

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Leader's Guide

WHO IS JESUS?

LESSON 5: THE FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled *Who is Jesus?* This series of seven lessons introduces the person and work of Jesus from a Christian perspective, considering His identity, work, teachings and death. Because Jesus is central to the Christian faith and religion, it is vital for the disciple to know Jesus, and for those exploring Christianity to know what makes Jesus Christ unique, and worthy of our discipleship and devotion. You may have participants from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds who have differing ideas about who Jesus is and what He taught. This series will be an excellent foundation for their future studies in discipleship.

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.



WHO IS JESUS?

LESSON 5: THE FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES OF JESUS

PURPOSE

This lesson looks at what we can learn about Jesus from the relationships He held during His time on earth.

LEADER'S NOTES

When Jesus left the earth, there remained a group of ordinary people who had encountered the extraordinary God in human form. On their own, they were not able to start a spiritual movement that would grow until it reached every corner of the earth – but with the Holy Spirit they could accomplish amazing things! Jesus spent His time investing in and discipling individual people. The early church was made up of ordinary men and women, sinners, children, and outcasts from society. This shows us we do not need wealth or power to impress God, but rather true faith. It also teaches us that we should not feel superior to other people, and that salvation is offered to everyone. Jesus viewed women and children as important as men (even though women had a low status in society). To Jesus, where you came from was of no importance. Our churches today should follow Jesus' example.

INTRODUCTION

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

- ❖ Have you ever been a disciple (or student) of someone? This might have been a mentor relationship, or perhaps in a school setting or workplace training. What did you learn from them? How did you learn it?
- ❖ Why did Jesus extend a personal invitation to people to “follow Him” and be His disciple? Why did Jesus want people around Him as He taught and worked miracles?
- ❖ If you were in the disciples' place and Jesus invited you to leave your job, your home, and all you knew to follow Him, what would be the most difficult thing to leave behind?
- ❖ *You may choose to demonstrate the idea of a 'disciple' by asking one of your participants to stand beside you. Ask them to copy your actions precisely. Engage in simple activities, such as folding a paper into a shape, preparing and drinking tea, tying a shoe, doing a physical exercise, etc. Make your actions exaggerated, and praise your 'disciple' when they follow you exactly. Explain that this is what a disciple is – a student who watches and behaves like his teacher.*



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH

- ❖ **Jesus: Revolution through Relationship** - When Jesus came to begin His Kingdom, He did not do so with a military campaign, a political rally, or by seizing power in any traditional sense. Rather, He built relationships with imperfect people and changed individual lives, just as God continues to do today.
 - Jesus didn't seek out the rich, powerful or others in high society to build His Kingdom and spread the Gospel message. On the contrary He overwhelmingly used imperfect people who were willing to follow Him by faith.
 - The ordinary people God used gave glory to Him for any good works they did. It would have been normal for the wise and powerful people to take credit for themselves. Instead, all that was accomplished was a work of God ([Acts 4:13](#)).
- ❖ **Ordinary People Loved Jesus:** Those who flocked to Jesus to hear Him teach were ordinary people from all walks of life. Jesus especially welcomed those who were rejected by society, as well as the poor and lowly.
 - **Jesus Fulfilled the Prophecy to proclaim Good News to the Poor:** Jesus came to the poor and shared with them the good news of salvation, eternal life, and the promise of treasure in heaven. People can be 'poor' in many ways, including financial poverty, social poverty and spiritual poverty ([Luke 4:17-19](#)).
 - Jesus defended the poor ([Mark 12:41-44](#)).
 - Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor ([Luke 6:20](#)). This teaching can also be found in the book of James (which was written by Jesus' half-brother) ([James 2:1-8](#)).
 - Jesus touched lepers and the unclean, people no one else would touch. He healed them and cared for them ([Luke 5:12-14](#)).
 - **Jesus welcomed Children:** Jesus did not place a low value on children, but rather He welcomed them and emphasized their significance. Children were often seen in Jesus' presence. This would have been very different from the cultural perception of children in Jesus' day.
 - Children were given understanding of Jesus' message ([Matthew 11:25-26](#)).
 - Jesus taught that we must become humble like children ([Matthew 18:1-4](#)).
 - Jesus loves and welcomes children ([Luke 18:15-17](#)).
 - Children loved and worshipped Jesus, whereas wise leaders (wise in their own eyes) scoffed at Him ([Matthew 21:15-16](#)).
 - **Jesus, friend of Sinners:** Jesus was accused of being a friend of tax-collectors and sinners. While Jesus never approved of their sin, He ate with sinners, spoke with them, and acted kindly towards them. This angered the religious officials of the day.



Jesus did not condemn people or punish them, rather He loved them, befriended them and invited them to repent and believe.

- o Jesus shared meals with many people, including those who were known to be sinners, and they enjoyed being in His presence (Matthew 9:10-12, Luke 15:2).
- o Jesus did not punish a woman caught in adultery, but rather called her to repentance (John 8:1-11).
- o Jesus chose to eat with Zacchaeus, a tax-collector (who often collected more money from people than he should have). After Zacchaeus sought out Jesus, he repented and believed in Him (Luke 19:1-10).

