

What Is a Disciple and a Servant?

By Terri Stovall

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23. Compare the two. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What one word does Luke add that is not in the Mark passage?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Mark 8:35 in the section **It's in the Book**. A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory or doesn't follow the norm. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What is the paradox presented in this verse?

Assignment Three

Read Mark 10:35-45. James and John responded to Jesus' question with an answer that upset the other disciples. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What was their answer, and why would this make the remaining ten disciples feel indignant?

Scripture to Memorize

"And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples, He said to them, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." Mark 8:34

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be able to identify the life characteristics of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

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She is the coauthor of *Women Leading Women: The Biblical Model for the Church* and a contributing author of *The Teaching Ministry of the Church* and *The Christian Homemaker's Handbook*. Her passion is to equip and enable women to reach women and families for Christ. She and her husband Jay currently live in Arlington, Texas, and enjoy motorcycling as well as traveling the country riding roller coasters.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

You have been sharing your faith with a friend who is not a believer and does not attend church. During the conversation your friend asks, "What exactly is a disciple?" How would you answer?

What Is a Disciple?

Read Mark 8:34-35 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 34. If anyone would. Jesus was talking plainly with His disciples about things to come. Some Bible scholars say this is the first conversation where Jesus predicted the suffering He would experience leading to His crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus turned to see the multitudes that were following Him and said, "If anyone would come after Me, . . ." With this simple phrase, Jesus was clear that being His disciple was not only for the original Twelve. The invitation is open to all. In the purest sense of the word, a *disciple* is a student or a follower of someone. If anyone wishes to follow Jesus and be His disciple, that person may do so.

You have made that decision by placing your faith in Jesus and professing him as your Lord and Savior. Because you have chosen to follow Jesus, you are a disciple.

Discussion Question

Briefly share when you made the decision to be a follower of Jesus.

Studying the Passage

After Jesus declared to the crowd that following Him is open to anyone, He gave three requirements for being a disciple. **deny himself.** The first requirement is to deny yourself. The word for *deny* here means "to forget one's self or to lose sight of one's self and one's interest." Because of the type of verb used here, there is a sense of entering into a new state or condition. In other words, because we choose to follow Jesus, we no longer make ourselves the focus. We make the One we are following—Jesus—our focus.

Discussion Question

What does it look like to deny yourself in today's world?

Studying the Passage

take up his cross. In biblical days, a man condemned to death would carry his own cross, usually just the crossbeam, to the place where the crucifixion would take place. He had already been tried and convicted. He was carrying his cross to carry out his sentence.

Three of the Gospels are considered to be synoptic because they write about many of the same events, but give us additional insight. Read Luke's account of this interaction in Luke 9:23.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on the subtle difference between Mark's version and Luke's version.

We have received forgiveness of our sins. We allow Jesus' death to count for us. At a point in time, we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, but we daily must take up our cross as a sign of our continual dying to self.

On Your Own

Write below some of the challenges that get in the way of your "taking up your cross" on a daily basis. When are you most likely to shift your focus from Jesus back to yourself? When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Studying the Passage

and follow Me. While the first two requirements, "deny himself" and "take up his cross," are commands to be obeyed, this last phrase has a little different meaning. Some scholars translate this as "and let him follow with Me." The picture painted is that the disciple accompanies, walks with and takes the same road as the One he has chosen to follow.

Verse 35. save . . . lose . . . loses . . . save. Jesus continued to explain the choice and consequence of denying oneself and following Him. What Jesus declares is a paradox, or a statement that seems contradictory or doesn't follow the norm.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the paradox presented in Mark 8:35.

The paradox Jesus states continues to support the choice of a disciple to deny himself and take up his cross. As a believer, we are never truly satisfied, never fully devoted to Him, until we completely lose ourselves in Him.

Discussion Question

How would you explain the paradox in Mark 8:35 to your friend?

What Is a Servant?

Read Mark 10:35-45 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 36. What do you want Me to do for you? As the disciples were walking with Jesus to Jerusalem, a discussion arose among the disciples and Jesus asked them this question. The answer James and John gave made the other disciples feel indignant.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on the answer James and John gave Jesus that upset the other ten.

Studying the Passage

Verse 44. whoever would be first. Here again, as in the Mark 8 passage, Jesus used a paradox to teach His disciples what it means to follow Him. Greatness in the kingdom of God is achieved by being one of the least—a servant. The Greek word for servant here refers to a servant at the lowest level. The primary focus of this kind of servant was to care for and meet the needs of others.

Verse 45. but to serve. Jesus used Himself as the example. He did not come to be ministered to or to sit and allow others to wait on Him. Rather, He came to serve. As a disciple, if we choose to follow Him and walk with Him, then we are to live the life of a servant to others.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: “In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . .”

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

You chose to be a follower and disciple of Jesus the minute you accepted Him as your personal Lord and Savior. With that decision comes requirements, responsibilities and expectations. In Mark 8:34-35, Jesus gave two commands to those who wish to follow Him: (1) deny ourselves and (2) take up our cross. In Luke's version, this second command is to be a daily commitment (Luke 9:23).

In Mark 8:34, Jesus told those of us who choose to follow Him that this will be walking with Him and accompanying Him for a lifetime.

A reward comes from denying ourselves and daily taking up our cross. Jesus, going against the common sense of the world, tells us that when we lose our lives, we gain our souls (Mark 8:35). As we continually die to ourselves and become all consumed with Jesus, we find life!

In Mark 10:35-45, Jesus taught His disciples (and us) that following Him and living a Christlike life is to live a life of a servant. Again, in a paradox that contradicts the world, true greatness is found in serving and ministering to others.

That is what it means to be a disciple and a servant: Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow Him.

How are you doing as a disciple? Ask yourself these three questions.

1. Do I keep my eyes off myself and on Jesus?
2. What is Jesus teaching me about walking with Him?
3. What is one way I served someone else this week for the sake of the gospel?

Follow up Question

What has been the hardest thing this week about being a servant to others?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.