

4.1 Intro: Discipleship that is Radical & Essential

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Learning Goals

1. Introduce Track 4 and begin to grasp a vision for how God wants to use us
2. Be able to distinguish what we mean by disciples, discipleship and disciple-making.

1. Radical vs. Selective Discipleship?

Deep vs. Shallow Discipleship (Ref: *Deep Discipleship* by J.T. English)

2. Definitions: What is a disciple?

Your Definition:

The six unique occasions when Jesus uses the word Disciple:

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|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| i. Luke 14:25-27 | _____ | iv. John 15:5-8 | _____ |
| ii. John 8:31-32 | _____ | v. Matt 10:24-25 | _____ |
| iii. John 13:34-35 | _____ | vi. Matt 28:18-20 | _____ |

3. Essential Discipleship

Do you think that all Christians are disciples? Why or why not?

To what extent do you think disciples are either born and/or made?

4. What do we mean by discipleship?

5. What do we mean by discipling or disciple-making?

Jesus' Great Commission to His Church

Mark 16:15 "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Luke 24:46-48 "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You will be witnesses to these things."

Matthew 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John 20:21 "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Discussion: What are the common themes and/or essential features of this commission?

What is your Level of Involvement with Making Disciples now?

Every Christian will tend to fit into one of these five disciple-maker profiles.

- **Level 1:** not personally making disciples and not helping others make disciples either
- **Level 2:** not personally making disciples, but are helping others make disciples
- **Level 3:** personally working a little at making disciples and helping others make disciples
- **Level 4:** personally making disciples and helping others make disciples also
- **Level 5:** personally making disciples who make disciples and fully engaged in helping disciple-making movements within their Christian communities

Appendix: Disciple-making throughout the Bible

Jesus' disciple-making happened in a context: some reflections on disciple-making in the Bible.

a. OLD TESTAMENT:

The OT the Hebrew word for disciple is *talmidh* but it's only used once (1 Chron 25:7-8 but translated student)! Our translations do however use the English word disciple in other places such as Isaiah 8:6 and Isaiah 19:11. These verses speak of a generation who will not listen to God's Word so Isaiah is to invest in a few disciples – a band of followers who would not only preserve it but make it effective in their day. Another verse says:

"The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. Isaiah 50:4

This was what was needed in Isaiah's day – people who are adequately instructed. The same is true in our own day with all the challenges that we face – we need people who are adequately instructed.

b. THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD:

To appreciate how Jesus trained his disciples, it's important to understand what the Greeks and Romans were familiar with. The Greeks developed the idea that the master a disciple *followed* was of paramount importance. It was much more significant who a disciple followed than what a disciple learnt. Commitment was seen in terms of a person's life & character; it was more about imitation than classroom learning. When you think of how Jesus trained his disciples in the Gospels, you can see how his ministry of calling & training disciples was similar to other masters of the 1st Century. Yet it was also unique because of the claims the made.

c. THE JEWISH WORLD:

Discipleship was a really big issue in the Jewish world. There were all kinds of disciples:

(1) Disciples of Jewish Religious Heritage: The Pharisees described themselves as *disciples of Moses* (John 9:20). Discipleship then was a personal commitment to the teaching of a person known to have spoken from God.

(2) Disciples of a Religious Institution: E.g. Sadducees, Zealots, Pharisees: You had to put yourself under their institutional methods, trained by them in order to become one of them.

(3) Disciples of the Remnant of Israel: The Qumran Community (Dead Sea Scrolls) set up an isolated community to devote themselves to God & the Law.

(4) Disciples of a Prophet: Disciples of John the Baptist were adherents of a movement, not members of a religious institution. It was about how you lived your life.

(5) Disciples of a Messianic Movement: The discipleship movement around John the Baptist was concerned about godly living, but there were different movements centred around a messianic figure and the hope of a military overthrow of Rome; it was about political power for the nation.

“Jesus started out by basing his form of discipleship in the common stream of Jewish hope based on OT expectations & then, slowly, clarified his distinctive form of discipleship. He worked contextually & moved from the commonalities to the distinctive.” Michael Wilkins, Following, pg. 93

It was not revolutionary to become a disciple of a Rabbi. Not everyone, of course, understood him but how did he do it?

d. ACTS OF THE APOSTLES:

Luke refers to disciples 28 times & the vast majority of times he clearly means believers (exceptions in Acts 9:25 & 19:1). What about the word ‘Christian’? Does Luke ever call believers ‘Christians’? The word “Christian” is only mentioned twice (Acts 11:26, 26:28...also 1 Peter 4:16). Two observations: (1) In Acts the disciples are always referred to as the Apostles. It may have been their example to the other disciples that was the focus in the gospels, but it was their foundational role as church leaders that is emphasised in Acts. (2) Only 5 times is the word ‘disciple’ plural; the other 23 are plural. Luke saw discipleship in terms of community.

e. THE EPISTLES/LETTERS:

The final reference to ‘disciple’ is in Acts 21:16 but then the word promptly disappears! Why? If this was such an important issue, why do the Apostles NOT mention it at all?

- CULTURAL AVOIDANCE: When Paul started his 2nd journey, perhaps he felt he was venturing more & more into the Greek/Roman culture and that the Rabbi/disciple model wasn’t communicating so well. He adopted a new model for the church by talking about the parent/child analogy. Local churches were based in the ‘oikos’ concept (extended family households). This was how the early church structured itself.

- ASSOCIATIONS with JESUS: Discipleship was so intimately connected with following the physical Jesus at that time & the Apostles may have found it difficult using the disciple concept for those who had never met Him personally.

- NEW TERMS: Other terms came naturally into use to describe the relationship these disciples had with their Lord, their community of faith and their society: e.g., Brothers/sisters; servants; citizens; saints; church; Christians.