

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discipleship Essentials

How does each sermon connect to this theme?

“The goal of discipleship is not information, but transformation.” (Greg Ogden) Christian formation is not measured by how much biblical knowledge a person accumulates, but by how deeply the life of Christ takes shape within them. True discipleship, therefore, is evident not primarily in what we know, but in who we are becoming (inner authority) and how we live for the sake of others.

Throughout the month of February, each sermon will engage key **Discipleship Essentials**, inviting the congregation to reflect on what it means to follow Jesus in concrete and transformative ways. On the first Sunday, we will explore Jesus’ calling of His disciples and their **answering the call**, even when it proved disruptive and intrusive to their ordinary lives.

The second Sunday turns to Jesus’ teaching on oaths, raising the question of integrity in the life of a disciple. To follow Christ means **speaking truth** and becoming one whose life reflects a commitment to truthfulness rooted in character rather than external assurances.

On the third Sunday, we will engage the book of James, which challenges disciples to demonstrate visible faith and **costly giving**. James confronts the gap between belief and action, calling believers to a faith which expresses care for others, and concrete acts of obedience.

February 18 marks the beginning of Lent, a season that invites deeper reflection on the Passion of Jesus Christ and **the message of the cross**. As we enter this sacred time, our focus turns toward self-examination, repentance, and renewed attentiveness to the cross.

The final Sunday of the month will explore the three “lost” parables of Luke 15, highlighting God’s relentless pursuit of the lost and the call for disciples to participate in both **seeking and celebrating** restored relationships.

Taken together, these sermons invite us to understand discipleship as a dynamic journey of transformation. As we move through February, we are called to open ourselves anew to Christ’s forming work, trusting that faithful discipleship will shape us into people who reflect God’s love with integrity, generosity, and joy.

Wishing you a most blessed Lenten season,



John S. Schnabel

FEBRUARY 2026

February 1

Discipleship Essentials:
Answering the Call

February 8

Discipleship Essentials:
Speaking Truth

February 15

Discipleship Essentials:
Costly Giving

February 18

BEGINNING OF LENT

Discipleship Essentials:
The message
of the cross

February 22

Discipleship Essentials:
Seeking & Celebrating

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR FEBRUARY 1

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS: Answering the Call

Where are we in the Bible?

We are at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 1 moves quickly from Jesus' baptism and temptation straight into action. As Jesus begins proclaiming that the kingdom of God is at hand, His first decisive step is not to gather monetary resources or build a military strategy, but to call disciples. Along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus encounters ordinary fishermen (Simon, Andrew, James, and John) and invites them into an entirely new way of life. This brief encounter sets the pattern for Christian discipleship in every generation.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Jesus' call is intrusive and disruptive.
2. Jesus' call is effective and powerful.
3. Jesus' call is a command and a promise.

Mark 1:16-18

And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Mark 1:16-20

Catechism
6.2.3.5, 8.1.9, 8.3.9

Discussion Questions

What do you think is essential to discipleship?

Jesus calls Simon and Andrew in the middle of their ordinary work. What does this teach us about where and how Jesus often calls people today? How do you typically respond when your routines or plans are interrupted?

For Simon and Andrew, the nets represented security, identity, and future provision. What might "nets" look like in our own lives, and why can they be so difficult to release?

Mark emphasizes that the disciples "immediately" followed Jesus. What does this suggest about the authority and effectiveness of Jesus' word? How does this challenge the idea that discipleship is mainly about personal effort or readiness?

We live amid many competing calls for our loyalty and attention. How do we discern the voice of Christ among these voices, and what practices help us remain open and responsive to His call?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR FEBRUARY 8

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS: Speaking Truth

Where are we in the Bible?

Within the Sermon on the Mount, you can find a number of “antitheses,” with each including a call to move beyond traditional piety to conduct commensurate with the coming kingdom of God. Each antithesis has a similar triadic structure: (1) statement of the traditional law, (2) comment on a vicious cycle, radicalization of the command, or a judgment, and (3) a transforming initiative. The transforming initiative that Jesus gives does not contradict or nullify the law, but rather, addresses the impulse that leads to the offense, or extends the command. Our Bible verse is part of the antitheses on oaths, which begins in verse 33.

Swearing oaths assured the trustworthiness of one's word, and an oath implicitly or explicitly invoked divine authority or divine judgment. In verses 33-37 the structure is as follows: (1) one shall not swear falsely, (2) one should not swear at all, (3) “Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no.”

Because Jewish people did not feel it was appropriate to say the name of God, they would often swear an oath by other items, and the list in verses 34-35 cover the most common - heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your own head. However, it was often thought that these oaths were not taken as seriously as the oaths sworn in the name of God, meaning that they were easier to get out of, or were possibly used to deceive, or evade the fulfillment of the promise.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Truth in speech
2. Truth in character
3. Truth in citizenship

Matthew 5:37

But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Matthew 5:33-37

Catechism

3.4.8.7

Discussion Questions

How does Jesus transform laws in the Sermon on the Mount?

Why do you think people in Jesus' time, and in our own, feel the need to strengthen their words with oaths or guarantees? What does this suggest about human trust, fear, and self-awareness?

Jesus focuses not only on what we say, but on the inner impulse that leads us to manipulate or obscure the truth. What kinds of fears or desires most often tempt us to qualify, exaggerate, or evade the truth?

What would it look like for a person's character to make oaths unnecessary? How is integrity formed over time, and what practices help shape a life that others find trustworthy?

Jesus teaches that God is already present in every word we speak and every agreement we make. How might this awareness change the way we communicate in areas like work, school, family, or social media? What would it mean for our community to be known for kingdom-shaped truthfulness?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR FEBRUARY 15

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS: Costly Giving

Where are we in the Bible?

