

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 3: CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Exploring Discipleship. This series of lessons studies the spiritual formation of a follower of Jesus Christ – the process referred to as discipleship. The discipleship process occurs after someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ, beginning with a desire to live out God's plan for their life. When we undertake the task of helping a new believer to grow in their faith, we are said to disciple them. This material will benefit anyone wanting to disciple others, especially those who are practising evangelism, following up with new believers and helping them grow in their faith. Discipleship is the duty of every believer, especially those in spiritual leadership!

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is new Christians, those who would like a refresher on the basics of Christianity, as well as those preparing to teach these Christian practices and beliefs. Also, those with an interest in Christian thought will find value in these lessons as they pertain to daily living and choices.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

LESSON 3: CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to explore what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Participants will learn some essential Biblical characteristics of Jesus' disciples and evaluate their own life in light of these.

LEADER'S NOTE

Engaging in discipleship requires a clear understanding of the characteristics of a disciple. A disciple is a follower or adherent of Jesus and the way of life and faith He demonstrated to us. It is important to understand that calling oneself a believer in Jesus and attending Church or Bible Study is only the beginning. The true mark of a disciple is their willingness to deny self and put God and His ways first. Being a disciple requires sacrifice and a commitment to lifelong learning. If you have participants who are young in their faith, this is an important lesson to learn. The Gospel is good news and may, for some, be relatively easy to accept, but becoming a disciple is hard work. The reality, however, is that we find peace and freedom in following Jesus – not restrictive bondage. This is a truth worth communicating!

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What does the word 'disciple' mean to you? What does a disciple do?
- ❖ What have you chosen to give up in order to attain something better? Was it a difficult choice? Does it seem as difficult looking back?
- ❖ Jesus told the rich man to sell all his wealth, distribute it to the poor and then follow Him. He couldn't. What are some of the things you find difficult to give up in order to follow Jesus?
- ❖ How are Christians different from disciples of other gurus or religions?

STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH

- ❖ **What It Means to Be a Disciple:** A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has accepted Him as their Saviour and then spends their entire life in pursuit of being like Him at any cost. It requires believing who Jesus is, learning what He taught, and agreeing to do what He asks of us.



- **Disciples are Learners:** The Greek word for 'disciple' is '*mathetes*,' which means 'learner.' Disciples are those with a heart for God and a teachable attitude. Because of their great love for their master, disciples are ready to receive whatever Jesus has to offer; His forgiveness, love, direction and commands. Learning from Jesus is a lifelong process.
 - [Matthew 11:28-30](#)
 - [Philippians 3:12-14](#)

- **Disciples are in the process of becoming like their Master:** While we will never be perfect, God does call us to grow in our likeness to Jesus Christ. When fully trained, disciples become more like their Master. Disciples of Jesus increasingly reflect His character, conduct and passions.
 - [Luke 6:40](#)
 - [Ephesians 4:13](#)

- ❖ **Some Essential Characteristics of Disciples of Jesus:** As we prepare to disciple others, we should evaluate our own lives. Are we true disciples of Jesus Christ? Even though imperfect, are we prepared to be a good example to others?
 - **Disciples of Jesus are growing in their love for God and others:** [Matthew 22:36-40](#): The aspiration, pursuit and commitment of disciples is to love God with their entire being. To love God is to submit our entire life to Him. We do this not out of obligation, but in response to His great love for us- it should be our delight!
 - God calls us to love Him with our whole heart, soul and mind ([Matthew 22:37](#)). God calls us to love others as ourselves ([Matthew 22:39](#)).
 - These two commands are the foundation for the Christian life ([Matthew 22:40](#)). What are some ways I can assess how I am doing in relation to these two commands?
 - How do we know that we truly love God? ([1 John 4:19-21](#))

 - **Disciples of Jesus submit to Christ as Lord of their lives:** The pursuit of God's Kingdom demands our single-minded commitment. Even the legitimate desire to serve our family must be submitted to Jesus' call to be His disciple. The more we know Jesus, the more we will know who God is. The more we meditate on what Jesus has done for us, the more we will serve Him out of thankful hearts. Therefore, to be a true disciple of Christ, we must submit the following to His Lordship ([Luke 14:25-33](#)):
 - Our relationships (Luke 14:26)
 - Our possessions (Luke 14:33)
 - Our whole being (Luke 14:26-27)



- **Disciples of Jesus seek the kingdom of God.** Before any other purpose in their life, a disciple will seek to promote God's Kingdom and glory, not their own or the world's.
 - Read [Luke 9:57-62](#)

- **Disciples of Jesus are internally motivated to follow and serve God:**
 - [Romans 5:6-8](#)
 - [2 Corinthians 5:14](#)
 - [Hebrews 12:28-29](#)
 - [1 Corinthians 15:58](#)

- ❖ **Evaluating Your Commitment to being a Disciple of Jesus:** We should each regularly evaluate our commitment as a disciple of Jesus Christ. There are times in our life when we might make slower progress or even allow old sins and habits to return. Being honest with our mentor or accountability partner will keep sin from growing greater in the dark.

You can produce a copy of the attached evaluation form to your participants for them to silently and individually evaluate how they are doing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. You may suggest they share their answers with a mentor, or trusted friend who will keep them accountable for changes needed in their life.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ What would your life look like if you loved God with all your heart, soul and mind?
- ❖ Becoming like Jesus Christ doesn't happen overnight – it is truly the mission of a lifetime! In what ways are you currently growing in your Christlikeness? What is God teaching you?
- ❖ Disciples put Christ first in their lives and seek His Kingdom. In what ways can you do this on a daily basis?
- ❖ What picture of Jesus Christ do non-believers see when they observe you? Can you think of things in your life that need a lot more work, and areas where you have already seen good changes?

PRAYER

Pray that the participants would grow in their Christlikeness as they take on the role of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Pray that they would be filled with a desire to be more like Him and to accomplish His purposes on earth. Pray that they would submit to Jesus and give Him complete control over their lives. Pray that they would honour Him as they serve Him.



EVALUATING YOUR COMMITMENT AS A DISCIPLE

We should each regularly evaluate our commitment to being a disciple. As you prayerfully consider the honest answers to these questions, ask God to renew your resolve to following Him with your whole heart.

1. What does it mean for you to be a disciple of Jesus?
2. What will it cost you to follow Jesus?
3. How closely are your priorities aligned with God's call to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness? What may need to change?
4. Do you desire what Jesus wants for you?
5. What reservations do you have regarding His call to be His disciple?
6. What evidence does your life display of your commitment to being a disciple of Jesus?

You do not need to share your answers with anyone else – but you may find it helpful to meet together with someone who can hold you accountable to renewing your commitment as a disciple.