

Characteristics of Discipleship

Purpose: The purpose of this session is to ask you to make a commitment to the discipleship process.

Objectives: By the end of this session:

1. You will be able to understand some essential characteristics of a disciple of Jesus.
2. You will evaluate your life in light of these characteristics.
3. You will understand some essential characteristics of a discipleship ministry and consider what commitment you need to make concerning the discipleship process.

Key Verse: Hebrews 13:7

Note to instructor: Share from your own experience the value you have seen in being disciplined and discipling others.

I. Introduction

In the Gospels, those who followed Jesus were called "disciples." Today, we are going to look at two facets of discipleship: 1) what characteristics one should find in a disciple of Christ, and 2) how to be part of God's program for building people into Christ's disciples. Before we begin that, let's first look a little more closely at the word "disciple."

II. Disciple Described

A. Disciples are learners.

The Greek word for 'disciple' is 'mathetes,' which means 'learner.' In biblical times a disciple would attach himself to a teacher and learn from him. He would follow him throughout the day, interact with him, work with him and often would go home with him at night. Let's look quickly at the idea of "learner."

What would they be learners of?

Instructors could ask the students came up with (perhaps things like "specific content," "values," "behaviors.")

As a result of this close, personal real-life training, a disciple often took on the characteristics of the one who trained him. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus said.

B. Disciples become like their Master

1. When fully trained, disciples are like their Master (Luke 6:40).
2. Disciples of Jesus increasingly reflect His character, conduct and commitments (Ephesians 4:13).

C. Christian Discipleship Never Ends

The word, "Learner," does not have a sense of arrival to it. A disciple is one who is always learning. He's not "Learned", but a "learner." Discipleship is a life-long process (Philippians 3:12-14). We will never fully reflect Jesus Christ in our lifetime. But disciples keep moving in that direction, learning from Jesus throughout their lives.

The English word "disciple" refers more to a hierarchical position, I am a disciple of...., or he's a disciple of . . ., whereas the Greek word "disciple" refers more to the activity of a learner.

Brainstorm for a moment. What are essential characteristics of a learner? What's true of all learners in general? Write the ideas down in your notes before continuing.

III. Essential Characteristics of a Learner

Note to instructor: The students should have already come up with answers to sections III and IV. Have them get into groups of about 4 to discuss answers.

- A. Desires to Learn. What verses can you think of relating to a Learner of Christ? Two verses are already given – can you think of any others?

Matthew 11:28-30. We come to Christ with a deep need

Matthew 19:16. We come to Christ with questions – wanting to learn and apply.

Matthew 22:36 We desire to learn from Christ

Luke 7:40 We need to be open to what He may have to say to us

Luke 21:7 We sincerely desire to learn and know things from Christ

Luke 11:1 We ask to learn because of the example we have seen in Christ or others

- B. Applies Self to Learning. Concerning a Christian Learner, what verses relate to this?

1 Timothy 4:14-16. We must work hard and often in learning from Christ

Any others?

- C. Puts Self in a Place Where he Can Learn. What verses can you think of?

Matthew 4:19. We must follow Him to learn from Him

Any others?

Luke 14:25 Again, we must follow Christ to learn from Him – personally or corporately

John 6:60, 66-68. We may need to put ourselves in a place that He's all we've got

Acts 9:26 Paul (new convert) wanted to associate with Christ's followers to learn

- D. Does What He Learns. What verses can you think of?

Matthew 7:24-28; Luke 11:28. We have to hear and do what Christ teaches

Any others?

Isaiah 50:4,5 We need to say and do what God tells us to say and do.

- E. Imitates His Teacher. What verses can you think of?

I Corinthians 11:1 Imitate godly examples as they imitate Christ

Any others?

Philippians 3:17 Follow the pattern of godly people.

Now, what can we add to this list that is a uniquely Christian characteristic of a disciple? Write down your ideas before continuing.

IV. Special Characteristics of a Disciple of Christ

Read the following verses and make notes of the characteristics of a disciple of Christ.

Matthew 22:36-40, 1 John 4:19-21

Luke 14:25-33

Luke 9:23-26, 57-62

Philippians 2:4-9; John 13:3-15

Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Hebrews 12:28,29

Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-8

2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Ephesians 4:11-13

Disciples are those with a love for God, their neighbor and Christian brother and show this love in deeds. They put Jesus first in everything and count the cost before they jump in. They are willing to wait on pleasure and comfort, to suffer now for the reward waiting them. They serve those whom they lead. They seek other's good before their own. They work out of gratitude and love and are zealous to do good deeds. A disciple of Jesus seeks to impart what he has learned to others, to fulfill the ministry Christ has given to them. Disciples are ready to receive whatever Jesus has to offer — His forgiveness, love, direction and commandments — and to pay the price to get it.

Note to instructor: After the students have discussed their answers to sections III and IV (about 20 minutes), briefly ask for some to share answers to some of the questions. Share answers from the Teacher's Notes only if they have not been given by the students.

V. Closing

We have two sets of characteristics of a disciple — those common to all learners and those specific to a disciple of Christ. The common characteristics revolve around the attitudes and behaviors of a learner. As we've talked about these characteristics, as you read these Scriptures, maybe God was tugging at your heart, pointing to areas that need to be improved, pointing to areas He wants you to excel in. Take a few minutes now to do a self-evaluation of how you are doing as a learner of Christ. The following two pages are some questions to help you think through this material. Remember, none of us are perfect yet, so be honest, but kind, remembering we are on a journey.

Share the top two or three areas of concern with your mentor and ask him/her to pray with you over these. He/she could share ideas with you on how you might grow in them and hold you accountable to that growth.

Note to instructor: Ask students if any would like to share their thoughts on this. Have them pray for one another in their groups.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some essential characteristics of a disciple of Jesus?
2. How does your life compare to these characteristics?
3. What are some essential characteristics of a discipleship ministry? What commitment do you need to make concerning the discipleship process?

Evaluation of My Attitudes and Behaviors as Jesus' Disciple.

- A. Do I have the heart of a learner? Am I willing to learn? Have I put myself in a place where I can learn? Do I apply myself fully in my learning? Do I fully and readily obey what I learn? Do I imitate Christ in my life?

- B. Am I growing in my love of God? How do I know this?

- C. Am I actively demonstrating love for my neighbor as well as my brother in Christ?

- D. Is there any area of my life (job, play, thoughts, relationships, entertainment, money) where Christ does not have first place?

- E. How closely are my priorities aligned with God's?

- F. Do I willingly follow my leaders? Do I seek to do my best? How would they answer this question about me?

- G. Do I willingly serve those who follow me? Am I seeking their best? How would they answer this question about me?
- H. Do I seek the best of others before me?
- I. Do I actively seek to do good things in the world around me?
- J. Am I motivated primarily out of gratitude for what God has done for me, or out the need to have other's approval?
- K. Am I imparting to others what God has built into me? Am I using my gifts to build God's kingdom?