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Christian

Though discipleship has been a topic of interest to Christians for centuries, for the first followers of Jesus discipleship was so much more than just that. For them, discipleship was the experience of following the Lord Jesus. At its core, discipleship was a relationship, one that was transforming, liberating, and empowering. And, as it was for them, so must it be for us.

A disciple is a person who has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, committed himself or herself to a growing relationship with God, and by the Holy Spirit is integrating the Lordship of Jesus into every area of daily life. Disciples are committed to being responsible members of the church through active and consistent participation in mission, and they are moved by the internal motivation of God's Spirit.

*Christian
discipleship . . .
involves
following, even
imitating,
Jesus.*

Discipleship can be viewed from varying perspectives. First, it can be examined with respect to the historical situation in which the Master and His disciples interacted. Second, it can be judged from the viewpoint of the nature of the Christian life. In order for us to grasp the character and meaning of Christian discipleship, both these approaches must be captured.

The theme *Christian discipleship* implies a discipleship different from others. Though the first century had many disciples—gathering teachers who were revered and whose styles of instruction were venerated—Christian discipleship speaks to a specific mode of discipleship. Because a Christian is an imitator of Jesus, and because a disciple is a *follower*, Christian discipleship is, then, the kind of discipleship that involves following, even imitating, Jesus.

Discipleship also can be viewed from two different levels: (1) that of the first disciples of Jesus and (2) that of His subsequent ones.

When one thinks of discipleship as it relates to Jesus and His followers, several questions arise. What must it have been like to have

Discipleship

Jesus call, teach, and train you for discipleship? What must it have been like to watch Jesus in action and to learn from His example?

On the other hand, and in some ways more relevant to us now, what does discipleship entail for Christians living so many centuries removed from the time when Jesus lived and taught? What does discipleship entail for Christ's disciples in the twenty-first century? What does discipleship involve for people who live in a society radically different from where Jesus and His first disciples lived?

In this quarter's Bible study guide, we will look at discipleship as an experience between Jesus and those He called to apprenticeship with Him. We will explore what is involved in discipleship and who is truly a *disciple*. We will also examine the process of becoming a disciple and the major characteristics of discipleship. We will compare Jesus' discipleship with that of other disciple-gathering teachers. Additionally, we will look at such questions as would-be disciples, gender and discipleship, ethnicity and discipleship, instructions for discipleship, and discipleship under pressure. In short, we will consider what we need to be modern-day disciples living in what we believe is close to the second coming of Jesus.

Betram Melbourne, our principal contributor, is a native of Jamaica. At the time of this writing, he was interim dean of the Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C. He is married and has three grown children.

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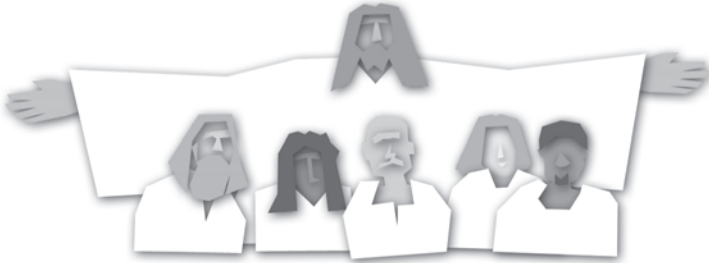
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An Overview of Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:18–22; 10:24, 25; Mark 3:13, 14; 8:34, 35; Luke 14:25, 26.*

Memory Text: “As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people’” (*Matthew 4:18, 19, NRSV*).

Dwight E. Stevenson tells a story from the days of the conquistadors that illustrates an important aspect of discipleship. “When Cortez disembarked his five hundred conquistadors upon the eastern coast of Mexico, he set fire to the ships.”—Charles L. Wallis, ed., *Speaker’s Illustrations for Special Days* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 25. As his warriors watched their means of retreat go up in flames, they knew that they were committing their lives to the conquest of the New World for Spain. They had to be totally dedicated to the mission.

In the same way, those who accept Christ and commit to the task of discipleship are called to burn their ships in the harbor. There is no room for retreat. There is no turning back. The motto of this complete surrender to Christ should be “forward ever, backward never.”

The Week at a Glance: What is discipleship? Who is a disciple? Can one volunteer to be a disciple? What are the requirements of discipleship? What is the essence of discipleship?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 5.

Discipleship—Historical and Personal

In Scripture, the concept of discipleship appears in two ways, historical and personal.

In the historical Christian context it refers to the interaction *between* Christ, the Master Teacher, and His first followers, known as the disciples. At the core, it referred to those who had a close and special affiliation with the Rabbi from Nazareth, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

On the personal level, discipleship refers to the encounter that occurs between Christ, the transformed individual, and the world. It refers also to the challenges that Christian commitment brings and to the resultant life of faith. Thus, discipleship involves not only what a Christian does on behalf of Christ but how Christ is represented in the world.

It is here that the two aspects of discipleship, historical and personal, can intersect. Modern discipleship can benefit from the insights offered by the experience of the historical disciples and the Master.

Outline the concepts of discipleship found in Matthew 4:18–22. What did Jesus ask Peter and Andrew to do? Compare the call extended to James and John with that given to Peter and Andrew. What light does the response of these four disciples shed on our understanding of discipleship? *See also John 1:40–42.* What do these passages teach us, as well?

Read Acts 11:26. What insights does this give to us about the meaning of discipleship?

From what you have seen so far, what is your understanding of discipleship? What personal lessons can you take away from the few texts looked at today?

Who Is a Disciple?

The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, meaning “learner,” “apprentice,” or “adherent.” It depicts a person whose mind is set on a purpose. In the New Testament, it is used mostly of Jesus’ disciples, especially in the Gospels. It refers to “an apprentice or pupil attached to a teacher or movement; one whose allegiance is to the instruction and commitments of the teacher or movement.”—Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1985), p. 222. A disciple, then, is a pupil or learner who is apprenticed to a master or teacher for the purpose of receiving instruction. There can be no disciple without a teacher. The New Testament term *disciple* is used primarily of Jesus’ disciples.

Discipleship involves willingness to follow commands and to make commitments. What does Jesus mean, and what is He calling for, in His statement to the crowds, “‘If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple’” (*Luke 14:25, 26, NASB*)? How are these words applied to us in our daily life?

If Christians are disciples, to whom are modern Christians apprenticed? Who should have the allegiance and commitment of Christians? The church? The doctrines? A charismatic preacher who does a good job of teaching and instructing? Or Jesus? What light does 1 Corinthians 1:10–17, especially verse 12, shed on this matter?

In the New Testament, a disciple was one whom Jesus taught and who was committed to following Him. Is it any different today? Read again Jesus’ words in Luke, as quoted above. How well does that picture fit you? Are you truly a disciple of Christ? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your commitment to the Lord?

How Does One Become a Disciple?

Read Mark 1:19, 20 (see also Matt. 4:18, 19). What do these texts tell us about how people became followers of Jesus?

In most instances in the New Testament, disciples were chosen; that is, they were called by the Lord, and they responded to the call. In other words, one doesn't make oneself a disciple. Instead, one becomes a disciple by responding to a call.

What do the following texts say about this topic?

Mark 2:13, 14

Mark 3:13, 14

Luke 5:8–11

John 1:43

Acts 9:4–6

These texts show that the initiative for discipleship in the historical situation did not rest with an individual. It resided with the Master. Each disciple responded to a call the Lord extended.

Even the response to the call Jesus extended did not wholly reside with the called. This, too, involved a divine initiative. “ ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him’ ” (*John 6:44, NIV*). Discipleship indeed is a work of grace. God provided the means of salvation. He extends the call for us, and He woos us to accept. Can anyone doubt that salvation is all of grace?

The fact that you are even reading these words indicates the work of God in your life. How have you responded to the call of the Master? How do your works reveal the answer?

Requirements of Discipleship

From our study thus far, we can discern a few conditions for discipleship.

First, discipleship in the New Testament began with Jesus' call to people to follow Him. A response from those called was essential. Thus, willingness to follow must have been a requirement of discipleship.

Second, willingness had to be based on something concrete, on something the disciple saw as valuable. Did those called discern something in Jesus they had not previously seen in anyone else? If so, they exercised faith in Him to follow willingly.

The third requirement of discipleship is a natural outgrowth of the first two. Willingness to follow and faith to believe must have led to a positive response to His call to discipleship. Without a positive response there could be no discipleship.

A positive response and willingness to follow are ineffective unless put into active reality through obedience. Jesus invited each person initially called to follow Him, and they did so immediately. This means that they were obedient and that obedience was a requirement for discipleship. No willfully disobedient person can be a successful follower of the Master.

Also, in the case of the disciples, their response to the call implied a total break with the past. They left their jobs, their families, and their possessions to follow Jesus, and they heeded the call to love these things less than they loved the Master. Being a disciple doesn't necessarily mean that we have to do all those things, only that we be willing to, if needed.

What other requirements of discipleship can you find in the following texts? *Matt. 16:24, 25; Mark 8:34, 35; Luke 9:23*. What is the basic message that Jesus is giving to us here? How can you apply this principle in your own life?

The Essence of Discipleship

Implicit in the reality of following the Master was a call to a life of community and fellowship. Jesus and the disciples must have had a close companionship. That such a relationship is at the core of discipleship can be seen from His words in John 15:5, “‘I am the vine; you are the branches’” (*NIV*). The intimate attachment between a vine and a branch that inspired Jesus’ illustration is noteworthy.

