

Study Guide for  
***LOSERS LIKE US***  
*Redefining Discipleship  
After Epic Failure*

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for  
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*Redefining Discipleship After Epic Failure*

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## Study Questions

Each page of study questions which follows covers one chapter in *Losers Like Us*. You can print out one page at a time for individual or group study.

For deeper study, write out your answers on the back of the page or other paper.

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## 1—An Introduction to Losers

Think about how, after we lose something, we are literally “losers”—yet God uses pain and loss to humble us and make us usable in his kingdom...

*Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you....*

(Deuteronomy 8:2a)

*Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*

(1 Corinthians 1:26)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 1.1: In ten words or less, write your own definition of a loser.
- 1.2: Are you uncomfortable being identified as a loser? Why or why not? Do you agree with the premise that God loves losers and may actually prefer them for kingdom work? Why or why not?
- 1.3: How do we use human achievements and successes to measure human value, including our own? How does God measure value, and how does his perspective differ from ours?
- 1.4: In what ways has your own life story made you feel like a loser? What part of your story holds the most painful feelings of “loserdom” for you, and thus the greatest need for redemption?
- 1.5: God knows your whole story, and he can use all of it for good. Ask him to redeem the most painful parts, and thank him for the work he has done and is doing. Pray with a friend if possible.

## 2—The Nobodies

Think about how God, despite his bigness, has a soft spot for small, lowly “nobodies” like James the Less and Judas Thaddeus...

*For this is what the high and exalted One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit....”*  
(Isaiah 57:15a)

*Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne.....many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”*  
(Matthew 19:28, 30)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 2.1: James the Less and Judas Thaddeus were among Jesus’ twelve closest friends, yet they are barely mentioned in scripture. Are they somehow less important than the other disciples? Why or why not?
- 2.2: Do you think it is shameful, honorable, or neutral to be a nobody? What is the world’s perspective? What is God’s?
- 2.3: Try to think of some things God can do with a “nobody” that he can’t do with a “somebody.” Make a list and explain your answers.
- 2.4: Name someone who, though a “nobody” in the eyes of the world, made a big difference in your life. What did that person do, and why did it matter to you?
- 2.5: Did you ever feel like a nobody, and then later learn that something you said or did was a big help to someone else? Describe that experience.
- 2.6: God made you one of a kind; he never thinks of you as a nobody. Keeping in mind that he loves you and sees the best in you, how do you think he might describe you?

### 3—The Zealot

Think about Simon's zeal, and how much God values that quality...

*The Lord will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.*

(Isaiah 42:13)

*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

(Romans 12:11)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 3.1: Zeal indicates passion—caring deeply. Make a list of your “hot buttons”—things you may be overly passionate or zealous about. What happens if people touch one? Why do you think you care so much about that area? (If you are mild-mannered and can't think of any “hot buttons,” then describe a time when you felt some sense of irritation or injustice inside. Those feelings mean you care deeply.)
- 3.2: Is there a place for zeal—especially yours—in God's kingdom? How can zeal be used for good, without becoming unloving or destructive?
- 3.3: In which areas do you see your zeal (passion) intersecting with God's heart the most? How can you use that intersection to bless the world? Ask God for growth and success in that area.

## 4—The Shadow-Dweller

Think about this: From shadow-dwellers like Andrew to shadow-casters like Peter, all gifts and temperaments need each other...

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*  
(1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 27)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 4.1. Are you typically a shadow-dweller, a shadow-caster, or a little of both? How do you feel in your role(s)?
- 4.2: Which godly strengths or gifts might shine brighter in a shadow-dweller than a shadow-caster? Why?
- 4.3: Describe a time when you struggled with envy or resentment because you seemed to be in the shadows.
- 4.4: Scripture never tells us whether Andrew had any negative feelings about playing “second fiddle” to his famous brother. If he did, how do you think he might have resolved them?
- 4.5: Are you ever tempted to believe God has better plans for others than for you? If so, ask God to show you the truth, which is that he has a wonderful plan for *you*.

## 5—The Bigot

Think about how we are all bigots like Nathanael, yet Christ's forgiveness is the great equalizer...

