



Following Jesus

Session 3 • Matthew 16:13-26



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Why Caesarea Philippi?*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 25. Stress that we all must follow someone at certain points: our teachers, bosses, traffic enforcers, and others.

ASK: What are the traits of leaders you want to follow? (p. 25)

CONTEXT: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Explain that Matthew 16 continues to move toward the close of Jesus's ministry in Galilee.

RECAP: Summarize the following from **Understand the Context** to describe the setting for today's passage:

- “Jesus withdrew with the disciples to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 5). Their journey would take them north to the area of Caesarea Philippi, where the events in this week's study take place. Thus began a new phase in the ministry of Jesus. From Caesarea Philippi, Jesus would travel south

directly to Jerusalem. This move signaled the end of the Galilean ministry and the beginning of the final weeks of Jesus's earthly life, culminating in His arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem.” (p. 25)

TRANSITION: *In today's passage, Jesus focused on what His disciples believed about Him. The question of who Jesus is remains the key question for every person who claims to have faith in Jesus.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 16:13-20** aloud as they imagine being in the group of disciples, carefully considering the words of Jesus.

DISCUSS: Allow volunteers to suggest ways people view Jesus today. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Why Caesarea Philippi?*). Encourage adults to scan the article and to underline key thoughts. Discuss what made this city a significant backdrop for Jesus's conversation with His disciples.

RECAP: Share this as you encourage adults to reflect on Peter's response to Jesus:

- **(16:16)** *Peter gave a double answer. “Messiah” referred to the “Anointed One” whom God had promised to send.*

Peter acknowledged that Jesus was uniquely the Messiah; there is one and only one Messiah. Peter also acknowledged that Jesus was the “Son of the living God.” The use of the definite article “the” pointed to the fact that Jesus is uniquely the Son and there is no other.

ASK: Why is it important to understand who Jesus is? (p. 27)

EXPLAIN: Point out that Jesus pointed to Peter as a representative for all the disciples in receiving the keys to bind and loose things in heaven. Share that this foreshadowed their role in leading people toward the kingdom once Jesus established His church in Acts 2. Note that since the disciples did not have a full grasp of what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah, He ordered them to remain silent for the time being.

READ: Invite two volunteers to read Matthew 16:21-23 aloud, one reading Peter’s words and one reading Jesus’s response.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to share what they believe motivated Peter to contradict Jesus’s words. Facilitate a brief discussion on ways people might mistake their own wisdom for God’s plans and purposes in life.

RECAP: Summarize this information from page 30 (Day 4) to help adults consider Peter’s motives:

- “Presumably, Peter thought he knew what was best for Jesus and took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus for speaking of His impending death. This may have arisen from Peter’s brash personality, or

his supposed ‘authority’ he had received from Jesus calling him the ‘rock.’ Or it could have arisen out of love for Jesus and fear of the future.”

ASK: How do we let our own agendas replace God’s greater plans? (p. 27)

SHARE: Point out that the literal meaning of Satan is “adversary” or “opponent.” Explain that Jesus wasn’t saying Peter was under demonic influence, but that he was standing in opposition to God’s divine plan for the salvation of the world. Share a time in your own life when you felt like Peter: ready to “correct” God on His plan because it wasn’t going the way you imagined or expected. Help adults see their own Peter-like tendencies, wanting to take control rather than trusting Jesus.

SAY: *Peter was a good leader, and His faith in Jesus was grounded in truth. But he hadn’t yet realized what would be involved in truly following Jesus. He didn’t realize at this point that it would cost him everything. Jesus needed Peter to recognize that his own plan was not God’s plan.*



Three Predictions

Jesus foretold His death three times in Matthew’s Gospel. Scan this QR code to learn more about His journey to the cross.

READ: Instruct adults to read Matthew 16:24-26 silently, inserting their own names throughout the verses.

DISCUSS: How does making the passage personal by inserting your own name affect the meaning for you?

EXAMINE: Direct adults to identify the three qualifications for a true disciple of Jesus (v. 24). Encourage them to reflect on each qualification by responding to these questions:

- **What hinders people from denying themselves?**
- **How does the image of a cross today differ from how crosses were understood by Jesus’s audience?**
- **Why is simply holding an orthodox view of Jesus not enough in the Christian life?**

ASK: What does it mean to deny ourselves and to carry our cross? (p. 27)

RECAP: Note that Jesus explained more about why discipleship is important. Share the following to help adults better understand Jesus’s teaching:

- *Jesus pictured a person gaining all that the world has to offer in riches, fame, security, and pleasure. Tragically none of this will rescue them at the end of life. Death and judgment will not be delayed by the accumulations of life. The ultimate question in life is simply this: what are we willing to exchange to experience life to the fullest, now and for eternity?*

CHALLENGE: Urge adults to reflect on what they may be holding that distracts them from complete devotion to God.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we know and accept His true identity.
- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we accept His mission as Messiah and Savior.
- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we sacrifice our personal agendas to Him.

REFLECT: Invite adults to look back through the direct quotes of Jesus in today’s passage. Encourage them to share how they see the summary points from this lesson revealed in these statements from the Lord. Highlight the value of living out each one.

DISCUSS: Invite a volunteer to read aloud the **Apply the Text** questions on page 27. Review the various ways people in the world view Jesus and how that differs from what we find in the Bible.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help each person know Him for who He is and to follow Him without reservation.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group a text or email during the week. Challenge adults to consider how their personal worship time can move them toward knowing Jesus better and following Him sacrificially.