In John 15:9 Jesus compares their relationship with that between Him and His Father. He calls on His disciples to abide in His love, further strengthening this idea of our need to be closely attached to Him.

From each of the texts below, what else can we learn about discipleship?

Matt. 10:32, 33

Matt. 22:37–40

John 14:15

What is your understanding of Matthew 10:24, 25 and Luke 6:40? What do they illustrate about discipleship?

If discipleship, as previously seen, involves a clean break with the past, then out of necessity it must inspire a vision of the future. The disciple envisions being with the Master, learning from Him, and becoming like Him. Mark 3:14 says that disciples were called “to be with Him” (*NKJV*). There is no way that a disciple can be with Jesus and not learn from Him and not be inspired to be like Him. Moreover, they would also catch the vision of His kingdom and would desire to be part of it.

Do you sometimes feel discouraged in your walk with the Lord? Go back over the week’s lesson and see what you can find from the texts that can help you draw some encouragement and hope.

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 319, 322, 323, 374, 484, 582, 584, 585, 592–594, 738, 749, 750, 910, 1036, 1037, 1083, 1084; Ellen G. White, “We Have Found the Messiah,” pp. 139–143; “The Call by the Sea,” pp. 244–251; “He Ordained Twelve,” p. 292, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“No mere theory of truth or profession of discipleship will save any soul. We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly. It is by halfheartedness in the Christian life that men become feeble in purpose and changeable in desire.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 50.

“Matthew ‘left all, rose up, and followed Him.’ There was no hesitation, no questioning, no thought of the lucrative business to be exchanged for poverty and hardship. . . . So it was with the disciples previously called.

“When Jesus bade Peter and his companions follow Him, immediately they left their boats and nets. Some of these disciples had friends dependent on them for support; but when they received the Saviour’s invitation, they did not hesitate, and inquire, How shall I live, and sustain my family? They were obedient to the call.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 273.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is the difference between discipleship and church membership? Why is it important for us to know the difference? In what ways can a person be a church member and not be a disciple?
- ❷ Read the second Ellen G. White reference above. At one level, the meaning is clear: We must be wholly devoted to Jesus, no matter the personal cost. At the same time, how is this principle open to abuse? In what ways could this idea be used by someone to evade what are, really, God-given responsibilities? How can we know the difference between being committed and using commitment as an excuse for some other agenda?
- ❸ What does it mean to be committed wholly to the Lord? What are the practical and positive ways commitment and discipleship can be manifested? Also, ask yourself this question: How are the lives of those around me improved and helped by my faithfulness to the Lord?
- ❹ What does it mean to deny self and take up your cross? Though we always tend to think of this command on an individual basis, would this also be words to your local church, as a whole? If so, how so?

Fishing for Souls

by GABRIEL ZANCHIOR

A friend stopped by the bar and dance hall that I operated in Benin, a country in western Africa, and invited me to his home for dinner. After eating I fell asleep and thought I was dreaming when I heard someone speaking beautifully. I opened my eyes and saw my friend and another man praying. The prayer was so beautiful that I knelt beside them.

When the man finished praying, he apologized for waking me. I asked him to teach me to pray as he prayed, and he said, “When you know God personally, praying is easy.” He was a pastor and offered to teach me about God.

As I studied the Bible with the pastor, I realized how little I knew about the Bible. I told my friend, “You have known this, and you didn’t tell me?”

Surprised, he responded, “But you own a bar. How could I know that you would listen to these things?”

As I studied the Bible, I realized that to follow Jesus I would have to give up my bar and dance hall. But these truths were so beautiful, how could I not follow them? I walked away from everything I had invested in the bar and turned my life over to Christ. My wife and I were baptized.

I found work as a fisherman, but fishing was poor in Benin, so I went to neighboring Ghana to work. While there I found the Adventist church and realized that this church was worldwide.

When I returned to Benin, I looked at our little chapel and our handful of members. I realized that the challenge was huge. Voodoo worship and witchcraft permeate life in Benin. People prefer to join a church that allows them to mix their voodoo practices with Christianity rather than stand up for the truth and become a Seventh-day Adventist.

I started evangelizing my town, calling people to Jesus. Ten people joined the Adventist church. But when trouble comes, staying in the church becomes difficult. In our culture funerals include drinking and offering gifts to the gods to assure that the dead person does not haunt family members. But when we Adventists don’t take part in these ceremonies, our families make it very difficult.

I now know that God’s church is a worldwide family. I pray, and I ask you to pray, that God will work powerfully in Benin to convince people of His love and power.

I continue casting God’s net in the devil’s sea, seeking to be a fisher of souls for Christ. Your mission offerings will help the work in my country grow stronger each day.

GABRIEL ZANCHIOR *is a lay evangelist in Benin, West Africa.*

Discipleship Then *and* Now



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Mark 16:20; John 3:21–30; Acts 5:34–39.*

Memory Text: “Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (*Mark 16:20, NIV*).

Discipleship goes back to even before the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Several centuries before His coming into this world in human flesh, there were disciple-gathering teachers who influenced the lives of others with their instructions. This was true with the Greeks, the Jews, the Chinese, and other ancient cultures. Several of these teachers refused to accept the use of the term teacher in reference to themselves or that of *disciple* in reference to their pupils, so close was the bond between them.

This week's lesson explores discipleship in other settings, compares it with Jesus' discipleship, and examines the implications for the disciples of Jesus who live in the twenty-first century.

The Week at a Glance: What was discipleship like among the Greeks and the Jews? How was discipleship different with John the Baptist and with Jesus of Nazareth? What applications for the contemporary task of discipleship can we gain from discipleship in the time of Jesus?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 12.*

Discipleship Among the Greeks

“Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’” (*John 12:20, 21, NRSV*).

The fact that these Greeks went to worship at the festival should tell us something about them already. Also, the verses beforehand reveal that so much was happening that the attitude of the Greeks should not be surprising.

Read the following texts. What insight could they shed upon what was happening here? *Jer. 29:13; John 1:9; 6:44; Acts 10:34, 35.*

Last week we saw that Jesus always chose His own disciples. The above texts might, at first glance, indicate something different. Yet, that is not the case. Even here the Spirit was wooing these Greeks.

In Greek culture, discipleship took many different forms. Though some Greek teachers would initiate the call to discipleship, the tradition was for the students to choose the teacher. The students, not the teacher, initiated the relationship. Also, it was common for the teachers to charge a fee for the students who studied with them.

In this case, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these Greeks were seeking Jesus, to learn from Him. Given that God uses what we know to teach us what we need to know, this is a viable notion. Indeed, Ellen G. White notes that “the Greeks longed to know the truth in regard to His mission.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 622. She also said that Jesus granted their request.

If someone were to come up to you, as these Greeks did to Philip, and say, “We wish to see Jesus,” what would you answer? How would you introduce them to Him?

Discipleship Among the Jews

Pupil-teacher relations are mentioned in the writings of Jewish scholars such as Philo and Josephus. There were also two famed rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, who had rival schools in Jerusalem and who attracted followers. We also are told in Acts that Saul of Tarsus was the pupil of Rabbi Gamaliel, another famed first-century Jewish teacher (*Acts 5:34–39, 22:3*).

Read the above texts. What can we learn about Gamaliel from them?

These teachers were reputed throughout the first century among the Jews. They attracted pupils from the whole world to Jerusalem, the center of theological and juridical knowledge of Judaism, to sit at the feet of these masters. A young Jew who desired to become a rabbi began his education as a pupil at a very early age, perhaps as early as fourteen. He was in personal contact with his teacher, listening to his instructions, imitating his gestures, and learning from him in the classroom and in daily life. In the classroom, he assumed the posture of a learner, sitting at his master's feet. When he mastered the traditional material, he was designated a nonordained scholar. Ordination came later at a prefixed age. At that time, the title rabbi was bestowed upon him, as well as the power to bind or loose for all time the Jews of the entire world.

What we have seen in the preceding paragraphs is consistent with the glimpses of Jewish teacher-pupil relations we get from the New Testament. What light do they shed on the understanding of the following passages? *Matt. 16:19, 18:18*.

Have you known a teacher you have admired, who made a great impact on your life for good? What were the aspects of that teacher that so impressed you? In what ways can you emulate those traits in your own life?

Discipleship With John the Baptist

Read John 3:21–30. Explain what this passage says about John the Baptist in relationship to discipleship. Was he also a disciple-gathering teacher? Because he did not have rabbinical education, what does the title *rabbi* say about the regard his pupils had for him?

It is apparent that some Jews wondered whether John the Baptist was the Messiah. This is implied by the questions of the messengers whom the priests and Levites from Jerusalem sent to John the Baptist (*John 1:19–28*). Their questions are significant, especially when one considers that a two-messiah concept had developed among the Jews during this period between the Old and New Testaments. It anticipated a priestly messiah from the tribe of Levi and a kingly messiah from the tribe of Judah. The fact that priests and Levites were sent is therefore notable since they belonged to the tribe of Levi.

It is possible that the disciples of John saw him as a priestly messiah; after all, he was from the tribe of Levi. This belief could also have motivated the Jerusalem visitors, who inquired of John regarding his mission. Some scholars believe that this was the reason the author of the fourth Gospel recorded so much of what the Baptist said about Jesus. He wanted it to be absolutely clear that John the Baptist saw Jesus, not himself, as the Messiah. Perhaps it is against this background that we must understand John 3:25, 26.

