

## SUNDAY CHRISTIAN

**Sally Chambers**

**“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for October 27–31, 2014.**

### MAKING THE CONNECTION

“Most youth have church friends and other friends. They have Sunday activities and weekly activities. They have a spiritual life, and then they have the rest of their life. I call this the great divide. We separate the spiritual from the secular, what we do on Sundays from what we do the rest of the week, how we behave at youth group from how we behave in the cafeteria. Realizing that this was not Jesus’ way was a significant moment for me. Jesus came to infuse all of our living—our eating, sleeping, working, playing, walking, cleaning, socializing, and worshiping—with his spirit. Jesus wants our whole life, not just a few hours on Sunday. So I work to help others, especially youth, to break down the great divide that compartmentalizes our life into sacred and secular.” —Sally

### MEET THE WRITER

**Sally Chambers** has been practicing youth ministry for nineteen years as part of her life with God and people; she is currently on sabbatical. By trade, she is a counselor and spiritual director. She is also a lover of art, photography, people, hosting, adventure, stories, a cup of tea, beauty, all things English, her niece and her Grandma, abbey ruins and cathedrals, creation in its grandeur and wildness, playlists, and her furry four-legged companion Doodlebug. Sally is a co-author of the leader’s guide to *The Way of Pilgrimage* and the creator of *The Pilgrim’s Way*, an approach to leading pilgrimage with teenagers and adults. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and is currently on staff and worshipping with St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church. She dreams of creating altars in the world where pilgrims may gather together, rest for a while, find renewed vision, be healed in body, heart, soul, and mind, and offer to the world the hope of God in Jesus Christ. Be sure to check out Sally’s blog at <http://justsally.wordpress.com/>.

### STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- a candle and a lighter or matches
- newsprint and markers
- Bibles
- slips of paper
- pens
- a basket

## PLUGGED IN

- + Open the conversation by showing the Nooma Video, “Sunday,” with Rob Bell (<http://nooma.com/films/004-sunday>). It’s a great conversation starter for this session. You can also download the discussion guide for this short film (<https://flannel.org/products/nooma-sunday-004>).
- + If you have a younger group and need an activity or game to start the session, try What’s Missing (<http://www.youthworker.com/youth-group-games-activities/11704131/>). The tie-in to the session goes something like this: “*Something is missing if we are Christians only on Sunday; six days are missing. Being a Christian includes corporate worship one day a week, but it also includes the rest of our lives.*”
- + You could illustrate the same point using an animated video based on Shel Silverstein’s *The Missing Piece* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT0wKeJQvGk>).

## CHECKING IN

Have someone light a candle. Then say: “*The Lord be with you.*” Invite the group to respond: “**And also with you.**”

Invite group members to close their eyes, take a deep breath, and relax. Invite them to pay attention to their breathing for the next minute or two. Suggest that as they exhale they imagine breathing out the distractions that occupy their mind, body, and spirit (tiredness, homework, worries). Suggest that as they inhale, they imagine breathing in the peace of God.

Then say: “*Now that we’ve become present to God and ourselves, let’s become present to one another.*” Invite each person in turn to say his or her name and to answer these questions:

**What’s your favorite part of our Sunday worship service?**

**What’s your least favorite part?**

When everyone has had a chance to speak, say: “*Today we are going to explore what being a Christian means.*”

## EXPLORING THE WORD

**Scripture:** Mark 2:14, Matthew 4:18–20, Matthew 16:24, John 14:5–6

Ask the questions below, and write down everyone’s answers on a sheet of newsprint.

**What’s the first thing that comes to mind when I ask, “What’s a Christian?”**

**How can you distinguish a Christian from someone who isn’t?**

(NOTE: You may need to help the group go beyond the answer that “a Christian is someone who believes in Jesus.”)

After you've made a list, ask:

**What do you notice about our list of what defines a Christian?** (The group may notice that many of the items listed are actions—descriptions of what Christians do.)

**Can we agree that Christianity is a way of living?**

Ask group members to look up one or more of the following sound bites of scripture. Encourage them to take note of what's happening around the verse, to consider questions such as these: *What point in Jesus' ministry does the verse describe? What was Jesus doing before and after the verse?* Before each verse is read aloud, ask a volunteer to say a few words about its context. Then ask someone to read the verse aloud, and invite discussion using the questions below for each verse or passage.

