

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Basic Doctrines: Discipleship

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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Basic Doctrines: Discipleship

Learning Objectives

1. Realize that discipleship is a lifelong journey with Jesus
2. Accept the Holy Spirit as the guide Jesus promised for your spiritual journey
3. Persevere through the suffering that comes from following Jesus

Content Outline

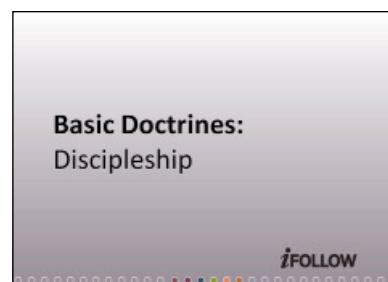
- A. Principles of Discipleship
- B. The Uniqueness of Christian Discipleship
- C. Marks of True Discipleship
- D. Status or Sacrifice?
- E. Rewards and Challenges

Background Material for the Presenter

Although all people are fundamentally equal in the eyes of God, there are major differences in the manner in which they function. Some have the gift of leadership. Our society, and every organization within society, would soon collapse if there were no leaders. Even in heaven there appears to be differentiation of roles. There are, for instance, angels and archangels! When God called His people out of Egypt, He appointed leaders. When He organized a sanctuary service, He made sure there would be leadership. God worked through judges, prophets, kings, and so on.

But leaders are useless without followers who are willing to accept their leadership. The more followers a leader has, the more he or she needs a group of close associates who are willing to learn from their leader and to assist in the realization of the goals of their leader.

In Exodus 18:13-27, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, helped



him to learn the importance of delegating leadership in what could be considered a “pyramidal” hierarchy, or could just as well be seen as concentric circles. The point is, no one person can do everything. Not even Jesus in His humanity on Earth. That’s why He chose twelve close followers, later known as apostles. All Jesus’ honest followers, of course, were disciples, but these twelve would be trained as leaders, both as secondary leaders while Jesus was still here, and to take on His work when He went back to heaven.

The Uniqueness of Christian Discipleship

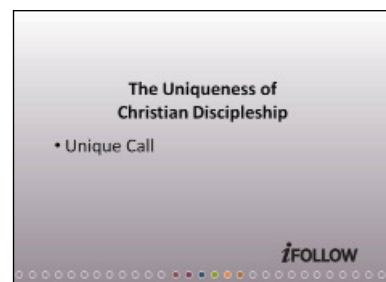
Socrates had Plato. Gamaliel had Saul. Leaders of various religions had their devout followers. More than that, every teacher—of some certain kind of medicine, for instance, such as Hippocrates or Galen, or of a certain philosophy, such as Plato and Aristotle—had disciples. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper 2010) this is the background of the word:

O.E. *discipul* (fem. *discipula*), Biblical borrowing from L. *discipulus* “pupil,” from *discipere* “to grasp intellectually, analyze thoroughly,” from *dis-* “apart” (see *dis-*) + *capere* “take” (see *capable*).

So the disciple was seen simply as a student, a serious one who was willing to “analyze thoroughly” and “take apart” a teaching. There was nothing extraordinary, therefore, about the fact that Jesus had a group of disciples. It was customary for teachers to have a following of “interns.”

What was it, then, that made that word become synonymous with Christianity, to the point that today, if you look online for a definition, some of the first ones you get will be about Jesus and Christianity? What was so unique about this particular Master?

Unique Call: First, there was the odd way these disciples were chosen. Other teachers were chosen by their followers. They could choose to accept or turn away whoever came to them, but they didn’t generally go out seeking certain people to be their disciples. Jesus, on the other hand, spent time with those who naturally followed Him, took time to get to know them, then spent all night in prayer before choosing twelve.



And what a startling crew He picked! Jesus saw potential in these men that most of us would not have discerned, and certainly neither Plato nor Hippocrates would have chosen them, It is also remarkable that they were instantly willing to leave their daily business and follow this Carpenter from Nazareth. They apparently saw something extraordinary in this Man that even most of His own relatives had not discovered yet.

Unique Task: All disciples had as their goal to become like their masters or teachers. In Jesus' case, His major mission, to die for all humanity, could not be imitated, duplicated, or learned. His disciples, in contrast, had the unique task given to them to make more disciples.

After He Jesus called the Twelve, He also called the Seventy (Luke 10:1–20) and then, at the end of His earthly ministry, commanded His disciples to “make disciples of all peoples” (Matt. 28:19). Thus, again unlike earthly systems, this discipleship is not restrictive: it is governed by the same “whosoever” principle that operates in God’s plan of salvation (John 3:16). So a Christian disciple’s job is to encourage others to become disciples, too.

