

LESSON 3: YOUR ANSWER CHANGES EVERYTHING

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

Affirming belief in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, like Peter did, is ultimately more than an intellectual assent or a doctrine one agrees to. It's a belief with serious ramifications. If indeed Jesus was and is who he claimed to be, then there are profound implications for our lives! This study will help teenagers personally respond to Jesus' call to follow him, to deny themselves, and to put him above everything else in their lives.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Jesus directly linked belief in his true identity with a life of fully committed discipleship.
- 2. WHY:** Understanding and believing in Jesus' true identity demands that we embody our answer in our everyday lives.
- 3. HOW:** As teenagers grow to know Jesus better and more deeply understand his identity, they can express their love for him through greater obedience and absolute surrender.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:13-16, 21-26

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 9:9; Mark 10:20-22; Luke 14:25-33; John 8:12; 10:26-27

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read Matthew 16:13-16, 21-26.

Verse 21 makes it clear that Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God was a pivotal moment for the disciples. It was a turning point, after which Jesus' interaction with them took on a consistent focus: the cross. "From then on," everything was different.

Directly linked to the disciples' growing understanding of and belief in Jesus' identity and mission was Jesus' compelling challenges of discipleship detailed in Matthew 16:21-26. Like a relationship of causality, like an inseparable if/then pairing, the linking of the conversation in verses 13-20 with Jesus' teaching in verses 21-26 powerfully communicates, "*If you believe this, then your life must be shaped by it.*"

A belief of mere intellectual assent is not adequate. No, the scope and implications of Jesus' identity claims necessitate the radical life-change Jesus called for from his disciples, and calls for from us as well.

The themes of Jesus' challenging call to all-out, fully committed discipleship in Matthew 16:21-26 reverberate in other Gospel accounts as well. He told his followers to ready themselves for persecution. He clarified, again and again, that discipleship costs it all (Luke 14:25-33). He demanded that commitment to him outpace one's love for their dearest family members (Luke 14:26). He asked followers to be willing to let go of and give up everything, and for some potential disciples that cost was just too high (Mark 10:20-22).

But for those willing to live out the if/then ramifications—those willing to put it all on the line and fully follow him—Jesus promised a beautiful and life-changing reality: “If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it” (Matthew 16:25).

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Believe Jesus is who he claimed to be? What next? Come tonight to consider the effect his true identity has on each of our lives.
- What did Jesus say *after* his conversation with Peter? Hint: It changes everything.

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've wrapped up our exploration of Jesus' critical question “Who do you say I am?” from Matthew 16 by exploring what Jesus said *next* to his disciples. After they “got it” when it came to his identity, he clarified that believing the truth about him inevitably demands changes in us: following him, denying ourselves, being willing to give up our lives for him.

This is not easy stuff for teenagers to grapple with, and let's be honest: It's not easy stuff for us adults either. The cost of discipleship is the highest price we could ever pay: It costs *everything*. Like a powerful if/then corollary, Scripture ultimately says both to us and to young people, “*If you really believe in Jesus, then....*”

And there are many exhortations in Scripture that follow those ellipses—teachings describing what the Jesus-changed life looks like. This if/then premise is one that challenges each of us throughout the Christian journey as we grow in deepened commitment and as we mature in discipleship. As you discuss this week's lesson with your teenager, I want to encourage *you* to be candid and honest about your own struggles with discipleship (see Matthew 16:24-26).

When is it hard for you to follow Jesus? How does Jesus' call to self-denial challenge you? What does it mean to you to be willing to give up everything for Christ?

As you connect over these questions together, sharing authentically from your journey, my hope is that you and your teenager would both be inspired and challenged by Jesus' teaching. If he is who he claims to be, then that changes everything—for your child, and for each of us.

LESSON 3: YOUR ANSWER CHANGES EVERYTHING**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

You'll need one or more sets of dominoes for this activity. (Optional: Preview the following video, "Insane Domino Tricks," to show it to your group: [youtube.com/watch?v=ARM42-eorzE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARM42-eorzE). You will need an Internet connection and a computer or tablet to show the video.)

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Direct teenagers to work together to build various rows of dominoes (standing vertically) and try to achieve a "domino effect" of cascading tiles by tipping the first domino over and watching the cause-and-effect reaction. (If you have a large group, have students form several smaller groups, and distribute several sets of dominoes for groups to build with.) Have students make several different attempts, encouraging them to try more difficult patterns or designs each time. (Optional: Show students the "Insane Domino Tricks" YouTube video to inspire them!)