What was the issue that caused some distress among John's disciples? See John 3:21–30. What does their attitude say about them? In contrast, what does John's response tell us about his character? What principle can we learn from John's response that we could apply to our own lives?

Discipleship With Jesus

From the very outset of His public ministry, Jesus had disciples. He appeared on the first-century Jewish scene as a disciple-gathering teacher in the tradition of both Greek and Jewish teachers. There were also points of contact with John the Baptist since John baptized Him in preparation for His mission.

As in both Jewish and Greek traditions, Jesus had disciples who followed Him everywhere, who listened to His teaching, and who imitated Him (*Matt. 5:1, 2; John 1:35–40; 2:1, 2*).

Carefully read Matthew 4:18–20; then (going back over Sunday’s and Monday’s lessons) compare the ways in which one came to be a disciple of Jesus, of the Greek teachers, and of the established rabbis. What things did they have in common? What things were different?

“Until this time none of the disciples had fully united as collaborators with Jesus. They had witnessed many of His miracles, and had listened to His teaching; but they had not entirely forsaken their former employment. The imprisonment of John the Baptist had been to them all a bitter disappointment. If such were to be the outcome of John’s mission, they could have little hope for their Master, with all the religious leaders combined against Him. Under the circumstances it was a relief to them to return for a short time to their fishing. But now Jesus called them to forsake their former life, and unite their interests with His. Peter had accepted the call. Upon reaching the shore, Jesus bade the three other disciples, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left all, and followed Him [Matt. 4:19, 20].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 246–249.

What has Jesus called you to give up in order to follow Him? What has your response to that call been? Might you still be holding on to something that is standing in the way of a full commitment to the Lord?

Contemporary Discipleship

“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (*Mark 16:20, NIV*).

According to the above verse, what was one major characteristic seen in the disciples of Christ? What message is there for us, as well? *See also Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12.*

Beside the fact that the disciples were preaching everywhere, Mark said that the Lord worked with the early disciples after His departure and *confirmed His word* among them by the signs that accompanied it. Are contemporary disciples seeing God’s confirmation of His word among them through signs and miracles? What are some of the signs and miracles we see? How do we define signs and miracles? Should we expect the same kind of signs and miracles in every culture, time, and society?

Are there other ways, besides signs and miracles, for God to *confirm His word* among us? If so, how?

Jesus has no less expectation of His disciples today than He had for the early ones. He requires the same commitment to the task from us. However, He says, “ ‘According to your faith be it unto you’ ” (*Matt. 9:29*). Moreover, He says, “ ‘And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it’ ” (*John 14:13, 14, NIV*).

How involved are you in the work of spreading the gospel? What are your own spiritual gifts, and how can they be used in this work? When was the last time you did anything at all in terms of helping others know the wonderful truths that you have been entrusted with? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 432, 433, 582–585, 932, 1022, 1023; Ellen G. White, “Who Is the Greatest?” p. 432, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“For a time the Baptist’s influence over the nation had been greater than that of its rulers, priests, or princes. If he had announced himself as the Messiah, and raised a revolt against Rome, priests and people would have flocked to his standard. Every consideration that appeals to the ambition of the world’s conquerors Satan had stood ready to urge upon John the Baptist. But with the evidence before him of his power, he had steadfastly refused the splendid bribe. The attention which was fixed upon him he had directed to Another. Now he saw the tide of popularity turning away from himself to the Saviour. Day by day the crowds about him lessened. . . . But the disciples of John looked with jealousy upon the growing popularity of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 178.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is involved in leaving everything behind in order to follow Jesus? What are the different ways such a commitment is made manifest in our lives? In class on Sabbath, be prepared to talk about your own understanding of what this means.
- ❷ What roles should our educational institutions have in helping make disciples? How can our churches and our schools better work together in this important challenge?
- ❸ Even in the time of Jesus there was a rivalry among disciples. Why is something like this so common, even among a work that is, ideally, so exalted, a work that should by its very nature keep us all humble and eager for the success of others? What practical things can we do to keep ourselves from falling into this trap?
- ❹ What about this whole question of signs and wonders and miracles? Do we believe in this? If so, what do we believe about it? What do signs and wonders prove? What do they not prove? Why should we always approach these things with caution, humility, and firm reliance on the Word of God?

Religion Class Discovery

by THOMAS WALTER

Herr Singer teaches religion to fifth- and sixth-grade children in a public school in Germany. One day he saw an ad for the Voice of Hope Bible correspondence course and signed up to take the basic course. Then he asked whether the Bible school offered lessons for children.

The Voice of Hope sent him their children's lessons, and Herr Singer asked permission to use them in his religion class. The Voice of Hope sent lessons for each student, and Herr Singer assigned the lessons to his students, who began completing them. Several students sent questions they had along with their lessons. From the first the teacher, his students, and their parents knew that the materials they studied were sponsored by Seventh-day Adventists.

Herr Singer taught another religion teacher's class when she was ill. When she returned to school her students wanted to continue taking the Bible course and asked Herr Singer to offer a second hour of Bible class so they could continue taking the Bible course. These public school children were willing to stay after school to study the Bible. So, once a week the students met in Herr Singer's class to complete their Bible course.

The other religion teachers at the school learned about Herr Singer's Bible class discovery and asked to use the material in their own religion classes. Herr Singer created a curriculum plan in which he explained how to use the Bible correspondence course to teach religion to children. He sent a copy to the Voice of Hope so that other religion teachers in Germany can use the material if they wish.

When the children completed the basic Bible course, some asked for more Bible material. Herr Singer directed them to the Voice of Hope, where they could study on their own. Six children enrolled in the basic adult course. They completed this course without their teacher's assistance. The course is not easy, and the children began asking their parents for help. When their parents couldn't answer their children's questions, some of them enrolled in the Bible study course in order to help answer their children's questions.

So, one teacher's quest for religious materials has sown seeds of faith in the minds of children and their families in Germany.

Your mission offerings support the Voice of Hope in Germany and around the world.

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Called *to* Discipleship *by* Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:18–22; 5:46; 9:10, 11; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11; 18:10, 11; John 1:35–51.*

Memory Text: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Hebrews 11:1*).

When Garibaldi published that famous proclamation to his soldiers after the storming of Rome, ‘Soldiers! I have nothing to offer you but hunger, thirst, hardship, death. Let all who love their country follow me!’ he knew many a gallant youth would follow him, accepting hunger, and thirst, and death.”—A. Gordon Nasby, ed., *Treasury of the Christian World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 92. Unlike Garibaldi’s, Jesus’ call was not for love of country but for love of God, a call that—though possibly involving hunger, thirst, hardship, and death—also offers the promise of eternal life. Thus, people then and now accept His call to follow and to commit their lives to Him and by so doing make a difference in this world now and for eternity.

This week we will take another look at the earliest calls to discipleship and seek to glean from them lessons for ourselves.

The Week at a Glance: What were the first calls to discipleship like? What role did Scripture have in those calls? What can we learn from the call of Levi Matthew? Despite many differences, what are some of the common elements found in the call to discipleship? What advantages do we have today over the early disciples?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 19.

The First Calls

Read John 1:35–51 and then answer the following questions:

1. How did John the Baptist help set the stage for the call of these first disciples? From what John did, what can we learn for ourselves and for our mission as a people?

2. How central were the Scriptures to the people's willingness to follow Jesus? What message is there for us?

3. What role do we see for the disciples in calling others to follow Jesus? What does that tell us about our own calling?

After Andrew spent a little time with Jesus, he not only believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but he immediately did what the Master expects every disciple to do: Spread the joy of discipleship. Andrew seemed to have understood a vital principle of discipleship: It is neither for private use nor does it belong to a gated community or an exclusive club. Rather, it is an experience that must be shared with others.

From Andrew's response to discipleship, a pattern emerges. Andrew heard John speak and followed Jesus. Next, he told his brother Peter of his experience and brought him to Jesus, and Peter became a follower, as well.

In the same way, we hear the truth about Jesus, make a commitment to follow Him, and then tell others about Jesus. This is repeated day by day, all over the world.

If you were to tell someone about Jesus, what would you say? How deep is your experience with the Lord? What would you say about Jesus that could make someone be interested in following Him?

The First Call in Matthew and Mark

In Matthew 4:18–22 and Mark 1:16–20, we are given other perspectives on this first call. In both examples, those He called dropped their nets and followed Him. What does that mean?

This is not the only time and place this principle is found in the Bible.

Look up the following texts. How do we see the same principle being manifested here, however different the circumstances?

Gen. 12:1 (see also Heb. 11:8)

1 Kings 19:19–21

Phil. 3:8

Heb. 11:24

The point cannot be repeated enough: The Lord demands the whole heart. That which we do not surrender to Him, that which we cling to, refusing to give up, becomes an idol, something we deem more important than the Lord. What is worse, those things we cling to become the hooks the devil uses to wean us away from the Lord completely. That is why we must be willing to forsake anything and everything the Lord asks us to. We cannot, as He said, “serve two masters” (*Matt. 6:24*).

The Call in Luke

Luke 5:1–11 contains Luke’s version of the disciples’ call. As with the other Gospel accounts, it brings in elements not found in other Gospels, while omitting elements found in others. Some claim that the accounts are, therefore, contradictory. Instead, careful scrutiny usually resolves any issues, showing simply that despite the different details or emphasis, the accounts harmonize, especially on the crucial points.

Read Luke 5:1–11. What indications are there that Peter already had some faith in Jesus?

