

session six

d i s c i p l e s b e c o m e l e a d e r s

FOCUS Jesus' goal in training his first followers as disciples became clear following his death, resurrection and ascension, and the Pentecost events. The disciples had been trained to be the leaders of his church. Their mission was to train and equip others for leadership in the church. This is God's method for reaching the world — disciples as leaders train other leaders who, in turn, carry on the mission.

PRAYER After a quiet time to focus on your hopes and needs, take turns offering words of thanksgiving as you begin. Pray once more for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds so that all will be ready to learn and grow. Pray for wills open to be redirected into living as disciples — as leaders bearing the responsibility and the challenge to lead others.

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- Tell about a time when you were asked to lead. How would you describe that experience? What was the outcome? What did you learn about yourself? About leadership?
- Describe the qualities of a leader you would be willing to follow. What do those qualities mean for us as leaders?
- List some of the dangers to consider when you accept any leadership role. What kind of help can overcome these dangers or barriers?
- Some people say we have a “leadership crisis” in the church today. Agree? Disagree? Why? What might be some solutions?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Acts 6:1-15 aloud.*

1. Even without the physical presence of Jesus, the disciples continued to function as if he were present. They had become leaders and were prepared for this task because of the training Jesus had provided. They were leading by their example even as Jesus had led them by his example. *Share some examples from your reading of the ways in which the disciples continued to do what they had learned from Jesus: preach, teach and heal.*
2. The disciples were forced to handle new problems, like what you do with three thousand new believers. They were forced to solve problems, deal with hostile governments and many complaints from their own community of disciples. They devised a plan to deal with the problem of the distribution of food. *What did the plan show about their priorities?*
2. The disciples sought specific qualities in those who would be leaders. The others accepted the plan and offered a list of candidates. The first disciples prayed and laid hands on those chosen to empower them for this work. *What can we learn from this example about selecting leaders?*
4. These disciples dealt with persecution, adversity, change and an expanding church by equipping and sending others. This same group of disciples sent Paul on the first missionary journey. *What does their example mean for us as we deal with problems? As we seek and train leaders? What outcome can we expect?*



K E Y C O M P O N E N T S O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

God's plan, according to the model we have received from Jesus, is that disciples are trained to lead his church. The call to discipleship is a call to leadership.

1. What has happened in the church? Why haven't we produced servant leaders who are making a difference in the world? George Barna, in his book *The Second Coming of the Church* lists five thought-provoking reasons:

- First, millions of Christians view transformation in Christ as a one-time solution to a 'crisis' rather than a lifelong process. Jesus has become one more quick fix for our problems.
- Second, and perhaps as a consequence, many believers stop "growing in their faith." Instead of measuring our life against God's standards, we compare ourselves to others and take consolation in being a little better than the next person.
- Third, many Christians have developed a distorted understanding of what constitutes purposeful or successful living. When asked to describe the ends they live for, the top items most American Christians reported were good health, a successful career, a comfortable lifestyle, and a functional family. The average Christian assumes that when we are happy, God is happy.
- Fourth, a large majority of Christians contend that the true meaning of our earthly existence is to simply enjoy life and reap as much fulfillment as we can from our daily pursuits. God provides blessings for the purpose of making us happy. Only a few Christians would say that we are blessed so we can be a blessing to others.
- Finally, Christians are not prepared to fight the good fight of faith. We find greater purpose in living by trying to avoid all struggle. We are products of a culture that values achievement and comfort over sacrifice and suffering. When hardships come we seek deliverance rather than look for ways to serve others who are immersed in even more difficult situations (p. 123-124).

What evidence of these conclusions have you seen?

2. One of the images Jesus used in training his disciples was that of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd cares for the sheep and is willing to risk it all for their sake. *What does it mean to you to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd? What does it mean to be called into that kind of servant leadership?*

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3. There are several characteristics of the servant leader that come from the early church. Servant leaders are:

CALLED We are servants first. It is the one who has authority over us that has called us to do this work. The calling is not to position or title, but to put the best interest of another ahead of self.

CARING Disciples listen and understand. The purpose of such listening is not to criticize, judge and condemn. We listen in a way that offers acceptance so that we can get close enough to demonstrate the love of Jesus.

COMPASSIONATE Disciples are willing to put themselves in the place of another person. The goal is to care enough to help them find hope, gain wisdom, and receive a new life-giving vision.

COMPELLING Disciples can translate needs into goals in a way that demonstrates Jesus' authority. Some people will follow a person, but they will not be transformed until they are convinced, persuaded and compelled to embrace a new direction for themselves.

According to these characteristics, what is the difference between the way the church defines leaders and the way the world defines them? Why the difference? What difference do the right kind of leaders make in the church? In the world?

4. Without Spirit-filled and directed leaders (both lay leaders and professional), the church cannot succeed. *Why? Why is leadership so critical? What can we do to find and nurture effective and in-spirited leaders? How can we continue to grow as leaders?*

M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Do or discuss one or more of the following:*

- How do we individually and as a congregation care for our existing leaders? How can we equip and support them more effectively?
- How can we be open to receive new leaders? How can we continue to bring in, train and support new leaders?
- List the opportunities for leadership in your congregation. How can you do a better job of getting the right people into positions of leadership? You might use the "spiritual gifts" inventory as a first step.
- Write an answer to these questions: Am I praying daily for our leaders? Do I see the way that the Spirit is calling me to become a leader? How can I move toward that calling?
- Write a plan for your own growth as a disciple and as a leader in the congregation. What will you do in the areas of prayer, study, worship, witnessing, encouraging, serving and giving as a way to move toward your goal? What will the promises of Jesus and the guidance of the Spirit have to do with your plan? Share your plan with others, if you are willing. Consider ritually offering your plans to God as part of the offering during a public worship service of your congregation.



CLOSING THIS SESSION

Reflect on some of the ways you have been changed or challenged as a result of this study. Offer petitions of thanksgiving for that growth. Pray for wisdom and strength to begin to make changes in the way ministry happens in your congregation so that it can be even more effective in making disciples. Pray for openness in your congregation to receive these ideas and for conviction to work toward that end.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT SESSION

The end of this study simply represents another beginning: an ongoing commitment to grow in faith and faith practice. Covenant to continue together as a small group OR look for ways to become involved in other small groups or studies in your congregation. Review the resources section of this guide to discover the dozens of possibilities for ongoing study and growth.

The only person who has the right to say that he is the person who has left all to follow Christ; such a person knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace.

(The Cost of Discipleship, p. 55)