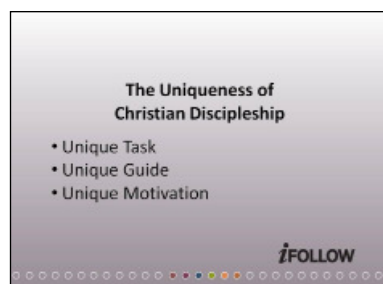
Unique Guide: Every other teacher could only teach while he lived, and then, after death, through whatever writings he might have left. Jesus, however, promised that even when He was no longer with them, He could still teach His followers new things. How could this be?

Before His trial and death, Jesus had so much to tell His beloved disciples. This is just one of them: “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” (John 16:12-15)

This is one of the most important differences; our Teacher is still with us. We can’t see Him, feel Him, or hear Him ... yet we can do all those things, in some unexplainable way. And we never graduate. Our job is to be a lifelong learner and to pass it on.

Unique Motivation: The most important difference, though, between what would have been seen as ordinary, garden-variety discipleship and the discipleship of Jesus is that the former was based on the content of a philosophy or teaching, whereas the latter is rooted in the accomplishment of Jesus. What Jesus achieved is redemption from sin through His death and resurrection. His disciples very soon made it abundantly clear that they were willing to lay everything, even their lives, on the line for this Master, and He wasn’t even here anymore! It was amazing to the ancient world, and when it’s real, it’s still amazing today.

Whoever heeds His call, experiences His forgiveness, and commits himself or herself to Christ’s service is His disciple. Christian discipleship is an operative link between the saved and the Savior. The former to live, obey, relate, experience, and serve within the will of the latter. Thus, Paul could say, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20, NIV)



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Thus, Christian discipleship rests not so much on Christ's teachings as on what He did for the salvation of humanity. Jesus bids all His followers to identify themselves fully with Him and take up their cross and follow Him. (Matt. 10:38, Mark 8:34; see also Luke 9:23) Without walking in the footprints of Calvary, there is no Christian discipleship.

There's one more difference, and it's a tragic one. In any other teaching system, then or now, students could decide to leave. You can leave even such a great teacher as Gamaliel, Plato, or Einstein. You can drop out of college, change your job, decide you no longer want to take art lessons. This has always been true of Jesus, as well. He forces no one. It would be totally outside His nature to do so. But in this case, the consequences are a little greater.

John 6:60-66 describes one major falling away of Jesus' disciples. This was a watershed moment of His ministry. But it had far-reaching results. And it broke the Master's heart.

Marks of True Discipleship

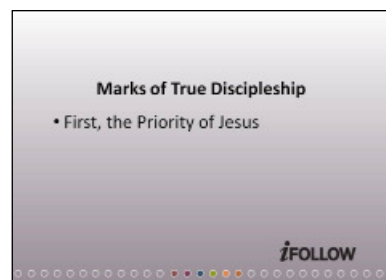
The word **disciple** occurs some 269 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospels and Acts. To be a disciple of Jesus is the most life-fulfilling experience one can have. It energizes the spirit, challenges the mind, and demands our utmost in our relationship with God and our fellow human beings. It is important, therefore, to explore what makes a disciple and what are the marks of discipleship.

At least four marks of true Christian discipleship, marks which make it plain whether it is real or imitation, must be emphasized.

First, the priority of Jesus. The New Testament uses a variety of names for Jesus. He is called "the Son of God" but also "the Son of Man" or "the Messiah." Hundreds of times Jesus is referred to as "the Lord." This word, which initially was quite general in its application, became a highly significant term for the early Christians. The Roman emperor claimed divinity and wanted to be addressed as "the Lord." To confess that Christ was their ultimate Lord rather than the Roman Caesar was not just expressing an opinion. It literally could be a matter of life or death. Those who lived in the Roman realm should only have one **Kyrios** (lord), and to apply this title to any person other than the emperor could well end in torture and death.

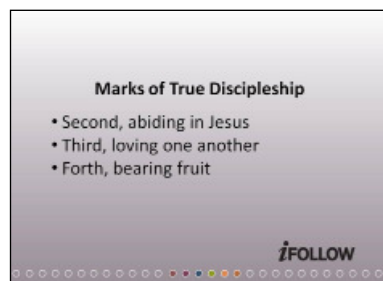
Thus, it required faith and dedicated discipleship to call Jesus "Lord." But today it also is no small thing to call Jesus our Lord and truly mean it. If He is our Lord, He is the Sovereign over our whole life, over all that we say and do.