Think about it. They had fished all night, when fishing was the best, and caught nothing. Jesus then comes along and tells them to let the net into the water. *Is He joking? If we did not catch anything all night, how are we going to in the day?* Yet for some reason, Peter listens. Did he already have reasons to trust in Jesus?

What was Peter’s response? How does that response, in many ways, capture the essence of discipleship and the everlasting gospel? *Isa. 53:6, Rom. 5:16–21, 1 John 1:7–9.*

Despite our fallen natures, despite our faults and our weaknesses, despite the fact that we, like Peter, are sinful, God does not abandon us. How natural it would be for any of us, in the presence of the Divine, to say, “Depart from me.” Under the blood of the Cross, we can abide in the presence of God. Under the blood of the Cross, we can be His disciples.

Dwell on what Jesus did for us at Calvary. Dwell on the promises of acceptance, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God because of the Cross. Claim the promises made to you, not because you feel worthy of them (was Peter?) but because God has promised them, and you want to take Him at His Word.

The Call of Levi Matthew

Read Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; and Luke 5:27, 28. Compare the call of Levi Matthew with that of the other early disciples. What are the similarities and the differences between the call of Levi Matthew and the other disciples so far?

Up to this point, those Jesus called to discipleship were apparently devout Jews, as John 1:44, 45 implies. The call to Levi Matthew, however, comes to one on the fringes of society. He was a publican and, as such, was deemed among the worst of society by the Jews.

Read Matthew 5:46; 9:10, 11; Mark 2:16; and Luke 18:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about how people such as Matthew were viewed in that society?

Matthew was the most unlikely candidate for a call to discipleship. First, he was called from the tax collector's booth. Roman writers linked these people with brothel keepers; the rabbis classed them with robbers. They were seen as extortionists (*Luke 3:12, 13*), notoriously dishonest and universally hated, especially since they were Jews who defrauded their countrymen for the enemy and also swindled the government.

How unlikely that one with such a character and a reputation should have been called to discipleship by Jesus! Yet, that is precisely what happened. Christ's call here speaks to the universality of the salvation He brought, the inclusiveness of His kingdom, and His willingness to give all a chance at salvation.

Who are some in your own society that are deemed outcasts, socially and morally unacceptable? What kind of attitude do you have toward those people? What can we learn, from the story of Levi Matthew's call, about not being too quick to pass judgment upon others?

The Calling

Based on what we have looked at this week (and in previous weeks) about the call to discipleship, what special message can we find for ourselves in Hebrews 11:1?

The amazing thing about the response of these disciples to Christ's call was how little they must have known about what was coming, about what they were getting into by leaving everything and following the Master.

Though, as we saw this week, they had some biblical evidence at that time for believing that Jesus was the Messiah (*John 1:45*), a study of the Gospels reveals how much of the work and ministry of Jesus was still unknown to them, especially the most important part of His work: His death on the cross. As we know, right up until the end, and even after, they had grave misconceptions about what was to come.

Read Mark 10:35–40, John 18:10, and Acts 1:6. How do these texts help us grasp just how little they really understood?

Think about the advantages that we, as modern-day disciples, have over those early disciples, especially right at the time they were first called. Sure, they got to witness many incredible miracles; but at the same time they did not know what we know about the work, the mission, and the ultimate triumph of what Christ was to accomplish. And yet, despite this, they moved ahead in faith, the kind of faith revealed in Hebrews 11:1.

Are you weak in faith? Could it be the things you are watching, the things you are thinking about, the things you are devoting your time to? What proactive steps can you take, right now, that will help your faith grow?

Further Study: Read Luke 5:1–11; Ellen G. White, “We Have Found the Messiah,” pp. 132–143; “The Call by the Sea,” pp. 244–252, in *The Desire of Ages; The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 352, 739, 909–911.

“Here were the four partners, in possession of the largest catch of fish they had ever brought to shore. At the moment of their greatest material success they abandoned their business. . . . Even in view of the higher significance of the miracle it must have taken a real measure of faith to leave their chosen occupation for an uncertain livelihood as followers of an itinerant teacher who, up to this time, had apparently had small success. . . . On the part of the disciples there was not the least hesitancy. The decision to dissolve their successful partnership as fishermen for a higher partnership with Jesus as fishers of men was made instantly and intelligently. They needed no time to think things over, no time to provide for the needs of their families. . . . They had launched out into the deep as ordinary fishermen; when they returned to shore they launched out by faith into the ‘deep’ to which Christ now called them, to fish for men.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 739.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In what ways do you need to rearrange your priorities so that you can glorify God more effectively and be more consistent in your discipleship?
- ❷ In reference to Thursday’s lesson, what are the advantages that we today have over the disciples? What are the things that we know about that they did not? Make a list of these things and bring them to class. Discuss what you each find and then ask yourselves: What are we doing with these advantages to help us grow in grace ourselves? How can these advantages help us go out and make disciples?
- ❸ Dwell more on the question regarding the call of Levi Matthew. In class discuss the question of prejudice against certain groups. What about your church as a whole? What groups of people are deemed outcasts in your society? How can you minister to them? So often churches reflect the culture around them, including the prejudices of that culture. How open are you to the Matthews of your own society? What can you do to help your own church overcome this terrible symptom of fallen human nature?

Growing God's Church

by OD

I remember the day well. My cousin Tulga and I were chatting in his home in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. He started talking about Jesus and invited me to visit a Bible study he attended. I decided to go.

I really enjoyed the small group meeting in someone's apartment and attended whenever I could. My new friends were different from other people I knew. I felt safe there; no one was trying to hurt me or make me look bad. I began to come out of my shell.

The Bible texts they read were powerful and seemed directed straight at me. The principles I learned helped me deal with issues in my life. I began reading the Bible on my own, and I could see my life changing.

Tulga told me that Sabbath was the day God had set aside as holy, that humans changed the day of worship to Sunday. I realized he was right, that my church didn't teach the Bible as Adventists did. I eventually started attending the Adventist church. After months of deep Bible study, I joined the Adventist Church.

I love music and play the guitar and the piano. At first I wanted to introduce the livelier music that had drawn me to the Sunday church into the Adventist church. But my new church family helped me realize that some of this music was not appropriate to worship.

I joined a singing group that sang several styles of music—classical, traditional, and some modern. But all the music focused on Jesus. I realized that through our music we can touch people who don't know Jesus yet, and we can share our faith with other Christians.

God gave me musical talent, and I want to use it to build up the young church in Mongolia. I have translated some Christian songs into Mongolian and teach them to new groups.

Recently I helped some Korean young people hold evangelistic meetings in Mongolia. After they left, I was shocked to learn that someone wanted to sponsor me to study theology in Korea. I had finished high school and had planned to attend a university in Mongolia and study mechanical engineering. But I understand that this is God's will, and I am thrilled.

I used to look forward to being older and having authority and power. But now I realize that God is challenging the young people of Mongolia to use their talents for Him while they are young.

Your mission offerings have had a huge impact on growing the church in Mongolia. Thank you for your support.

OD is studying theology in Korea and will return to Mongolia to minister to his people.

Lessons From Would-be Disciples



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 8:19–22, 19:16–26, Mark 10:17–23, Luke 4:16–30, 18:18–30, John 3:1–21.*

Memory Text: “Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (*Luke 9:61, 62, RSV*).

Life comes filled with mysteries at every level. From the workings of subatomic particles, to the very nature of space and time themselves, there is so much we do not even begin to understand.

Probably, though, of all things mysterious and hard to fathom, nothing is more so than the workings of the human heart. People, in an instant, for reasons that seem so unknowable (perhaps even to themselves), make decisions that can impact their lives in a dramatic way, for good or bad, for all eternity. No wonder that Scripture, when talking about the heart, says, “Who can know it?” (*Jer. 17:9*).

This week we will look at some would-be disciples and the decision of their hearts.

The Week at a Glance: What do the Gospels say about would-be disciples? What lessons may we learn from their experiences that can inform our discipleship, strengthen our faith, and deepen our commitment?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 26.*

The Scribe

Read Matthew 8:19, 20 (see also Luke 9:57, 58). What is the point of this story? What message is here for us? What principles can we take from it?

Here is a case of someone who, not specifically called by Jesus, volunteered instead. Notice, too, just how intense his profession was. He would follow the Lord anywhere. It is easy, even for a true follower of the Lord, to make all sorts of pronouncements about being faithful (Luke 22:33); it is not so easy, however, to follow up on them (vs. 55–61).

When was the last time you made some bold promise of faithfulness to God that you later broke? What lesson did you learn from that experience?

What also is interesting about this encounter is that the person who came to Jesus with that profession was a scribe, one of the educated elite in Israel. They were men of “culture, education, and station in life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 365. Few scribes identified with Jesus; they were too upstanding. They followed Him, not to be influenced by His teaching but to entrap Him. Yet, here was a scribe who was touched by Jesus’ teaching to the extent that he volunteered to become a disciple.

Yet, Jesus knew the heart, and His response shows that, perhaps, this scribe’s motives were not pure. He may have wanted to join himself to Jesus in hopes of gaining worldly advantage. Christ’s response, however, quickly should have disabused him of any such notions. In the end, the text does not tell us what the ultimate choice of this scribe was. From what Jesus said, it is not hard to imagine the scribe turning away.

How do we understand what was happening with this scribe and with, for instance, Christ’s words in Mark 10:30? Are we not promised some immediate advantages in following Jesus now? If so, why is it not wrong to want those advantages? Or is it?

An Unnamed Disciple

Read Matthew 8:21, 22. How do you understand what is going on here? Why would Jesus say something like this to a person who first wanted to bury his own father?