ASK:

- *What did you enjoy most about this activity? What did you find most difficult or challenging?*
- *What are some other examples of chain reactions or cause-and-effect reactions in science—or in everyday life?*
- *Now think outside the physical realm: What's a "cause" in your life that always has an "effect"—that demands a response in your life? Brainstorm several examples together.*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *When Jesus asked his disciples what they believed about his true identity and Peter boldly declared his faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, the conversation didn't stop there. That pivotal moment changed the focus of Jesus' interactions with his disciples. For them, Jesus' identity was a "cause" that inherently demanded an "effect"—an inevitable response of profound change.*

TEACHING POINTS**LEADER
TIP**

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 16:13-16, 21-26 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *As we saw in Lesson 2, people who didn't believe Jesus' radical identity claim repeatedly tried to kill him, and they eventually succeeded—though it was only a temporary victory! Because they believed he was blaspheming, the immediate effect was indignant rage. But what about those who believed Jesus? More than just nodding their heads and saying words of belief—“Yes, Jesus, you are who you say you are”—they realized that Jesus' claims demanded a major response. Let's explore together what Jesus said about the “effect” that belief in his true identity would have on our lives.*

1. IF JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD, THEN WE MUST FOLLOW HIM

ASK:

- *Zero in on verse 24. What does it really mean to “follow” Jesus? What all does this involve? How would you explain this idea to someone who'd never heard it before?*
- *What's one of Jesus' actions, traits, choices, or values that stands out as something you want to see grow in your own life?*
- *What's one of Jesus' powerful teachings that seems particularly important for Christians to follow—to obey and put into action?*
- *What person do you know who is really Christlike—who follows Jesus in his or her behavior and demeanor? Describe that person. How does he or she reflect Jesus?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *When we answer the question “Who do you say I am?” with belief that Jesus is who he claimed to be—the Son of God—then we must respond by following him. There's no other logical choice! It would make no sense to nod assent to Jesus' claim but then just go along with our lives, doing things our way. Instead, our following proclaims our answer to the question—it underlines our belief that Jesus is Lord.*

2. IF JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD, THEN WE MUST TURN AWAY FROM A SELF-CENTERED WAY OF LIFE

ASK:

- *What do you think is included in Jesus' call to “turn from your selfish ways” (v. 24)?*
- *Some Bible translations use the phrase “deny himself.” How does the idea of self-denial add to your understanding of verse 24?*
- *In what ways are we naturally self-centered people? Brainstorm as many examples of instinctive self-centeredness as you can.*
- *What's the opposite of self-centeredness? If Jesus wants us to turn away from a self-focused life, what are we to turn toward? And what does that actually look like?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Following Jesus isn't just a choice to learn from him and live like him. It's a choice to turn over the keys of the car, to let him sit in the driver's seat of our lives rather than putting ourselves—our desires, our plans, our feelings—in charge. When our natural, self-centered instincts pull us one way and Jesus draws us the other way, we must choose the way of Jesus.*

3. IF JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD, WE MUST GIVE HIM EVERYTHING—EVEN OUR VERY LIVES

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *For the disciples, a “cross” didn’t bring to mind a pretty necklace or a funky tattoo or a decoration in a church. In their time and culture, a cross meant only one thing: a mode of execution. It meant the death penalty. It meant torture, pain, and public humiliation.*

ASK:

- *Look again at verses 21, 24-26. We know the brutal death Jesus eventually endured. How do Jesus’ torture and execution inform your understanding of what he really meant here?*
- *If you were in the disciples’ place when Jesus said these things, what might you have felt? thought? wondered? Explain.*
- *Read Luke 14:25-33, another passage where Jesus used extreme language to challenge people to give up everything and follow him. What’s Jesus’ real point here? Sum it up in your own words.*
- *Jesus’ call to give up everything was too much for some. Read Mark 10:20-22. Ultimately, what held this man back from following Jesus? What do you notice about Jesus in this account?*
- *What do Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 10:20-22, and Luke 14:25-33 ultimately say about love—about what we love, whom we love, and how we love them?*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



ASK:

- *Read John 8:12. How does following Jesus bring “light” to your life? How is a Jesus-following life different from a life in darkness?*
- *Read John 10:26-27. Why are listening to Jesus and being intimately known by him critical to our understanding of what it means to follow him?*
- *Read Matthew 9:9. How does the idea of discipleship tie in? What does it mean for a modern-day person to be a “disciple” of Jesus?*

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- *In light of all we’ve studied in this series, what stands out to you most about Jesus himself? What has Jesus been showing you personally about who he really is?*
- *Of the three points we talked about today, where is Jesus drawing your attention? To growing as an obedient follower? To turning away from self-centered living? To being willing to give up anything and everything for him? Zero in on one particular focus and share why it strikes you as personally significant.*
- *How do you desire to more strongly integrate your beliefs about Jesus’ identity and your everyday life—your choices, attitudes, relationships, and so on?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *It's imperative that we each answer Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" for ourselves. We each must grapple with this claim and come to our own conclusion. But our answer must be more than just words or beliefs—our answer is spoken through our lives. If we really believe Jesus, then that belief affects our lives in every way. It's a reaction that changes everything. It's a love that's worth everything.*

SUMMARY



LEADER
TIP

Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me' " (Matthew 16:24).