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

(Galatians 3:26-28)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 5.1: Bigotry has two sides: the bigot, and the victim. If you've been a victim of bigotry, describe how it feels.
- 5.2: Even victims of bigotry can sometimes be bigots too. How might your own bigotry make it hard for others to see Jesus in you?
- 5.3: Can you identify a time when you, like Nathanael, failed (or almost failed) to recognize Jesus because of your own prejudices about how he should appear? What happened?
- 5.4: Did you ever find bigotry in yourself, but then repent and turn around? Are there areas in which you still need to do this? Write them out to God. If you are not ready to discuss your answers with others, at least ask for prayer.

## 6—The Pragmatist

Think about how we, like Philip, must learn to see the spiritual beyond the practical. The prophet Elisha prayed for his servant to be able to do so...

*When [Elisha's servant] got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city.*

*"Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.*

*"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*

*And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire....*

*(2 Kings 6:15-17)*

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 6.1: Discuss both types of people: the practical "bean counter" type vs. the imaginative "magic bean buyer" type. How can God use each one?
- 6.2: Which type do you tend to be—a bean counter, a magic bean buyer, or a little of both? Try listing areas in which you, like Philip, see only the actual and have a hard time seeing the possible.
- 6.3: In Scripture, how did Jesus take Philip beyond pragmatism to show him the kingdom of God? How has Jesus worked with you in this area?
- 6.4: Philip's role expanded from that of a pragmatist to that of an evangelist. If you are a pragmatist, ask God to use your pragmatism for the kingdom, and give you eyes to see past the practical to the spiritual.

## 7—The Uber-Loser

Think about how the other disciples probably hated Matthew at first, yet Jesus prayed that all of his followers would be united as one...

*“...I pray also for those who will believe in me through [the disciples’] message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”*  
(John 17:20)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 7.1: Just as the other disciples must have struggled to accept Matthew as their coworker, ask yourself who you find hard to work with. Would you have trouble working with someone who is...
- much wealthier or much poorer than you?
  - much more liberal or much more conservative than you?
  - “too cool” or “too hick” or “too ethnic” or “too vanilla” for you?
- 7.2: How do you think working together might have forced Simon and Matthew to grow?
- 7.3: Jesus prayed for his believers to be one. Why was unity so important to him? How does God work to bring unity among believers who hate each other, and how can we cooperate with him in the process?
- 7.4: Of all the disciples, Matthew may have given up the most to follow Jesus. What do you think of his radical turnaround? Do you think any of us can truly follow Jesus without doing the same?

## 8—The Betrayer

Think about how in Psalms, David show both sides of betrayal. Like Jesus, David was betrayed by a friend—but like Judas, he also betrayed God by sinning ...

*Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.*  
(Psalm 41:9)

*Against you, you only, have I sinned .... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*  
(Psalm 51:4a, 10)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 8.1: In scripture, Judas' remorse after the betrayal seems real. If he had lived, do you think he could have been forgiven and restored to relationship with Christ? Why or why not?
- 8.2: Do you agree or disagree with the author that Jesus' actions left the door open for Judas' restoration?
- 8.3: Apparently Judas didn't start out planning to betray Christ. Do you agree that each of us is capable of betraying Christ? Discuss your thoughts.
- 8.4: Describe a time when you were betrayed, and a time when you betrayed someone else. If these experiences are still painful, repent for your part and ask God to forgive and heal all affected parties.

## 9—The Doubter

Think about how Jesus stressed to Thomas the importance of belief, especially belief in the resurrection...

*He said to [his disciples], “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” (Luke 24:36-39)*

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 9.1: Have you faced doubts or tests of faith? If so, what were they and how did you come through them?
- 9.2: Paradoxically, experiencing doubt often increases faith. Has it done so for you, or not? Give examples.
- 9.3: Thomas was absent when the disciples saw the resurrected Jesus the first time in scripture, but present the second time. Do you agree or disagree that Thomas was grieving the first time, but had just enough hope and faith to come back the second time? Why or why not?
- 9.4: Jesus says those who “have not seen and yet have believed” are blessed. In your opinion, are we—that is, modern-day believers who fit this description—blessed? Why or why not?

## 10—The Egotist

Think about how we, like James, are called to humility instead of self-exaltation...

