

STUMIN

SMALL GROUP
LEADER GUIDE

MIDDLE
SCHOOL
FOCUS

THE BIG QUESTIONS

NOVEMBER 1, 2023

Week 1 of a 4-week series
about identity, belonging &
purpose

BOTTOM LINE

When you really understand
who Jesus is,
it changes everything.

SCRIPTURE

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him.

- Matthew 4:18-20 NLT

GOALS OF SMALL GROUP

To help students think about what it really means to follow Jesus and to take a step in the direction of following Jesus with their lives

 **PRINCE OF PEACE**
Called to Connect

>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: Pay attention to the way your students engage in this conversation. It will give you an idea of where they are when it comes to following Jesus in their own lives right now. Remember also to talk about the disciples and Jesus as real people—because they are! Humanizing the disciples, especially for your middle schoolers, will help them understand that these were real people, with real struggles, who had to make a real decision to follow Jesus. In other words, they were a lot like us! An important thing to note as well is that the disciples were invited to follow Jesus before they even really knew Him. And the good news is that the same is true for us! It's important for your middle schoolers to know that they can ask questions, learn about, and get to know Jesus before they believe. They can belong in your group before they have a faith of their own.

>> DURING GROUP

This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.

DO THIS:

Give your group members some time to think back through their day prior to coming to StuMin and to come up with 5 questions that they asked somebody and/or that somebody asked them during the day. Then discuss the questions. Were they important or unimportant? Were they easy or hard to answer? Did they like the answers they received? How did they benefit from learning the answer?

DISCUSS THIS:

- What does it look like to follow someone or something? Who or what do you follow? Why do you follow that person or thing?

DO THIS:

Draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. Ask students to list some things that they think it means to follow Jesus, and write them in the left column. Then, in the right column, list questions your group has about following Jesus.

DISCUSS THIS:

- What's one reason someone might not want to follow Jesus?
- How do you imagine the disciples felt when Jesus told them to follow Him? Challenge kids to each come up with a different word to answer this question (for example: special, nervous, confused, etc.) and then share why the disciples might have felt that way.
- What is one step you can take this week to either start following Jesus or get to know Jesus better?
- Give a short response to one of these three questions: Who am I? Where do I fit in? How can I make a difference?

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>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: Between the news, social media, and relationships with different people, your students can discover a million different opinions about what it means to be a Christian. But that can leave them wondering, if they don't fit in a certain box, do they have what it takes to follow Jesus ... or do they even want to. As you discuss what it looks like to follow Jesus, help students understand that believing in, following after, and being in a relationship with Jesus is life changing, life sustaining, and definitely worth their time and energy.

>> DURING GROUP

Create meaningful conversations. Adjust the questions as needed and ask thoughtful follow-up questions as the conversation unfolds. Don't feel like you need to answer every question.

DISCUSS THIS:

- What's one of the last questions you googled? What did you learn?
- When you have a question about something, where is the first place you go to find the answer?
- What are some characteristics most people think of when they hear the word "Christian?"
- What are some things you've heard about "Christians" that could make someone NOT want to be a "Christian?" (Leader Note: Don't allow the conversation to get stuck here by trying to work through each thought they bring up. Instead, use this time to create a safe space for conversation even if students express views that may be uncomfortable, cliché, or unexpected.)
- What do most people expect following Jesus will do for their lives?
- How might really following Jesus be different from what someone might expect? If you follow Jesus, how has it been different than you expected?
- How do you think Jesus would define following Jesus to the disciples? How do you think he would explain it for your life today?
- Read John 10:10. Based on what Jesus said, what would living "life to the full" look like for you?
- What's something that you think could get in the way of you doing that?
- What's one next step you can take when it comes to following Jesus?
- Give a short response to one or more of these three questions: Who am I? Where do I fit in? How can I make a difference?