To understand the 2nd chapter of James, especially its challenge toward *costly giving*, you must first place yourself within the world of the epistle as a whole. This letter forms part of the New Testament's witness to what a transformed Christian life looks like in light of the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Situated among the general epistles, James is addressed not to a single congregation but to the whole Christian community. It speaks with a prophetic, pastoral voice, calling God's people everywhere to integrity, wisdom, and a faith that takes tangible form in the world.

These writings grapple with a central question: *How do followers of the risen Christ live faithfully in a world marked by suffering, inequality, and temptation?*

Its tone is deeply practical, drawing from the Old Testament wisdom tradition, resonating with the teachings of Jesus (especially the Sermon on the Mount) and concrete realities of early Christian communal life. The book of James serves as a bridge between belief and behavior, also bringing to light our deepest allegiances.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. A living faith has visible signs.
2. A living faith trusts God.
3. A living faith is costly.

James 2:15-16

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

James 2:14-26

Catechism

4.2.1.5, 4.8.2

Discussion Questions

James insists that faith is revealed through action. How does this challenge common ways Christians talk about faith today, and where do you see the tension between belief and behavior in your own life?

In James 2:15-16, what makes the response "be warmed and filled" so inadequate? What modern examples might parallel this kind of well-intentioned but empty compassion?

How does trusting God's provision free us to give, serve, or sacrifice without fear of loss or reward-seeking?

Costly giving is measured not by amount, but by sacrifice. What factors most often make generosity difficult - comfort, security, time, control, or something else - and how does James' teaching confront those barriers?

James addresses the whole Christian community, not just individuals. What would it look like for our congregation or group to embody a living faith marked by mercy, readiness, patience, and comfort in tangible ways?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR FEBRUARY 18

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS: The message of the cross

Where are we in the Bible?

February 18 marks the beginning of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Lent is a time of reflection focused on Christ's suffering and sacrifice, leading us to self-examination and repentance, and a focus on practices such as prayer, devotion, and fasting (or creating space).

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of the message of the cross - *"to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). The message of the cross is a complete reversal of normal worldly values underpinning humanity's search for self-gratification and identity, but it is the way that God brought salvation to humanity. How can we come to accept the cross? Through belief in these four messages that are revealed on the cross (found below in the key themes).

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Perfection happens through suffering (2:10)
2. God becomes Man (2:11-13)
3. Victory is won through death (2:14-16)
4. Help comes to those who believe (2:17-18, 4:14-16)

Lent is a 40-day (excluding Sundays) liturgical season of fasting, prayer, and repentance preceding Easter. It commemorates the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, serving as a period of reflection, spiritual discipline, and preparation for Holy Week.

Emerging after the Council of Nicea (325 AD), it likely began as a preparation period for new converts before Easter baptism.

BEGINNING OF LENT

Hebrews 2:18

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Bible Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Hebrews 2:10-18

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

Catechism

3.4.7.2, 3.4.9.9

Discussion Questions

Paul describes the message of the cross as foolishness and a stumbling block. What makes the cross so challenging to accept in a culture shaped by success, comfort, and self-fulfillment?

Hebrews speaks of salvation being "perfected through sufferings." How does this reshape the way we understand suffering in our own lives, especially during the season of Lent?

How does Christ's shared humanity affect the way you approach Him in times of temptation, failure, or pain?

Scripture teaches that Christ defeats death by dying and rising again. How does this paradox - strength in weakness, victory through defeat - offer freedom from the fear of death and meaning for daily Christian living?

Hebrews invites believers to "come boldly to the throne of grace." What practices of Lent (prayer, fasting, creating space, repentance) might help you more intentionally draw near to Christ and receive His help during this season?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR FEBRUARY 22

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS: Seeking & Celebrating

Where are we in the Bible?

The 15th chapter of Luke contains three parables: The Parable of the Lost Sheep, The Parable of the Lost Coin, and the Parable of the Lost Son. Jesus tells these parables in response to the Pharisees and scribes taking offence to His kindness toward sinners. There are consistencies throughout each one, and also differences. In all three parables, something or someone is lost, but *how* they are lost differs. The sheep is lost because it wandered away (slowly lost); the coin is simply overlooked (temporarily lost); and the prodigal son *chooses* to separate himself (purposefully lost). In all three parables, what was lost is found, twice as a result of seeking (sheep and coin), and once through self-awareness (prodigal son).

Repentance is Jesus' main lesson with each parable, and communal rejoicing is the consistent response. This rejoicing is expressed in the 5th and 6th verses of Luke 15. The consistencies throughout the parables serve as inspiration for the structure of the sermon which follows.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. The inevitability of being lost
2. The grace in being found
3. The call to communal rejoicing

Luke 15:5-6

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Luke 15

Catechism
3.4.8.6, 12.1.8.5

Discussion Questions

Luke 15 presents people as lost in different ways - wandering, overlooked, or choosing separation. Which of these forms of lostness do you most recognize in yourself or in others, and how does this shape the way you respond to them?

What attitudes or assumptions can prevent us from sharing God's compassion for the lost, and how can those attitudes be transformed?

In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd carries the sheep home. What does this image teach us about God's role in salvation and our inability to "find our own way back" apart from Christ?

What might faithful "seeking" look like in everyday life through prayer, listening, and presence - especially with those who seem resistant or overlooked?

Each parable ends with communal rejoicing, yet joy can be difficult when judgment or resentment lingers. What helps us align our hearts with God's joy when someone is found, and how can the church more fully reflect heaven's celebration?