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

(I Peter 5:6)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 10.1: In what areas have you struggled with egotism and striving for position, instead of letting God choose for you? Ask God to help you trust him in those areas.
- 10.2: Jesus indicated that positions of honor come only by drinking his “cup” (usually interpreted to mean suffering and death). Are you willing to drink the “cup” he has for you?
- 10.3: James is in heaven now. Do you believe God “did right by” James and his desires? Do you think God will “do right by” you and your desires? Be honest.

## 11—The Kid

Think about how John and others, despite their age, were greatly used by God...

*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*

(I Timothy 4:12)

*Moses was eighty and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.*

(Exodus 7:6-7)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 11.1: Although probably the youngest disciple, John was very powerful and influential. What do you think Jesus saw in him? What strengths of youth does God use today?
- 11.2: John's culture exalted elders and denigrated youth, while Western culture today sometimes seems to do the opposite. Do you agree? Which age brackets do you think are most disrespected, and how?
- 11.3: What is your view of age in general, and your own age in particular? What is God's?
- 11.4: How did God work to change John from an unloving young man to "the disciple of love"? How is God working to change you?
- 11.5: Tradition says John lived a long life and died naturally of old age, while all of the other disciples except Judas were martyred. If so, was God unfair to let John escape martyrdom when the others didn't? Do you think you can trust God with your own future?

## 12—The Screwup

Think about how Jesus restored Peter to ministry after the resurrection...

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”*

*Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”*

*He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

*The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”*

(John 21:15-17)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 12.1: Peter’s blunders are recorded for all to read, down through history. Why do you think they are included in scripture? If you had to pick a “favorite,” which one would it be, and why?
- 12.2: Peter’s mouth was a strength and a weakness—it gave him trouble, but in the book of Acts God used it to make Peter a fearless evangelist to thousands. What part of you is both a strength and a weakness? How is God redeeming it?
- 12.3: Peter’s attitude was: “Jesus, I’m going to jump out of the boat and follow you, even if I make mistakes.” Do you have the faith and courage to make mistakes for Jesus? If not, what holds you back?
- 12.4: Judas’ shame and regret led to suicide, while Peter’s led to restoration. Have you ever felt you’ve messed up so badly that Jesus could never forgive you? If so, where are you in the cycle of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration?

## 13—The Greatest Loser of All

Think about how scripture tells us how to live like Jesus, the greatest loser of all...

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:5-11)*

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 13.1: Jesus was rejected as a bastard, a blasphemer, an agitator, a sorcerer, a lunatic, a demoniac, a phony, and a criminal; yet he rose above all of these “loser labels” to willingly lose his own life and fulfill God’s purposes for his time on earth. Through Christ, do you believe you can overcome “loser labels” and fulfill God’s highest purposes for your life too? Why or why not?
- 13.2: List any “loser labels” that have been applied to you and hindered you. When, where, and by whom was each label first put on you? Ask God to replace each one with a new “love label” expressing his love for you.
- 13.3: As mentioned above, Jesus rejected human “loser labels,” yet became a loser willingly in that he chose to lose his life for us. What is the difference between the two kinds of “losers”?
- 13.4: Being a loser is a good thing if it means losing our old sinful nature, and exchanging it for a new nature that is like Jesus. How is God making you more willing to lose everything in order to gain the kingdom? How can you cooperate with him?

## 14—Losers Like Us

Think about how scripture verifies that even in failure, God is still at work in us...

*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

(Philippians 1:4-6)

Now prayerfully answer the questions below...

- 14.1: The author says Jesus picks losers because they excel at teachableness, egolessness, brokenness, and empathy. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 14.2: Have any of the above traits been developed in your own life, and if so, did pain or loss play a part in their development? Explain.
- 14.3: Do you agree that the disciples were losers? If so, how did their “loserness” bear fruit in the kingdom?
- 14.4: In this chapter, the author ends up still a “loser,” with no change in his circumstances. Is there value in sharing this type of deep loss and pain while the person is still in the middle of it, with no apparent happy ending—even if that person (like Job) never knows God’s reasons for it? Why or why not?
- 14.5: Scripture says God will give his people “beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3, NIV). Do you have trouble believing this promise? In what ways have you seen it fulfilled in your life so far? In what ways can you believe it will be fulfilled in the future?

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## Join the Conversation

Thanks again for using this study guide; I hope you found it worthwhile.

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