Yesterday we viewed a scribe who sought discipleship. Today we encounter another volunteer, but one who is neither named as an individual or identified with a specific group. Examining the narrative, one wonders if Jesus was not unreasonable in His expectations. The man asked to bury his father, and in the Jewish faith it was a sacred duty to ensure a decent burial for a parent. What is going on?

Contrary to popular belief, the young man's father was neither dead nor even at the point of death. It was even possible that he was at the time "enjoying good health, and the time of his death was indefinitely in the future."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 366. If this is so, why did the man answer the way he did? Was it an excuse, one that Jesus saw through? Because the dead were usually buried the same day, had his father actually died, there would not have been a problem, because he could have attended to matters and then returned to discipleship.

This man's response revealed his character. In contrast to the scribe's hastiness and impulsiveness, he was slow, lethargic, lacking in zeal for the work, indecisive, and prone to procrastination. He was in fact delaying his discipleship to the indefinite future because he did not want to make an immediate commitment. If he did not commit right then, he would perhaps never commit. The man was, apparently, saying that he could begin discipleship only when the time was convenient for him. Furthermore, Jesus wanted it known that because of the limited time He had for ministry and training disciples, discipleship required undivided attention and full commitment.

Is the Lord calling you to do something (End a relationship? Give up a habit? Be faithful in tithe? Witness to someone?) that you intend to do, but not now? What are the dangers of delaying?

The Rich Young Ruler

Read Mark 10:17–23 (see also Matt. 19:16–26, Luke 18:18–30). What lessons can we pull from the story of this would-be disciple?

Today's lesson covers a colorful character. He did not come either timidly or under cover. He made a grand entrance. Mark says he ran to Jesus and fell on his knees before Him. While Mark and Matthew do not name the man, Luke says he was a ruler and thus perhaps a member of the honored council of the Jews. Matthew says that he was young. The name, the "rich young ruler," is a composite description derived from all three accounts.

In Jesus' presence, he immediately began a discussion, seeking, it seems, to flatter Jesus, who did not fall for the flattery. Instead, Jesus went right to the heart of his question, pointing the man to the law of God.

Why would Jesus, who knew that salvation could not be attained by works of the law (*Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16*), point him toward the law?

In a certain sense, the answer to that question is found in the response of the young man. Though he kept the law, he sensed that it was not enough. Something was missing, which is why he asked, "What lack I yet?" (*Matt. 19:20*). In other words, though he outwardly, in his actions, seemed a faithful follower of the Lord, something more was needed. Jesus' words, and the man's response to those words, showed that his heart was not truly converted. By pointing him to the commandments, Jesus showed him that true salvation is manifested in an obedience to the law that involves death to self. The man's wealth had become an idol to him, and Jesus showed him that, despite his outward propriety, his treasure was on earth, not in heaven, and he needed a radical change of heart.

You might be keeping the commandments, at least outwardly, but where is your treasure? What reasons do you have for justifying your answer?

Nicodemus

One of the most famous accounts in the New Testament is that of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night and asked the question, “How can these things be?” (*John 3:9*).

Read John 3:1–21. What “things” was Nicodemus asking about?

How interesting that Jesus would be talking to Nicodemus about the workings of the Holy Spirit when, in fact, it was obvious from Nicodemus’s words and actions that he himself was being convicted by the Holy Spirit. For him to come to Jesus, not to try to trap him (as so many of his contemporaries did) but to learn, shows the sincerity of his heart.

What can we learn from Christ’s words about discipleship from what He said to Nicodemus?

Jesus’ response to Nicodemus not only was tailored to his needs but, in John’s Gospel, serves to identify suitable and unsuitable characteristics for discipleship. It says that physical birth and descent from the Jewish nation are insufficient for authentic discipleship. Discipleship presupposes a rebirth that unites one with the heavenly realm and opens one up to the constant working of the Holy Spirit. That Nicodemus misunderstood all this even further revealed the inadequacy of merely being born a Jew or being born into the right family; it also provided an opportunity for further instruction on the nature of discipleship. Although Nicodemus did not make an immediate and open response to discipleship, he at times acted as a secret disciple. At least initially, he was a would-be disciple, because he did not commit then. As we know, that later changed (*John 19:39*).

You might be of right descent; that is, you might be in the right church, with the right doctrines and teaching. Why, though, is that not enough? How can we avoid the danger of thinking that membership in the right church, or even knowledge of true doctrines, is all that we need?

Herd Mentality

Salvation, we know, is personal. We are not saved in bunches; we are not corporately brought into the kingdom of heaven (*see Ezek. 14:20*). In the end, we each will have to answer for our own deeds, not for the deeds of others (*Rom. 14:12*).

Nevertheless, most of us do not live in isolation. We are in contact with other people, and we influence others, just as we are influenced by them. It is just part of human nature, even unfallen human nature (*see Gen. 3:6*), that we influence one another, either for good or for evil. How unfortunate that, unless we are careful, the influences can be negative.

Read Luke 4:16–30. What happened here? Why did the people, as a group, act as they did? What led to the downfall of these would-be disciples?

Though at first they all marveled at His words, once those words became cutting, they turned, en masse, against Him. Imagine if some would-be disciple there, instead of succumbing to anger, submitted to the rebuke humbly. Who knows what his or her influence might have been on the others? Instead, it says that they all in the synagogue became angry, so angry that they tried to kill Him. No doubt each one's anger influenced another, and then another, until the whole synagogue, who had come there to worship the Lord, in a spasm of anger sought to kill Him instead. Had any one of these people encountered Jesus' rebuke on a one-to-one basis, they might have been angry, but most likely they would have walked away. Now, though, feeling the strength of a mob, they acted in a horrible way.

How easily influenced are you by the crowd, by the prejudices and teachings of your own society and culture? What practical steps could you take that could help protect you from the dangers of this herd mentality?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 365, 366, 456–460, 602–605, 926–934; Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” pp. 167–177; “Peace Be Still,” pp. 333–341; “One Thing Thou Lackest,” pp. 518–523, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In this age of diseased piety and perverted principle, those who are converted in life and practice will reveal a healthy and influential spirituality. Those who have a knowledge of the truth as it is revealed in God’s word must now come to the front. My brethren, God requires this of you. Every jot of your influence is now to be used on the right side. All are now to learn how to stand in defense of truth that is worthy of acceptance.”—Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 22.

“But while Nicodemus had not publicly acknowledged Christ, he had in the Sanhedrin council repeatedly thwarted the schemes of the priests to destroy Him. When at last Christ had been lifted up on the cross, Nicodemus remembered the words that He had spoken to him in the night interview on the Mount of Olives, ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up’ (John 3:14); and he saw in Jesus the world’s Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 104.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Has there ever been a time when you got caught up in a herd mentality, when you went along with the crowd, perhaps in a fit of emotion, and did something you later regretted? If so, what have you learned from that experience that could help protect you from doing the same thing again?
- 2 Think more about the point addressed earlier this week regarding the idea that being part of the true church is not enough. What message is there for us as Seventh-day Adventists? How are we in danger of falling into that same trap, that idea that because we believe that we have truth, that is all we need? In class, talk about how we can protect ourselves from that delusion.
- 3 Review the reason that these would-be disciples used to not make a commitment (with, we know for sure, the exception of Nicodemus). What other excuses do people use? How can we as a church help those who are struggling with this momentous decision?
- 4 What’s the difference between being a “believer” and being a disciple?

Crash Course in Faith

by JOHN MAKEUSA

I was a new believer. I boarded a small passenger plane in the Congo to fly to another city. Halfway to our destination in torrential rain, the navigation system developed a problem. Then one engine stopped. The pilot descended to look for a place to land.

I prayed as the pilot struggled to bring the plane down safely. Then the other engine stopped working. Without power we had no control over the plane. I prayed earnestly, “Lord, if You have work for me to do, please save us.”

We crashed onto the savannah and flipped over, tumbling to a stop. My seatbelt broke, and I was knocked unconscious. I awoke lying outside the plane. I had neck and leg injuries and couldn’t walk. We saw no one around and had no idea where to go for help, so we slept fitfully by the plane that night.

The next morning we saw two men paddling a canoe down a nearby river and shouted at them. Because it was a time of war, the men thought we were military and took us to the guerilla army headquarters nearby. These soldiers could have killed us, for we were from “enemy” territory. But God protected us, and the soldiers fed us and bandaged our wounds.

A week later when we were able to walk, soldiers marched us to their commander, 130 miles (200 kilometers) away. When we arrived four days later, the commander questioned us. I told him I was an Adventist Christian, not a soldier. He held us for a month. During this time I shared my faith, and one soldier asked how to become a Christian. I told him all that I knew and prayed with him as he accepted Jesus as his Lord. When we were set free, we walked toward the Tanzanian border to find help.

Soldiers at the border arrested us, thinking we were soldiers. They held us for more than two months. Throughout our ordeal I shared my faith with the pilot and other passengers as well as with our captors. We prayed together, and the other men asked me to pray for them, as well.

When finally we were freed to return home, we had been gone four months. Everyone thought we were dead. What gladness when we arrived! What rejoicing when I testified how God had saved us, not once but four times, and helped me share my faith with strangers. The experience helped me know I can trust God in everything.

Evangelism takes many forms, and your mission offerings make evangelism possible.

JOHN MAKEUSA is a mechanic living in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Gender *and* Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 5:25–34, Luke 1:26–38, 8:1–3, 10:38–42, John 4:4–30.*

Memory Text: “Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word’ ” (*Luke 1:38, NRSV*).

