



STAGES OF DISCIPLE MAKING
STAGE 4: COME TAKE UP YOUR CROSS
Leadership Group Guide - April 2021

We are continuing our discussion of the article *“The Stages of Disciple Making”* by Bobby Harrington. The goal in our leadership team reading this article is for us all to become better leaders and disciple-makers. This month is Stage 4: “Come Take Up Your Cross.” This is an important stage of the disciple-making process as it focuses on the cost of following Jesus - a willingness to “die to yourself” and “take up your cross.” As disciples-makers, we must present this truth to those who are serious about following Jesus.

4. “Come Take up Your Cross” Phase: Mark 8:27–38; Matthew 16:13–27

The fourth phase is often a make-it or break-it phase. Scholars of the gospel of Mark teach us that when Jesus took his disciples to the district of Caesarea Philippi it was a fundamentally important turning point in Jesus’ ministry. It is also a crucial turning point as Jesus was making disciple makers. Caesarea Philippi is in the most Northern part of Israel; it was a non-Jewish area, away from the crowds. Jesus intentionally engaged his disciples in what, for many of them, was the most fundamental issue in becoming a future disciple maker.

Mark describes this turning point in chapter 8:27–29:

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am...?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”

Two things should be noted: Jesus presses the disciples with a fundamentally important coaching question on his identity and Peter answers him rightly, that he is the Messiah (Christ).

Mark then records the decision point that Jesus wants his disciples to process (8:31–33).

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Jesus explains that, as God’s Messiah, he is going to suffer and be killed. That is not Peter’s concept of the kingdom or of the Messiah. Peter believes in a different kind of Messiah and a different kind of kingdom. Peter’s discovery at this point is vital. Jesus strongly rebukes him, saying that he does not have the right mindset on this matter.

That encounter then leads to Jesus making a fundamental point about disciples and disciple makers (like the Twelve) in the next few verses (Mark 8:34–35).

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. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.

The willingness to die to yourself is the distinguishing issue in the fourth phase.

Jesus kept emphasizing this point to his disciples moving forward (Mark 9:31–32; 10:32–34). James Fleming points out that, in the oral culture of the first century, the stories of the blind men just before Jesus' three-fold confrontations with the disciples on this point (Mark 8:22–26), followed by the healing of another blind man right afterward (Mark 10:46–52) was Mark's way, in the ancient culture of the first century, to point out the blindness of the disciples.

They needed to accept that Jesus would die and, as disciple makers, they had to be willing to die just like him.

This phase is significant because it is about the death of self to the false dreams and human aspirations imposed on God's kingdom.

The narrative in the gospels, especially in Mark, is that from this point forward Jesus is going to Jerusalem where he will die. Initially Peter and the other disciples are blinded to it. They too have to die to their vision of what it meant to be a disciple. They too have to surrender to God's kingdom and die to themselves. Judas will NOT die to his false vision and he betrays Jesus (Mark 14:10–11).

Peter says he will die for Jesus—he said emphatically, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you,” but he does not really understand (14:31). He abandons Jesus, but later has great remorse and returns.

The last supper and Garden of Gethsemane, just before the crucifixion, magnifies this point (John 13:1ff). Jesus serves his disciples and models what it is to forgo one's selfish desires for the kingdom. Jesus tells them that they should become like him.

How do we apply the principles from this phase today?

The focus is death to self.

A person cannot truly become a healthy disciple maker or truly live out the Gospel until he or she dies to themselves and surrenders his or her dreams to God.

Peter did it, but Judas did not.

This is a fundamental change of heart at a deep level that is inspired and nurtured by the Spirit of God. We have seen it lead to great fruit when future disciple makers leave successful careers or give up privileged positions, perks, and dreams because they are in conflict with God's invitation into selfless service. It may not involve those things, but at some level, the willingness to die to self for the kingdom of God is established within a person's inner being and disposition about life in this phase.

When a person is in a disciple maker position and his or her death to self has *not* been established, they will easily use other people or instill in them truths about being a disciple that are more reflections of their sinful mind or worldly aspirations. Once a person has truly surrendered and died to *their* dreams for the sake of God's calling, they are on the path to becoming very effective disciple makers. It is now about God's kingdom, not our kingdoms. It is now about other people, not ourselves.

Key points in the fourth phase:

- Pay attention to the motives of the heart of those you are discipling and pray for them the way Jesus prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31).
- Pray that the Holy Spirit leads future disciple makers through this challenging period and make note of the hardships that they are experiencing; hardships refine and purify our faith (Romans 5:3–5).

- In love and in close relationships, help those you are discipling to work through the death-to-self challenge.
- Pray earnestly and intently for your disciples in this phase, they are on the precipice of making a big difference.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there anyone in your Small Group who is currently stuck in Stage 4? Why do you think they have not been able to “die to themselves” and “pick up their cross”?
2. As their SG leader, what are some ways you can challenge them in truth and grace in this area?
3. If you have but they have not taken this step, is there anything else aside from prayer that you could possibly do? *Leaders, please help one another by sharing your own experiences and giving each other feedback.*

Prayer Points:

1. Pray that those in your Small Group who are currently stuck in Stage 4 would choose to “die to themselves,” “pick up their cross,” and continue to grow as disciples of Christ.
2. Pray that our church members would persevere through their current hardships and trials through the grace of God and that others would come to know Jesus because of their witness and testimony.
3. Pray for continued peace and unity in our state and nation during these unprecedented times.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Fresh Start Class - Every Sunday at 12:30pm starting April 4th. (Main Campus Only)

Salvation, or the decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, is the most important decision we can make in this life. In Fresh Start, we discover how to know God through faith in Jesus and how to begin to have an eternal relationship with God. This class is for both those who are new in their faith and for believers who just transferred to Pearlside. For more information, go to pearlside.org/classes.

Growth Track Class - Every 2nd, 3rd, & 4th Saturday starting April 10th. (Main Campus Only)

Our faith is not designed to be static, rather God desires all believers to grow in their faith. In the Growth Track, we will learn how to follow God through the essential practices of Christianity which include; how to grow in spiritual community, how to read the Bible, and how to pray. Growth Track is a 3 session class. For more information, go to pearlside.org/classes.

Financial Peace University - Sunday, April 18 - June 13 at 3:00pm to 4:30pm (Main Campus)

Take control of your money with Financial Peace University (FPU)! This nine-lesson course uses biblical wisdom and common sense to help you tackle budgeting, pay off debt, and make your money work for you! FPU includes your member workbook and a year of free online resources through Financial Peace Membership. For more information or to register, go to pearlside.org/life-matters.