**Mark 2:14 (NRSV)**

“As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.”

**What did Levi do before he met Jesus?**

**What did Jesus ask Levi to do?**

**How did Levi respond?**

**What did following Jesus mean for Levi's profession and his previous way of life?**

**Can we agree that following Jesus affected Levi's whole life, his whole way of living?**

(You might need to point out that following Jesus meant both following his teachings and literally following Jesus around the countryside.)

**Matthew 4:18–20 (NRSV)**

“As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

**What did Peter and Andrew do before they met Jesus?**

**What did Jesus ask them to do?**

**How did they respond?**

**What did following Jesus mean for Simon and Andrew's profession and their former way of life?**

**Did following Jesus affect their whole way of living?**

**Matthew 16:24 (NRSV)**

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

**What did Jesus mean when he said, “let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me”?**

**Could the statement summarize what happened to Levi, Peter, and Andrew? Why? Why not?**

**What would we need to drop or to leave behind if we were to follow Jesus?**

**In what ways have your choices changed how you live now that you follow Jesus?**

### **John 14:5–6 (NRSV)**

“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

Say: *“This verse is part of a conversation that Jesus has with the disciples toward the end of his life. It has often been misunderstood or misused. What do you think Jesus means when he says, ‘I am the way’?”*

Allow some time for discussion; then reread verse 5, highlighting Thomas’ question.

**What sort of “way” was Thomas asking about?** (Thomas was asking Jesus for directions.)

**What did Jesus mean when he answered Thomas by saying, “I am the way?”** (If you live as I have lived, do what I have done, that is the way to end up in the same place as me.)

Say: *“The Hebrew word for ‘way’ was ‘torah,’ which was also what the Hebrews called the commandments God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. Torah was not a set of beliefs but a set of actions, a way of living that helps God restore the world to the way it was created. It was a way of living in a new world where there would be no death, no poverty, no sickness, no injustice. When Jesus talks about the ‘way,’ he’s talking about a way of life.”*

**Given all these snippets of scripture, can we say that being a Christian or following Jesus is about much more than belief; it’s about how you live your life?**

Say: *“If Christianity is about how we live, it’s about how we live seven days a week. Peter, Andrew, and Levi didn’t follow Jesus one day a week. They gave up everything and started traveling and camping out with Jesus. Being a Christian includes more than coming to church on Sundays. Being a Christian doesn’t mean giving up everything and spending seven days a week in church. But when Jesus says, “Follow me,” he means following him with our whole lives, not just a few hours on Sunday.”*

### **SHARING IN PRAYER**

Distribute slips of paper (two for each person) and pens. Ask group members to write on one slip of paper, “Leave behind,” and on the other slip of paper, “Follow me.” Then invite them to spend a few minutes in silent reflection before writing their answers to these questions:

**What do you need to leave behind or to stop doing in order to more fully follow Jesus?**

**What is one thing you could start doing to more fully follow Jesus?**

Pass around a basket, and invite people to place in the basket the slips of paper on which they have written what they need to leave behind. Then ask them to fold up the other slip of paper and to put it in their pocket or wallet. Suggest that when they get home, they display the slip of paper where they can see it daily as a reminder to follow Jesus.

Close the session by saying, *“Thanks be to God.”*

Invite the group to respond, **“Amen.”**

## **TAKING IT FURTHER**

- Have a brainstorming session with the group. Create a list of ways to follow Jesus seven days a week, even as we go about the details of our lives. If Jesus doesn't mean for us to be in church every day, what does following Jesus mean. Help group members be specific in their response.
- Engage the group in a follow-up Bible study on one of the gospels to find out more about the way of Jesus: What did Jesus do? How did he live? Encourage group members to be specific. Record what they learn; make a list. Then make another list of what each of you can do to translate the way of Jesus into the details of your day-to-day lives.

—from **devozine** In the Habit (September/October 2014). Copyright © 2014 by The Upper Room®. All rights reserved.