Women were, one way or another, intimately involved in Christ's ministry, even from the start. Mary, His earthly mother, gave birth to the infant Jesus. Of course, only a woman could have done that, but her example of faith and submission remains a powerful one for all who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus. Then, all through the Gospels, we can see the crucial role of women. From Mary the mother of Jesus, from the woman who touched His garment and was healed, to the woman at the well, and others, it is clear that a woman open to the prompting of God's grace could be a follower and disciple of Christ.

In an attempt to gain more insights into what it means to be a disciple, this week we will take a look at how Jesus interacted with some women.

The Week at a Glance: What incredible things was Mary, Jesus' mother, asked to accept on faith? What does the Bible say about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus? What can we learn about discipleship from the story of the woman at the well?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 2.*

“Be It Unto Me”

Read Luke 1:26–38. Try to place yourself in the position of Mary. What can we learn about her character from these verses? What very difficult things was she told to believe?

Even in an ancient society, where the concept of the supernatural was much more readily accepted than it is in many of our modernistic, scientific cultures, the angel’s words to Mary must have stretched her faith to the limits. First, she would be pregnant though still a virgin. Had that ever happened before in the history of the world? If that were not hard enough, her child would be the Son of God. Her question, “How shall this be?” was natural and normal enough. But once the angel pointed her to the miracle of her cousin Elisabeth, who conceived in old age (*Luke 1:5–25*), and then gave her the powerful reassurance, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (*vs. 37*), Mary responded with an affirmation of faith and acceptance.

Read prayerfully and carefully her response to the angel: “Be it unto me, according to thy word” (*vs. 38*). What kind of attitude does this reveal? What kind of model of faith does Mary’s example provide for us?

After centuries of theological discussion on the question of the Incarnation (the coming of Jesus in humanity), the subject remains an incredible mystery. Imagine how much this young woman did not understand about what was happening to her. And yet, even with all she did not know, she surrendered herself in faith to the Lord and wanted His will to be done.

As with Mary, we are asked to believe in things we do not fully understand. Compare your spirit to the spirit of faith Mary represented here. How open are you to trusting God on the things you just do not understand?

Female Followers of Jesus

Luke 8:1–3 describes Jesus’ second Galilean tour. Besides the Twelve original disciples, who else accompanied Jesus on this tour?

Luke is very explicit that women accompanied Jesus on His missionary tours. This should not be surprising, because Luke’s Gospel emphasizes the salvation and the release Jesus brought to the outcasts, the women.

“Luke is the only gospel writer to record many of the details of the early life of Jesus, and often does so from the viewpoint of the women most concerned—Mary, Elisabeth, and Anna. . . . It is as if Luke were saying the gospel of the kingdom of heaven was as much for women as for men, and that their part in its proclamation was equally important.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 769, 770.

Jesus’ act of allowing female disciples was unique. Various religious movements in that time did not include women. Some teachers said that women were emptyheaded, were not to be taught, should not be seen in public with men, and should be confined to the home and domestic arts. Yet, from the earliest pages of the Gospel right up to the end, women, in one way or another, were involved in the life and mission of Jesus.

Read Matthew 27:55, 56 and Mark 15:40, 41. What more do they add about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus?

Having been healed of various maladies, some of these women showed their love and devotion by assisting in His work and providing for His sustenance. Some of them might have been widows, since they were part of the missionary tour and had sustenance to provide for the needs of Jesus and His disciples. Whatever the specifics, the Word of God shows that women played an important role in the earliest days of the church.

Read Galatians 3:28. Looking beyond the immediate context, what should these words tell about how contrary to the principles of Christ prejudice is? Examine your own heart. What attitude and prejudices might you be holding that are contrary to God’s Word?

“If I May Touch His Clothes . . .”

Read Mark 5:25–34, the famous account of the woman healed from a distressing malady. Though the story does not portray the woman as a disciple per se, she displayed the kind of faith so necessary for discipleship.

Notice the interesting contrast between how she approached Jesus and how Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, did (*Mark 5:22, 23*).

What were the differences between their approaches? At the same time, what was the one thing they apparently had in common?

As far as we can tell, this woman had not seen Jesus before. According to the text, it was when she had heard of Him that she came. Someone had witnessed to her, telling her of this Man, and she moved ahead in faith, even without seeing anything for herself. This was her first act of faith (*see also John 20:29, Heb. 11:1*).

No question; according to the texts, the woman was desperate. Levitical law deemed her unclean. People were not to come in physical contact with her. If she had been married, she would not have been allowed intimate relations with her husband; in fact, technically, she would not even have been able to touch her own children. All this for 12 years!

What was the next great act of faith on her part?

However secretly the woman sought to act, Jesus turned it into a public display. She told Him (and everyone listening) what had happened. By giving her own testimony, she did her first act as a disciple. Now that the whole event was known publicly, how much easier it would be for her to tell others about what Jesus had done for her. She had come to Jesus because she had heard about Him; she now could tell others about Him, as well.

Why must we continue to trust in the Lord even when healing, as or when we want it, does not come? If we stop trusting, what have we left?

Troubled by Many Things

In order to be a disciple, we need to know Jesus personally. We must have a close relationship with Him. This can come only by spending time with Him. In our busy lives, with so many important things vying for our time, how easy it is to get caught up in things, even good and important things, and let our relationship with God slip.

Read Luke 10:38–42. How does this episode reveal how even good things can distract us from what is most important? What message for you can be found in the story of these two female “disciples”?

Mary *heard His word*. No one can be a true disciple who does not hear His word. The text said, too, that she sat at His feet. First-century teachers sat on high stools while their students sat at their feet on lower stools or the floor. To sit at one’s feet means to adopt the posture of a disciple or learner. That she sat at Jesus’ feet meant that she was His student (*compare Acts 22:3*).

In contrast was her sister, Martha. The Greek text says that she was “drawn away” by much serving. In one sense, this could be understandable. After all, the Master had come to their house, so it was their responsibility to tend to their guests’ needs. At the same time, her plea that her sister help also echoed customary conventional values and expectations. Mary’s place was in the kitchen—the part of the household designated for women—not in the dining area with the men.

Yet, Jesus did not rebuke Mary; He chided Martha. He named her twice, perhaps showing concern. Martha’s complaints were justified, but Jesus’ rebuke reminds us there are issues more important than other necessary things. We all need to take heed, for sometimes we allow the urgent to crowd out the important or the good to exclude the vital and necessary.

How can you find the proper balance in your own life between things that must be done and spending time at the feet of Jesus? What adjustments might you need to make? At the same time, can one ever be too much like Mary and not enough like Martha? If so, how?

The Woman at the Well

Read John 4:4–30. How did Jesus go about winning the confidence of this woman and, essentially, turning her into a disciple?

The process of winning the woman of Samaria deserves the most careful study on the part of all who set out to win others to Christ.

There were four main stages in this process: (1) The awakening of a desire for something better (*vss. 7–15*); (2) The awakening of a conviction of personal need (*vss. 16–20*); (3) The call for a decision to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (*vss. 21–26*); (4) The stimulus to action appropriate to the decision (*vss. 26–30, 39–42*).

Imagine what must have gone on in the mind of this woman. First, this stranger, a Jew, shows her unexpected kindness. The next thing she knows, He reveals to her some of her deepest and darkest secrets, something that most likely no one but she knew. Her response, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (*vs. 19*), is a confession, not only of her own sins but that Jesus is Someone special. Notice, too, that when the woman sought to change the subject, Jesus did not press her anymore with her sins. Instead, He picked up on her conversation and used it to point to more truth, ultimately leading her back to Himself, this time not as a prophet but as the Messiah. Impressed by Jesus—no doubt mostly by His knowledge of her secrets—the woman believed Him.

Look at how she witnessed to her own people (*vss. 29, 39*). What so impressed her about Jesus? Might there not have been a bit of a confession in her own witness? How effective was this witness?

The Lord changed this woman, apparently no bastion of purity and piety, into a powerful witness for Himself. What lessons can you draw from this story about (1) not judging the hearts of others and (2) forgiveness and grace even for the worst of sinners?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 607, 608, 656, 657, 669, 670, 785, 786, 940–942; Ellen G. White, “Lazarus, Come Forth,” pp. 524–536, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The ‘one thing’ that Martha needed was a calm, devotional spirit, a deeper anxiety for knowledge concerning the future, immortal life, and the graces necessary for spiritual advancement. She needed less anxiety for the things which pass away, and more for those things which endure forever. Jesus would teach His children to seize every opportunity of gaining that knowledge which will make them wise unto salvation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 525.

“One of the characteristics of the Gospel of Luke is its frequent references to Christ’s ministry for the womenfolk of Palestine and the ministry of some of them on His behalf. This was something new, for the role of Jewish women in public life had been a relatively minor one, although in isolated instances, prophets like Elisha had ministered to women and been ministered to by them.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 769.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back over the story of Mary being told about becoming Jesus’ mother. Again, think about what amazing things she was told to believe, things she could not possibly understand. Think about many of the things we Christians are told to believe that we cannot possibly understand. And though we do not understand them, we still have faith and even reasons to believe them. Bring your thoughts to class and, as a class, talk about these things and why we can and should believe them, regardless of what we do not understand. How can we help others who are struggling to believe in things that, in the end, have to be taken on faith?
- 2 At a time when, in most countries, the membership of the church seems to be predominantly female, why should the church not discourage female discipleship?
- 3 Jesus was revolutionary, transforming, liberating, innovative, restorative, sensitive, and supportive. No one was ignored, marginalized, or ostracized in His presence. Contemporary disciples should emulate Him and model His example for all classes, cultures, genders, peoples, and nations. How can you help your local church be a place where all are welcomed and can find a role in service?

