

“ARE WE THERE YET?” SERIES

PART 1: SETTING OUT – THE CHALLENGE OF LEAVING

BEFORE THE LESSON

Our examination of Scripture today will include Luke 9:24: “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.” This saying of Jesus is found in all four gospels, and some of them more than once (Luke 14:26-27, 17:33; Matthew 10:38-39, 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; John 12:25). No other saying of Jesus is emphasized to such an extent in the Bible; it may be useful to read these other Scripture references ahead of time so you as a leader can more deeply discuss the themes of this lesson.

STARTING THE LESSON

This is the first in a series of lessons on what it means to take a journey with God, and what he requires of us in the process. Just as our perspective changes during the different phases of a journey from place to place, keep your mind and heart open to what God may want to teach you during the spiritual journey of pursuing him. It’s okay if diving into the Scriptures stirs more questions in you than answers; remember that God is continuing a good work in you that happens over time. (Philippians 1:6)

TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

This material is meant as guidance, not strict instruction. Read over the background and the questions, pray about what God is showing you, and then guide your group through a discussion that is suited for them. One of the great blessings of being a leader is getting to know the people you lead, and as a leader, pray that God will assist you in not only bringing your group closer to Him, but bringing them closer together as well.

STARTER QUESTION

- What is something in your life that you have had a hard time giving up?
- How do you feel when you think about following and obeying God?

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, please bless today’s discussion, and bring us closer together and closer to you as a result of it. Please open our hearts and minds to the good work that you want to continue in us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE

Genesis 12:1-5: The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. ²“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

- How does God describe the land to which he’s sending Abram?

God instructs Abram to go to “the land I will show you” (verse 1), meaning he hasn’t shown Abram his destination yet.

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE
(continued)

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Luke 9: 21-27: ²¹ Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²² And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." ²³ Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

QUESTION 2

- What does God's description of the land say about the nature of His instructions?

Abram had to take God's word for it that the land to which he was headed even existed.

QUESTION 3

- Which part of God's promise to Abram is most appealing to you?

This is a discussion question; some may find their personal blessing to be less important than their family's legacy, for instance.

QUESTION 4

- What do you think was the biggest challenge to Abram's obedience here? What do you think motivated him to obey?

Discuss how Abram's fears might have stacked up against his faith in God. It wouldn't have been easy to take his family and all he owned to parts unknown, but his relationship with God was such that he obeyed.

QUESTION 5

- How would you react if God asked of you what he asks of Abram here?

Discuss how your trust in God compares to your fears.

QUESTION 6

- In Luke, centuries after Abram's obedience, we see Jesus requiring sacrifice of his close friends, the disciples. What is a major difference between what God says to Abram and what Jesus says here?

Jesus describes the suffering that will be required of him before asking his disciples to follow him. The disciples know more about their future path than Abram does.

QUESTION 7

- Jesus mentions self-denial when he says his disciples have to take up their cross daily to follow him. What do you think that everyday burden looked like for the disciples?

At the very least, they would have to face persecution for living out their faith.

QUESTION 8

- Based on this scripture, what do you think the reward is for following Jesus, and the consequence for choosing not to do so?

Jesus says our lives can be saved if we follow him, but we lose our soul if we try to gain the world instead.

QUESTION 9

- Jesus speaks of denying ourselves, losing our lives, taking up our crosses—and all of this after describing the path of suffering he'll soon be taking. Why do you think he presents this as such a painful, all-or-nothing proposition, instead of leaving room, for instance, to gain some of the world while we follow him?

Jesus would be lying if he presented our path as easy; he wants us to know what we're committing to. Jesus isn't saying we won't have earthly blessings, any more than God denied them to Abram. But in order to fill our lives at all, Jesus requires that we first surrender our right to fill them. We have to lose our lives to save them because hanging on to even the smallest bit of our will over God's will foster sin.

QUESTION 10

- As you consider what following Christ looks like in the days ahead, what everyday cross is Jesus calling you to pick up?

Discuss the practical difficulties we face while following Jesus.

QUESTION 11

- What are you most afraid of losing as you follow Jesus?

Discussion of this will lead you into prayer time.

QUESTION 12

- What are you most eager to gain as you follow Jesus?

Discussion of this will lead you into prayer time.

PRAYER MINISTRY

- Have willing members of the group share specific burdens they have as a result of carrying their cross—make sure to note that they don't have to disclose anything to the group that they're uncomfortable with sharing. Make a list of the burdens as they're shared, then pray for those burdens out loud. Next, ask the group for the joys of following Jesus, as well as the promises of Jesus that they're most looking forward to being fulfilled, such as eternal life or healing. Make a list of those things, and lead a prayer of rejoicing.
- Assign the group into pairs (men with men and women with women) and ask that each pair exchange contact information so that they can check in with each other at least three times in the coming week. During each check-in, the pair should pray together about a burden and a blessing that each person is facing. Encourage individual prayer for the group throughout the week, as well.