

DEFINITION OF A DISCIPLE

TEACHING NOTES

GET THEM TALKING:

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word "disciple"? How about "discipleship" or "disciple-making"?

TEACH: DEFINITION OF DISCIPLE

If we are striving to become better followers of Jesus, we need to understand what Jesus truly expects of us. It's important to start with the term Jesus used to describe his followers: that word is "disciple."

The word "disciple" means learner, student, follower, and, my personal favorite, apprentice. Today, the term "disciple" has become loaded with various interpretations.

What is a disciple anyway?

Jesus used the term "disciple" for any of his followers. There were only 12 apostles, but every follower of Jesus was considered a disciple. The word "disciple" appears 261 times in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, while the term "Christian" is used just 3 times.

Since "disciple" is the word Jesus chose and the one most frequently used in the Bible, I believe it's a really good idea to use that term as well. I understand it's one of those "churchy" words, but if it was good enough for Jesus, it's definitely good enough for us.

Can we further define what it means to be a disciple? Let's examine a passage of Scripture in Matthew 4:19-20. This passage describes when Jesus called his disciples. He told them from the very beginning exactly what he was calling them to do!

I (Joel) have read this passage all my life, but it wasn't until around six years ago that I understood that the definition of a disciple is in the call Jesus gave to His disciples. A mentor of mine, Jim Putman, highlighted the first three parts of this definition to me.

MATTHEW 4:19-20.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

"Follow Me"

"Follow me" indicates that a disciple is someone who follows Jesus with urgency, treating Jesus as their Lord, Master, and King of their life. They listen, learn, and actually obey what Jesus says without delaying their response; they follow and obey urgently.

"I will make you"

"I will make you" suggests that a disciple is someone who is transformed by Jesus, actively becoming like Jesus in every aspect of their life. Jesus expects his followers to truly change—not just pretend to change, not only change when others are watching, but to change consistently and genuinely.

"Fishers of men"

"Fishers of men" signifies that a disciple is committed to the mission of Jesus, sharing His message within their relationships. It involves moving beyond a self-centered agenda to further God's mission of making disciples through their relationships.

"They left their nets"

Following Jesus wasn't a solitary journey. Some of Jesus' disciples were brothers, and some were friends even before their calling. For three years, Jesus' disciples lived with faithful friends in a tight-knit community. Eventually Christians called that a church.

Here is the definition:

A disciple is someone who (1) follows Jesus, (2) is changed by Jesus, (3) is committed to the mission of Jesus, (4) with a faith community.

PROCESS:

Can you be a disciple of Jesus without pursuing all four of these areas?

Can you follow Jesus if you tell yourself, (1) I don't have to treat Jesus as my authority, (2) I don't really need to change, (3) I don't have to share Jesus' message with others, or (4) I don't need to be part of a faith community?

If you are outright unwilling to engage in any of these four aspects, you cannot be His disciple.

However, if you are willing to engage in all these areas, but don't know how, that's okay! You're in the right place. Disciples are learners and apprentices of Jesus!

The definition of a disciple isn't merely a definition; it's also the best way to mentally organize all the different areas in which we follow Jesus.

PROCESS:

As you look at this graphic where do you feel your spiritual life is the strongest?

Where do you feel your spiritual life is the weakest? Why?

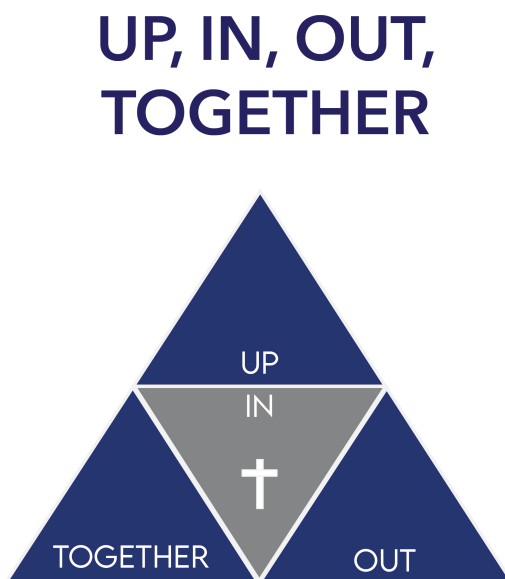
TIP: Start by sharing openly about your progress and struggles in these 4 areas. Spend the rest of your time on this question getting your group to share.

As we have reviewed discussed the definition of discipleship and the Triangle what is God saying to you?

What can you do this week to obey what God has revealed to you?

Who can you share this with this week?

TIP: If sharing faith seems like the biggest hurdle for someone in your group. Encourage them to pray everyday for God to send someone that does not know Him. Also, explain that while



UP

- How am I consistently connecting with God?
- What is God saying to me?

IN

- How am I going to obey what God is saying to me this week?
- Who am I in Christ?

OUT

- Who can I share God with this week?
- How am I going to share my faith this week?

TOGETHER

- Who is helping me carry my burdens?
- Who am I supporting and encouraging in my church?

sharing their faith is new, it is important to push themselves to do it even if it is with a family member or Christian friend.

HANDOUT PROCESS AT HOME

Review the handout for them to work on throughout the week.

PRAY:

Ask one of your group to close in prayer. Ask them to pray that each one in the disciple making group will

PROCESS AT HOME

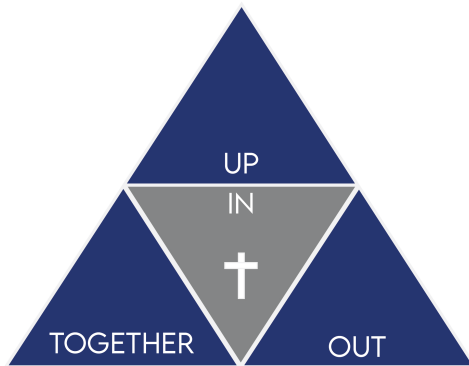
HANDOUT

Commit the definition of a disciple from Matthew 4:19-20 to memory.

A disciple is someone who (1) follows Jesus, (2) is changed by Jesus, (2) is committed to the mission of Jesus, (4) with faithful friends.

Reflect on the Triangle (Up, In, Out, Together) and the questions.

UP, IN, OUT, TOGETHER



UP

- How am I consistently connecting with God?
- What is God saying to me?

IN

- How am I going to obey what God is saying to me this week?
- Who am I in Christ?

OUT

- Who can I share God with this week?
- How am I going to share my faith this week?

TOGETHER

- Who is helping me carry my burdens?
- Who am I supporting and encouraging in my church?

What is God saying to you this week?

What can you do this week to obey what God has revealed to you?

Who can you share this with this week?