

# SESSION 1

## Brand Recognition

In the book of Acts, we see that people in Antioch (one of the Roman Empire’s largest cities) were the first to identify followers of Jesus as “Christians” (11:26).

Later in Acts, when Paul is under arrest and testifying for his defense, 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,” Peter writes, “do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Peter 4:16). The implication is 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 primarily meant to you in the past?

How have you noticed that other people define this word differently than you do?

### VIDEO OVERVIEW

For Session 1 of the Video

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

Church leaders in Jerusalem sent a man named Barnabas to Antioch to observe and help this new church. Barnabas later brought a man named Saul (known later as Paul) there to help him. “For a whole year,” we read in Acts 11:26, “Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” So “Christians” was a label that others gave them.

In the New Testament—specifically in the four Gospels and in Acts—a different term is used more consistently to describe these people who were part of this Jesus movement. It’s the term “disciple.” Notice again Acts 11:26: “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

What is a disciple? It simply means a learner, a pupil, an apprentice, an adherent, or a follower.

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A disciple looks to a certain other person as the authority and the example for everything. A disciple always answers yes to whatever that person asks or requires of him.

That brings us to this uncomfortable question: Are we disciples? Or are we just Christians? If we're disciples of Jesus, then no matter what he asks of us, the answer must be yes.

Jesus gave his disciples the bottom line of what it means to be his disciple. On the night before he was crucified, he told them, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:33–34). That's how he wanted them to characterize their relationships.

He wanted them to love one another in such a way that outsiders looking on would be drawn to say, "Look how they love!" He wanted them to be a community of people defined by unconditional, generous, compassionate love.

Jesus said this was how others would know we're really his followers. Not by how long we pray, how loud we preach, or what we do on Sunday mornings, but how we love one another.

What would it look like in your world to love the people around you the way Jesus loves you? By God's grace, just try it.

Trying it won't mean that your life will be free of problems. After all, Jesus was crucified.

This isn't a means to an end; it is 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 your mind? What have you learned about the meaning of this word according to 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 being a "disciple" mean to you?
5. Why do you think Jesus puts so much emphasis on love as the distinguishing characteristic of his disciples?
6. In general, do you think the followers of Jesus in your community think of themselves as "Christians" or "disciples"? What difference do you see this making?

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### MILEPOSTS

- The word “Christian” can mean anything we want it to because it’s never clearly defined in Scripture. Originally, it was a derogatory term that outsiders used for followers of Jesus.
- The New Testament emphasizes a different word for those who follow Jesus: disciples. It’s a disturbing and challenging term because it’s 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 truly a disciple of Jesus? Or are you settling for just being a Christian? Keep reflecting on the command and calling from Jesus that love be your distinguishing characteristic as his follower. Think about it in regard to each of your most important relationships. What will it look like for love to be your first priority?

### CHANGING YOUR MIND

This session’s key Scripture passage is a reminder of the highest calling and the distinguishing characteristic that Jesus has given all who follow him:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34–35

### PREPARATION FOR SESSION 2

To help you prepare for Session 2, use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your small group meeting.

#### Day One

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.

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### Day Two

Turn to the book of 1 John toward the back of the New Testament. Concentrate today on verses 7 and 8 in chapter 4. How do these two verses reinforce what Jesus stated in John 13:34–35?

### Day Three

Focus today on 1 John 4:9. Again, in what specific ways does this verse reinforce the words of Jesus in John 13:34–35?

### Day Four

Reflect today on 1 John 4:10. As you do, what particular links do you see with the words of Jesus in John 13:34–35?

### Day Five

Concentrate today on 1 John 4:11. Once more, in what specific ways do you see this verse reinforcing the words of Jesus in John 13:34–35?

## Last Session

We can hide behind the word “Christian” because its meaning isn’t specifically taught in the Bible. So “Christians” can pretty much do anything they want and believe anything they want. In the New Testament, however, those who follow Jesus are called something else: disciples. To a very challenging degree for us, the Bible clearly defines this word. Specifically, Jesus calls his disciples to love one another as the critical distinctive in their lives.