Chrislam

by DANIEL PEREZ

Only a few of the teenagers attend the little mission school on our island in southern Philippines. Most are embarrassed because they can't read or write and don't want to be teased by their younger siblings who attend the mission school. So these teenage boys spend their time diving in the coral reefs and catching fish. They keep us supplied with fresh fish every day.

We teachers wanted to reach these young men, but we were not sure how. Finally we decided to try to engage them through sports. We told the boys what we wanted to do, and they helped us clear an area to make a simple basketball court. We found a metal ring to use as the hoop and pooled our money to buy a basketball. Then we taught them to play. They enjoyed the game and soon played quite well. We formed teams to encourage them.

We went swimming with them and invited them to eat at our cottage. Sometimes we worshiped with them in their Mosque. We became friends.

During a group massage session we held for the boys, some of them opened their hearts to us. They talked about problems they faced, and we listened. Little by little we realized that they noticed we don't smoke, don't drink fermented coconut juice, and don't eat shellfish. Their religion forbids these things, but they do them anyway.

One day they expressed their questions to us. "Teacher," one said. "You are different from most Christians we know. You don't smoke or drink alcohol or eat pork as most Christians do. Our elders tell us that smoking and drinking alcohol is bad because it destroys the *Masjid* [temple] of Allah.

"We Muslims worship on Friday, and most Christians worship on Sunday. You Adventists are a bridge between Muslims and Christians, and you worship on Saturday. Thus, you live the life of true Islam. That is why we respect you as you live up to what a true child of Allah should be. Thus, we will call you Chrislams, which means Christians who live as Islam."

We were humbled as we realized that our actions had spoken so clearly what our mouths couldn't say to these sincere and open young sons of Islam. Pray for them as they search for the path to the living God. Pray for the student missionaries who teach these children of Allah to truly live for Him.

Our mission offerings help support Mountain View College, which sends student missionaries throughout southern Philippines.

DANIEL PEREZ is a pseudonym. Because of the sensitive nature of the work in his area, we have chosen to protect his identity.

Ethnicity and Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 15:21–28; Luke 7:1–11; John 1:3; Acts 10:28, 34, 35; 11:25–30.*

Memory Text: “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (*1 Corinthians 9:22, RSV*).

Jim felt called to take the gospel to a foreign country. Upon arrival, he discovered that the people had a test for foreigners to earn the right to stay among them. The foreigner had to swallow, and not regurgitate, a potion. If the person failed the test, he or she had to leave immediately; otherwise, they could be eaten by the tribe. Jim watched the tribe prepare the potion of milk, human saliva, blood, chewed-up herbs, and other herbal concoctions. It looked and smelled sickening. All he could do was pray—and drink. To everyone’s amazement (especially his own), Jim drank it and held it down, earning the right to remain.

Making disciples might require us to do strange things: eat or drink strange mixtures and be all things to all people so we can win some. This is the call and challenge of discipleship, especially as the gospel goes around the world and into cultures sometimes radically different from our own.

The Week at a Glance: What other examples do we have of Jesus ministering to others besides Jews? Who were the God-fearers, and what can we learn from them about discipleship? What can we learn today from the Antioch model of discipleship?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 9.*

Disciples Among the Samaritans

Look up the following texts. What can we learn from them about God's attitude toward all races and people? *John 1:3; Acts 10:28, 34, 35; 17:26–28; Heb. 2:9.*

Scripture is clear: Not only did Christ create all humanity, He died for all humanity as well, regardless of race, nationality, or ethnic origin. The universality of Christ's death, the fact that His death was for every human being, should be more than enough to show us how repugnant prejudice is to God.

It is no wonder, then, that when Jesus was here, He ministered not just to the Jews but to non-Jews, as well. Though Paul is understood to be the *apostle to the Gentiles*, Jesus was already witnessing to them when here in the flesh.

Read Luke 17:11–16 and John 4:39–42. What is going on here? What message should we take away from these texts?

Last week's lesson showed that the woman at the well left her water pots and went to invite the villagers to meet Jesus after He had told her everything she ever did. She even introduced the possibility of His being the Messiah. Scripture says that many of the villagers believed because of the woman's testimony. When they met Jesus, they persuaded Him to stay, presumably to teach them.

The story of the ten lepers (*Luke 17:11–16*) also speaks to Jesus' work for Samaritans. The tenth leper, who returned to give thanks, was a Samaritan. By praising God in a loud voice, he showed his gratefulness for what Jesus had done for him. Jesus told this Samaritan that his faith had made him well. The Greek word used for this healing denotes the idea of being saved. This implies that the Samaritan's faith had saved him not only physically but spiritually. Jesus also called the Samaritan a foreigner. Despite knowing him to be a Samaritan and a foreigner, Jesus did not discriminate against him but rewarded his faith. These encounters show that Jesus did not conform to the prejudices of His time.

It is one thing to say we should not harbor prejudice against anyone; it is another, actually, to be free of these poisonous emotions. What practical steps can you take to help break the bonds of prejudice in your own heart?

The God-Fearers

In the first century, some Gentiles were called God-fearers. They nominally accepted Judaism, made gifts to synagogues, and attended Sabbath services. They did not, however, submit to proselyte baptism or adopt all the rabbinic regulations. One such God-fearer was the centurion of Luke 7:1–11.

Read Luke 7:1–11. From these texts, what can we learn about the faith and character of this Gentile disciple?

For Jesus, the faith of this centurion “was an earnest of the work which the gospel was to accomplish among the Gentiles. With joy He looked forward to the gathering of souls from all nations to His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

Acts 10 mentions another Roman official. Cornelius was a devout God-fearer and a centurion. He was generous to the needy and prayed earnestly to God. God sent an angel to inform him of the acceptance of his gifts and prayers and sent him in search of Peter. Peter went to his home, contrary to Jewish scruples, and was even reprimanded for it. But God told him not to call common or unclean those, like Cornelius, whom He had cleansed.

As Peter preached to Cornelius’s assembled household (*Acts 10:44–46*), the Holy Spirit interrupted him with the Gentile Pentecost, to the amazement of his Jewish companions.

Read Acts 11:1–3. What was the reaction of the Jewish followers of Jesus? What makes that reaction so shocking to us today? What message can we take away from their actions?

Here they were, themselves followers of Jesus, yet not understanding the fullness of the gospel. How careful we should be not to allow any cultural, educational, or social influences contrary to the principles of Christ to hinder us from living to the fullest the profession we claim for ourselves.

The Canaanite

At one point in His ministry, Jesus withdrew to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. He had to, in a sense, get out of town because things were getting tense with the leaders. In this Gentile territory He entered a house but did not want anyone to know it (*Mark 7:24*). Yet, a Canaanite woman soon found Him.

Read Matthew 15:21–28 and answer the following questions:

1. Why did the woman call Jesus by a Messianic name, “Son of David”? What did that imply concerning her knowledge of Jesus?

2. How did His disciples react to her, and why was that typical of them?

3. What kind of appeal did she make? How helpless is she?

4. What things happened that should have discouraged her but did not?

Despite coming from a *despised* nation that had a long history of enmity with Israel, despite being ignored at first by Jesus, despite the attitude of the disciples, even despite Christ’s own words to her at first, she knew that Jesus was her only hope. Perhaps it was a tenacity born out of desperation. Who knows? But in the end, we are all just as dependent upon Christ, whether we acknowledge it or not.

Jesus also has a powerful lesson for His own disciples. Christ’s purpose was to teach them about the need to work for non-Jews, and this He did by acting out the contrast between the usual attitudes and His own. These Twelve had a lot to learn about what it meant to be disciples.

Look again at this woman. What can we learn from her attitudes, actions, words, and faith that can make us better disciples?

Philip and the Ethiopian Official

One of the most fascinating stories about discipleship is found in Acts 8:26–40. It is the story of Philip and the eunuch.

Read the whole story (*Acts 8:26–40*) and answer the following questions:

1. What indications show us that this man already had some knowledge of truth and was a seeker after truth?

2. What role did the Scriptures play in his becoming a disciple?

3. What can we learn about discipleship from the role of Philip in this story? What characteristics did Philip show that made him such an effective witness for the Lord?

In this story, providence played a powerful role, did it not? After obeying the angel, Philip met the eunuch on the road. Interesting, too, that Philip was to go from Jerusalem to Gaza (What symbolism do you see there?). The Ethiopian was, apparently, another God-fearer. He also just happened to be reading the Bible, and not only the Scripture but Isaiah, and not only Isaiah but the greatest Messianic prophecy in all the Bible, chapter 53. This chapter, of course, depicts Christ's substitutionary death for us. Then, after Philip explained to him the meaning of the Scripture, they came to a certain water, and the eunuch wanted to be baptized. Everything fell right into place.

Read Acts 8:39. The eunuch went on his way *rejoicing*, surely about His newfound discovery of Jesus' dying for His sins. We say that faith is not feeling and that we need to maintain faith even when we feel bad. At the same time, why should we, as disciples who have been forgiven our sins through the death of Jesus, always have a place in our heart for rejoicing, regardless of our immediate circumstances?