"If anyone desires to come after Me," said Jesus, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23, NKJV) All relationships, activities, hopes, and



dreams must come under the lordship of Christ daily and perpetually. Nothing can come between the disciple and the Master. (Matt. 10:37-39) A disciple's ever-binding motto will be, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21, NKJV)

Second, abiding in Jesus. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." (John 8:31, 32, NKJV) Christian discipleship is a call to continually live in Jesus and to let His Word be the constant guide to faith and conduct. Doctrinal faithfulness, lifelong obedience, and fearless witness to the Master will set a disciple apart from others.



When many Jesus disciples turned away, as recorded in John 6:66, Peter spoke for the disciples and declared their allegiance. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (Vs. 68-69) With the exception of Judas, they eventually did prove to be faithful followers, and they became leaders in the early church, even though they had moments of grave doubt and disillusionment when their Master was taken prisoner and crucified. Their experience gives us great comfort. Many of us have had moments when our resolve to be disciples was at low tide, but as in the case of the apostles, this does not mean that we cannot overcome our temporary lapse.

Third, loving one another. "A new commandment I give to you. ... By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35, NKJV) In Jesus' new commandment the newness does not refer to love but to the object of love. We do love, but we love the lovable, our own. But Jesus expects His disciples to love as He did, to love sacrificially, love at all costs, love without barriers, love inclusively, love to build the community, love to enlarge God's kingdom, and love to make disciples.

As "new" as this may have sounded to the eleven remaining disciples, it was in fact the one command the entire Bible was based on. The most common thing for which the people of Israel were rebuked time and again by prophet after prophet was unloving actions. Oppressing the poor, unjust treatment of workers, uncaring attitudes toward widows and orphans, even harsh treatment of the stranger or foreigner were the cause of much of the trouble Israel faced in her history.

The one thing Jesus had set His entire life to demonstrating, the one thing He said was the greatest commandment after loving God, was loving each other. It was even the thing He demonstrated in the very last hours of His life, from speaking words of encouragement to the weeping women on the Via Dolorosa to asking forgiveness for His tormenters, from giving John and His mother to each other's care to promising salvation to the repentant thief without so much as one question. Jesus made it abundantly clear that love was the one and only principle on which His kingdom was run. "This," He said, "is how they'll know for sure; you'll love!" Do we? Is that what Christianity is most known for? If not, it isn't Christianity. Period.

Fourth, bearing fruit. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will

be My disciples.” (John 15:8, NKJV) Far from being a theoretical construct, discipleship is a practical witness to what Christ has done to a sinner. He has forgiven, redeemed, and empowered so that the once feeble and guilt-ridden are freed from condemnation to live lives of obedience and ones that are fruit-bearing. Disciples are overcomers and reflectors of Christ’s righteousness.

There are two basic kinds of “fruit” of the Christian life, and they come in a definite order. First is the fruit of the Spirit, defined (not necessarily exhaustively) in Galatians 5:22-25. Lives in constant connection with Jesus through His indwelling Spirit will be lives like His. They will be loving, joyful, peaceful, and all the rest. It’s a growing thing, of course. It never stops, and you’re never “there.” But you’ll recognize His presence. Second, this fruitful, loving life leads to a greater attraction for those whom you long to draw into discipleship themselves.

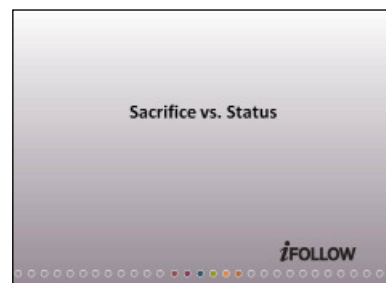
Preachers sometimes say, “An apple tree’s job is not to make apples. It’s to make more apple trees.” In fact, the apple tree’s only “job” is to stand in the sun, drink in the rain, draw up all the nourishment of the earth, and **be what it was created to be**. The apples will come. From them will come new apple trees. But none of that was in the control of the tree. Love, however, draws. And Jesus, when He is lifted up (as He always is, where there is love) draws **all**.