❖ **Ordinary Disciples Followed Jesus:** In the time of Jesus, it was common for disciples – or followers – to accompany a great teacher as he taught from town to town. These disciples would take work, where they could get it, to support the work of the teacher. They also assisted Him by teaching others themselves. The disciples show us that God uses ordinary people who have faith in Him to accomplish great things for His Kingdom:

➤ **Calling of the Disciples:** We have several accounts of Jesus choosing the disciples and inviting them to follow Him:

- o Jesus called twelve specific people to follow Him (Matthew 10:1-4).
- o Simon Peter was a fisherman when He met Jesus. He had been up all night trying to catch fish, and then Jesus performed a miracle for Him and filled his nets (Luke 5:1-11). Simon Peter bowed down and was fearful because he knew he was a sinner, not worthy to be near Jesus, but Jesus called him precisely because of this. Jesus told the Disciples that they would now be 'fishers of men'. That day, **Simon Peter** and **Andrew**, his brother, left everything and followed Jesus.
- o **James and John** were fishermen also, and left everything to follow Jesus. They were likely young men as the Bible mentions they left their father (Matthew 4:21-22).
- o **Matthew** was a tax collector when Jesus called him (he was also known as Levi in some Gospels). Jesus simply walked by and invited Matthew to follow Him (Matthew 9:9).
- o **Nathanael and Philip** were in Bethsaida when Jesus called them. Nathanael at first was sceptical, but after meeting Jesus and hearing Him prophesy, Nathanael, too, left everything to follow Him (John 1:43-46).
- o **Jesus invited many others to follow who did not become apostles. Some followed, some did not** (Luke 9:59-61, Mark 10:21-22).

➤ **Training and Sending of the Disciples:** Jesus focused His training and His teaching on 12 men (although other disciples, including women, were often around Him). Jesus trained them and prepared them to present the good news of salvation to others.

- o **Jesus taught His Disciples His message** (Matthew 11:1).
- o **Jesus kept His Disciples close to Him so they could see and believe** (Mark 3:7).
- o **The Disciples did as Jesus directed them** (Matthew 21:6, Matthew 26:19).



- o **Jesus multiplied His teaching through the disciples** He sent out 72 of them in pairs to teach others (Luke 10:1-9).
- o **Jesus prayerfully appointed 12 Apostles to lead the other Disciples** (Mark 3:13-19).
- **Ordinary People:** Even though they spent all their time with Jesus, the disciples were still ordinary people who struggled. They were not perfect followers, but they recognized their sin and the ability of Jesus to meet their every need.
 - o **Disciples doubted:** Even though Jesus had told them He would die and rise again, some doubted even after they saw his resurrected body (Matthew 28:16-18, Luke 24:38).
 - o **A Disciple denied he knew Jesus:** Even though they loved Jesus, they were afraid and Simon Peter even denied knowing Him (John 18:15-18, 25-27).
 - o **Disciples were weak:** When Jesus asked the disciples to stay awake with Him, they could not even do that small thing (Matthew 26:36-45).
- ❖ **God Uses the Ordinary to Accomplish the Extraordinary:** Jesus demonstrated tremendous love in His dealings with all people while on earth. He was harsh with those who oppressed and took advantage of people, but kind to those who recognized their sin and were willing to repent. Jesus taught these simple Disciples – some who had no schooling or training – to teach others about the Kingdom of God.
 - **Jesus commissioned them to make disciples:** Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God would grow one person at a time, and taught the disciples to teach others and make more disciples (Matthew 28:19). Because of these men, the message of Jesus has been taken to every corner of the earth through new, faithful disciples!
 - **Disciples followed Jesus to death:** Even in their imperfect state, Jesus' disciples followed Jesus' teachings even to their deaths (1 Corinthians 4:9, Acts 7: 54-60). In defence of the true Gospel, they counted it a privilege to die as Jesus had died, and they faced their sentences with extraordinary courage.
 - **Jesus gave them Power:** The disciples were told to perform miracles and they did many great things in Jesus' name, proving that His message was true (Luke 10:1-9, Acts 1:8, Acts 4:16, Acts 5:12, Acts 5:16).
 - **Jesus Grew their Numbers:** More and more people joined the spiritual movement of following Jesus (Acts 2:46-47, Acts 6:7).
- ❖ **Jesus Loves You:** Jesus never caused people to fear Him, but rather evoked love and devotion. Jesus saw them as they were, and loved them anyway. As these ordinary people relied on the power of God within them, they could accomplish many things. Each of us can be a friend and disciple of Jesus Christ, and join His mission in taking the Good News of forgiveness to every person on earth. Jesus loves us, and wants to use us right where we are to join this adventure with Him! How will you respond to Jesus' invitation to follow Him?



DISCUSSION

- ❖ Why is Jesus' way of leading people in love so different from most leaders today (especially military or political leaders)?
- ❖ Why do you think Jesus concentrated on teaching and loving individual people rather than always speaking to large crowds? It might seem less efficient, but what was the result?
- ❖ Christianity is the spiritual movement of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. How has Christianity spread around the world? Where can it be found where you live, and how is it spreading?
- ❖ Do you see that Jesus loves you, even in your ordinary state? What can Jesus do with your life?
- ❖ What will you do with Jesus' invitation to come and follow Him?

PRAYER

End with a time of prayer. Pray that your participants will follow Jesus with their whole hearts and their whole lives. Pray that they would see their ordinariness as a gift of God, and understand that nothing is more valuable than knowing Jesus. Pray that the church of Jesus would grow and fill every corner of the earth, and that many more would become His true disciples, willing to take up their own cross and follow Him.