

LIFE GROUP NOTES:

SERIES: Disciple

PART ONE: Brand Confusion

Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can't come where I am going. 34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." **John 13: 33-35**



INTRODUCTION

In the book of Acts we see that people in Antioch were the first to identify the followers of Jesus as "Christians" (11:26). Later in Acts, when Paul is under arrest and testifying for his defence, he preaches Christ to King Agrippa and expresses his longing for this man to come to faith. The king answers, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:28). The final occurrence of this word in Scripture is in 1 Peter 4:16 "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." The implication being that those persecuting the followers of Jesus had thrown this label "Christian" at them, but Peter urges his readers to see the intended slight as cause to praise God.

But the New Testament highlights a different name for the followers of Jesus- and exploring it will both teach and challenge us.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What comes to mind when you think of the word "Christian" (associations, people etc.)? How would you normally define this term? What has it meant to you in the past? How have you noticed other people define this word differently than you do?

MESSAGE SUMMARY

In the book of Acts we see a Jesus community forming in a city called Antioch, where many- both Jews and Gentiles- embraced this new faith.

Church leaders in Jerusalem sent a man named Barnabas to observe and help this new church. Barnabas later brought a man named Saul (Paul) to help him. "For a whole year, Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called 'Christians' first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26). "Christian" was a LABEL that others used. In the New Testament- specifically in the four Gospels and in Acts- a different term is consistently used to describe people who followed Christ. DISCIPLE.

What is a disciple? It simply means, learner, pupil, follower or apprentice. A disciple looks to a chosen leader as their example and authority on everything. A disciple always answers 'YES' to whatever that leader requires of them. That leads to an uncomfortable question: Are we disciples, or are we just 'Christians'?

Jesus gave the bottom-line of what it means to be his disciple. On the night before he was crucified he told them: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:33-34). This is how he wanted his disciples to be defined. To love each other in such a way that outsiders looking on would be drawn to say "Look how they love!" He wanted them to be a community characterised by unconditional, generous love.

What would it look like in your world to love people the way Jesus loves you? Trying to do this won't make your life 'problem free', after all, Jesus was crucified for this kind of behaviour. This is not a means to an end. It is simply what it means to follow Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What major differences among Christians do you find hard to understand or explain?
- 2) What does the word "Disciple" bring to mind? What have you learned about this word in the New Testament?
- 3) In what ways have you looked to Jesus as a model and standard for major decisions in your life?
- 4) How comfortable are you thinking of yourself as a disciple of Jesus? Have you ever thought of yourself this way? What does that mean to you?

- 5) Why do you think Jesus puts such an emphasis on love as the distinguishing characteristic of his disciples?
- 6) In general, do you think followers of Jesus in your community think of themselves as “Christians” or “Disciples”? What difference do you see this making?

KEY POINTS

- The word “Christian” can mean anything we want it to be because it is never clearly defined in Scripture. Originally, it was a derogatory term that outsiders used.
- The New Testament emphasises a different word for those who follow Jesus: DISCIPLES. It’s a challenging term because it is so clearly defined.
- Jesus tells his disciples that love for one another is to be our distinguishing characteristic, our defining mark that attracts outsiders to Him.

Moving Forward

Are you a disciple of Jesus? Or are you settling for your own definition of “Christian”? Reflect on Jesus command and calling that ‘love’ be your defining characteristic as his follower. Think about your most important relationships. What would it look like for love to define them?

Preparing for session 2

To help you prepare- use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your next life-group.

Read the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35. Express as fully as possible, in your own words, all that Jesus is teaching here.

Turn to the book of 1 John. Concentrate on chapter 4:7-11. How do these two verses reinforce what Jesus has stated in John 13?