Sacrifice vs. Status

Most of us like to be with important people. Meeting a head of state or a government minister or a celebrity provides us with a much-coveted conversation topic. Knowing someone important, or even knowing someone who knows someone important, somehow seems to endow us with a halo of glory. It seems a natural desire to climb up the social ladder rather than remain near its base. Jesus’ disciples were no exception to this unfortunate human trait. More than once, His closest followers argued over who would be “first” in His kingdom.

However, rather than promising His disciples material prosperity and social status, Jesus prepared them for a different kind of reality. In Mark 8:31-38, Jesus is teaching plainly about His upcoming torture and death. Peter rebukes Him, and Jesus responds with one of His own strongest rebukes. “Get away, Satan! You don’t have your mind on God’s matters!” It must have been very important, first for Him to have said something so strong, and then for Him to call the crowd to listen, along with the twelve, to what He had to say next.

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come



after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Vs. 34-37)

Following Jesus is a costly business. In his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German pastor who was martyred by the Nazis in 1945, emphasizes that divine grace does not come cheap. And following Christ is not an easy thing to do. It inevitably will involve suffering. Just as Christ said that He "must suffer," so must we. If we want to identify with Him in His life, we must also do so in His suffering and death. "To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. ... Only a man ... totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, or he has only got to pick it up; there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God." (Bonhoeffer, p. 98)

Rewards and Challenges

Jesus left His disciples with no doubt that following Him would require sacrifice. He was entirely open with them in regard to what they should expect. In John 15:18-25 He promised His followers would be hated and persecuted. In Luke 9:57-58, He said that following Him might not even leave a disciple with somewhere to lay his or her head.



The disciples, except Judas, eventually became the apostles. From the first chapters of the book of Acts, it is clear that these men had learned many lessons. They had been with Jesus, and now, with the power of the Spirit, they were able to deal with opposition and persecution. Although we cannot be sure about the details, there is good reason to believe the strong traditions from the early church era which say that all apostles eventually suffered martyrdom. All supposedly suffered a violent death, except John, but his imprisonment on Patmos was not a luxurious vacation, either. He also was a "brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus." (Rev. 1:9, NIV) And of course, the most common reward for good work is more work. To those who are faithful in little, Jesus will give much; not much reward, much work!

Still the rewards are incalculable. Those who follow Christ will face numerous challenges. But if they stay focused on their Master, they will be able to deal with whatever happens. They will have something that is precious beyond words. He gives them His peace, which is unlike the imperfect and transient kind of peace the world offers. (John 14:27) It

is the peace that transcends all understanding. (Phil. 4:7) That peace is the hallmark of the abundant life that Christ gives to His disciples. (John 10:10) In spite of all trials and temptations, this is the kind of life that satisfies at a level beyond the reach of those who choose to live without Christ. And yet, even more so, faithful followers of Christ have the assurance of eternal life, beginning now; the certain promise of God that whatever they struggle with now can't be compared with the promise of eternity that awaits them.

Handouts in This Package

1. Participant Notes



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Additional Resources

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Discussion Questions

1. Historically, a disciple assented to and studied to learn a certain set of ideas from the chosen teacher. What are the similarities and differences between that form of discipleship and true Christian discipleship? Do you think we always clearly know the difference?
2. Humanly speaking, we have leaders and followers, teachers and disciples. Name three people who are teachers to you. Name three people who are disciples to you. How can being (or not being) a disciple of Christ impact this human relationship?
3. There tends to be in some societies an anti-leadership attitude; in contrast, in other societies people often blindly follow their leaders. What's the tendency in your society, and how do you strike a proper balance?
4. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) requires that we make disciples of all nations. What areas of life are affected by the "all nation" concept? How would you relate to those areas?
5. What do you see as your role in the Great Commission? What are some other roles in your personal discipleship journey?
6. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit guides us as disciples. How have you been influenced by the Holy Spirit in your life?
7. Paul, a great example of discipleship, acknowledges the suffering associated with following Christ. Yet, despite that suffering, he was a devoted disciple of Christ. What convicts you to be the same?
8. What are some of the things experienced disciples can do to encourage new ones?
9. Try to imagine how different the church would be if everyone who professed to follow Christ was truly a disciple of Jesus. What differences would we see? While you can't change others, what one difference would you like to make, to bring your life closer to true conformity to Jesus' will?

Group Activity

Purpose: To examine one story of the first explosion of discipleship and draw from it lessons for our time.

Preparation: Have four tables, labeled Jerusalem, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Scatter place cards on all the tables except Jerusalem, which say “You are a Jew,” or “You are a Greek.” Make handout copies of Acts 11:19-26.

Assignment: Ask several people to sit at each table, taking the part of either a Jewish or Greek. Another group, at the Jerusalem table, represents the first Christians, mostly Jews. Choose one person to be Saul and one to be Barnabas. Explain that the stoning of Stephen has just taken place, and that a great persecution has begun because of it. Then read or have someone read the story through once. Then read it again slowly, one part at a time, and pause while that part of the story is acted out.

Debrief: Some preachers call this narrative the Antioch effect, the effect of God’s grace that produced disciples out of both Jews and Gentiles and made a common family known for the first time as “Christians.” What did you learn? What were your feelings and reactions? How is your life similar to or different from this story? Are you this kind of disciple? If so, what makes it possible? If not, would you like to be? What would have to happen for it to be true of you?

Time: Allow 5 minutes for people to be chosen and get into place and then about three minutes to read the story. Allow at least 10 minutes for acting out the story and 20 minutes for a general discussion.

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Handout

Key Concept 10: Discipleship

Key Texts: Exodus 18, Mark 8:31-38, Romans 8:18

Concept: A life of discipleship means that we constantly learn how to follow Jesus through life's joys and difficulties.

Connecting with Scripture

A. Who do you report to? Who reports to you? Rate the level of mentoring taking place in both of these relationships on a scale of 0 (nothing happening at all) to 5 (constant teaching is taking place).

B. Recall a recent "teachable moment" when an unplanned opportunity for mentoring arose. How well did you, your mentor, or the one you were mentoring take advantage of that moment?

Sharing and Receiving Scripture

A. Write out simple instructions for an activity that you are good at—how to compose an interesting photo, make tasty mac & cheese, that sort of thing. Try to sound as if you are an expert on this subject. Now have someone read your instructions. Were they as clear as you hoped? Does the person have any tips to improve your teaching style?

B. Moses, in Exodus 18, acted as sole judge of the Israelites because...

1. No one gave him permission to release the responsibility to others until Jethro spoke up
2. It's often easier to just do it yourself than take the time to mentor someone else
3. If other people can do his job, then maybe he isn't needed anymore
4. He felt that only he was wise enough to render sound judgments
5. It simply never crossed his mind to recruit others to help
6. Other...

C. In the book of Matthew, Jesus effectively recruits disciples with the simple request "Follow me." Why was this approach so successful?

1. Simple requests (Uncle Sam needs you!) are more appealing
2. Too much information and explanation gives people more opportunities to resist the invitation
3. Those being recruited had already seen Jesus in action and just waiting for an invitation to join

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4. Jesus knew that these people were open to an invitation
5. The Holy Spirit reinforced Jesus' invitation by tugging on some of the resistant hearts
6. Other...

D. Why did Jesus, in Mark 8:31-38, rebuke Peter so forcefully?

1. Jesus had tried to teach him about eminent suffering but he wasn't paying attention
2. Jesus didn't wait for teaching moments, but created them
3. Peter expressed a dangerous attitude and Jesus had to forcefully confront it for Peter's sake
4. Peter rebuked Jesus first
5. If Peter could take Jesus' rebuke and learn from it, he would be better prepared for the future
6. Other...

E. Romans 8:18 addresses a critical issue for Christians—being a disciple of Christ comes at a cost in this life. What best helps you face trials?

1. The promises of future glory
2. I see the trials that my Lord (and mentor) Jesus Christ faced, and it strengthens me
3. Jesus leads me gently as I learn by small trials how to face bigger problems later on
4. I've seen others in my church endure sufferings and their Christ-like example encourages me
5. I honestly don't face trials very well and I need help with this
6. Other...

Applying the Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If the opportunity arises, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: A good leader is always training his or her replacement. If you hold a church office, brainstorm how to identify someone that you can mentor to someday step into your position. Report on how you would choose your replacement and how you would mentor that person.

Option 2: We often do well at bringing people into the church, but not so well at keeping them. List some suggestions that would help your church assimilate these new members.

Option 3: Outline a plan to connect your young people with the older members of your church (Adopt-a-Grandparent, etc.). What do your youth need to learn from the

older generation? What can your elderly members learn from the youth?

Valuing Scripture in Your Life

A. Spend some time reflecting on your spiritual mentors. What are their greatest contributions to your life? Write about it for your own benefit. Then write them thank you letters.

B. Consider prayerfully areas in which your discipleship commitments need to be refined, and then list those areas. Place the list in your Bible and review it during your private devotions. Add specific actions as the Holy Spirit shows them to you.

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