The Antioch Church

The persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen and the pre-conversion activities of Saul of Tarsus took the gospel to many lands. Among the places it went was Syrian Antioch, where the first organized presentation of the gospel for Gentiles occurred. Luke says that the Lord was with this initiative and that “a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (*Acts 11:21, NIV*). So phenomenal was the growth that the Jerusalem leaders sent Barnabas to assist them.

Upon his arrival, Barnabas secured the help of Saul of Tarsus for this discipleship mission. This had a positive effect on the church. It not only caused the church to grow but also gave it a sense of social concern, stewardship, and mission.

Read Acts 11:25–30. What were the issues? How did the church respond? What lessons can we take away from this account for our mission today?

Notice, too, that when Paul and Barnabas got to Antioch, they taught much people for a year. What should that tell us about the importance of teaching in the question of discipleship?

Acts 13:1–3 reveals more about the makeup of the early church. We know that Barnabas was a Cypriot Jew; Saul, of course, came from Tarsus, another city that was not part of Israel proper. Manaen was either a good friend or foster-brother of Herod Antipas. Simeon was called *Niger*, the Latin word for “black.” Lucius hailed from Cyrene in North Africa. This means that the leadership of the church was ethnically diverse, with some of the leaders not being Jews at all.

These leaders took their discipleship seriously. They worshiped the Lord with fasting and prayer. It was to this church, one that took discipleship seriously, that the Spirit revealed God’s will for missions. Saul and Barnabas were commissioned and consecrated to take the gospel to the ends of the earth in fulfillment of Acts 1:8.

Thus, we see in these texts mission, teaching, consecration, and dedication of both Jew and Gentile, as the cornerstones of discipleship.

The needs of others present the church with great opportunities for service and witness. No doubt there are a great many needs around you. How well have you taken advantage of these needs to serve others and to witness to them about Jesus?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 626, 627, 1021–1025; Ellen G. White, “The Centurion,” pp. 315–318; “Barriers Broken Down,” pp. 399–403; “In the Outer Court,” pp. 621–623, in *The Desire of Ages*; John 12:20–33, Acts 9:1–31, 22:1–21, 26:2–18.

“He [the Centurion] had not seen the Saviour, but the reports he heard had inspired him with faith. Notwithstanding the formalism of the Jews, this Roman was convinced that their religion was superior to his own. Already he had broken through the barriers of national prejudice and hatred that separated the conquerors from the conquered people. He had manifested respect for the service of God, and had shown kindness to the Jews as His worshipers. In the teaching of Christ, as it had been reported to him, he found that which met the need of the soul. All that was spiritual within him responded to the Saviour’s words.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 315.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look more closely at the Antioch model. What things could your local church learn from this model that could make it a more effective witness for Christ?
- 2 As a church, the Adventists are very good at getting people to join, as our growing numbers of baptisms prove. We are, though, struggling with the question of discipleship, the question of what to do with these people after we baptize them. As we know, far too many who join soon leave. What are your own thoughts on this problem? What has been your experience with being discipled after you were baptized and joined the church? What do you wish might have been done differently with you? What do you think your local church could do, must do, to disciple new members better? Be prepared to talk about this issue in your Sabbath School class.
- 3 The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53. Go over the chapter and review what it tells us about the death of Jesus on our behalf. What does the text tell us that Jesus did for us? What hope does it offer? Why is it so important to keep His death for us at the forefront of all our witnessing? Why is it so important that we keep the Cross at the front and center of all our discipling, as well?

Are You Sure?

by HOMER TRECARTIN

Raquel's parents are church planters for their denomination in Brazil. Their first church plant has 10,000 members, and their second numbered 2,000 when Raquel moved to the United States to study.

Raquel missed home and yearned to hear her native Portuguese. She met a Brazilian Adventist couple who befriended her and invited her to church. She went once, but she loved her own church.

A year later the Adventist couple told Raquel that they were planting a new church and invited her to visit. Raquel went and felt drawn to this group. She began studying the Bible and shared what she was learning with her parents.

Raquel's worried mother pleaded, "Those Adventists are a cult. They will brainwash you." Raquel explained that no one was brainwashing her, she was just studying the Bible. But her mother worried even more.

Then her brother came to visit. Raquel knew that her parents had sent him to "straighten her out," but she was glad to have family nearby. David insisted that they attend their family church on Sunday, and Raquel agreed—provided David attended the Adventist church with her on Sabbath. David thought he would see how this cult was misleading her.

Three months later David and Raquel were still attending the Adventist church on Sabbath and their family's church on Sunday. David studied the Bible, too, trying to prove Raquel wrong. When Raquel decided to be baptized, David asked her, "Are you sure you want to do this? You know what it is going to do to Mother and Father?"

"Yes, David," Raquel replied. "It will break their hearts, but I have to follow Jesus."

She noticed tears on David's cheeks. Then David said, "Raquel, I want to be baptized with you."

When they told their parents the news, their mother cried. But their father said simply, "Be faithful to what you believe God wants you to do."

Raquel's parents came to the United States for her wedding. They visited the Adventist church with their children. It seemed strange to them, but they saw the deep love Raquel and David have for Jesus. They still attend the church they planted in Brazil, but they are studying the things Raquel and David are sharing with them.

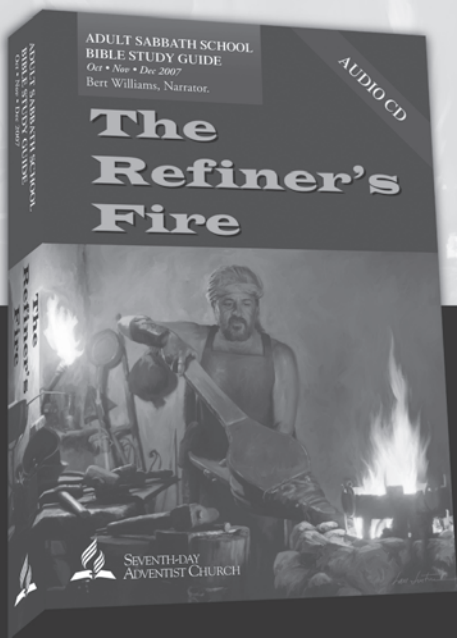
Your mission offerings help plant new churches such as the one Raquel and David attend.

HOMER TRECARTIN is special projects coordinator for the Office of Adventist Mission in the General Conference.

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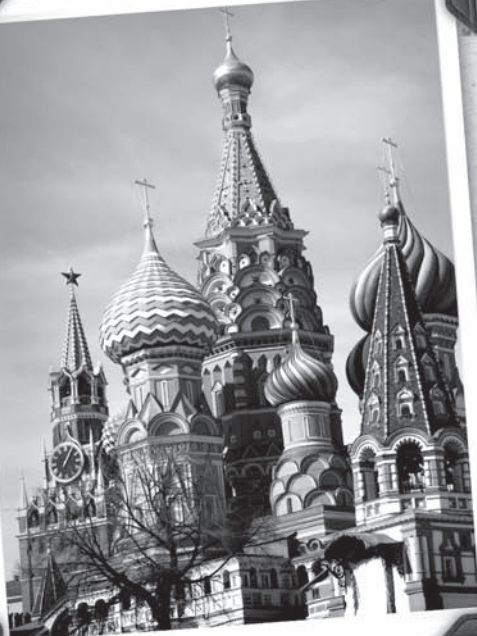
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Houses of Worship

I traveled through eleven time zones in Russia, Moldova, and Belarus, worshipping with fellow believers in simple house churches, unfinished buildings, and in a dark basement hall. For now, these are the only places many church members can afford. Believers would love to have a traditional house of worship, but it will take years to raise the money needed to complete their church building projects.

We can help our friends in the former Soviet Union to reach out for Christ by providing the means to finish their church building projects. In some places, they are anxiously waiting for funds so that they can start building a new church in their area. How wonderful it would be for them to have a real place of worship to welcome their new believers!

This Thirteenth Sabbath I'm going to give a special offering to help my new friends who are trying to finish God's work without the funds they need. For me it's personal.

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Preparation for Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matthew 5–7, 10:1, 10:5–11:1, Mark 3:1–19, Luke 6:12–16.*

Memory Text: “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (*Matthew 5:14–16, NRSV*).

A disciple is a learner/follower of Jesus Christ who constantly seeks to become like the Master. Just as Jesus trained and sent out His disciples, every local church must inaugurate an effective program for the facilitating, encouraging, and developing of disciples. After all, what good does it do us if the folk we baptize soon leave? We are not being faithful to our Divine commission, because Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (*Matt. 28:19*); yet, the word translated “teach” comes from the Greek word that also means “to make a disciple.” (Indeed, numerous versions translate it in that manner.)

This week we will look at preparation for discipleship.

The Week at a Glance: How did Jesus prepare His disciples? What principles can we learn for ourselves regarding discipleship from what He said to them before sending them out? What can we learn from the Sermon on the Mount that is crucial for discipleship? What kind of opposition should disciples of Christ expect?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 16.*

The Appointing of the Apostles

Mark 3 begins with Jesus entering a synagogue and healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, one of His famous Sabbath healings. A great irony is found in these texts (*Mark 3:1–12*): The rulers sought how they might kill Him, while great multitudes of people flocked after Him. One group feared His power; another coveted to be blessed and benefited by it.

Read Mark 3:13–18. What was happening here? See also Luke 6:12–16.

From both accounts, it seems that at some point Jesus got away from the great multitude that followed Him, taking with Him a select group of disciples. From among this group of disciples, He then picked out twelve to do the work of apostles.

For this task, Jesus chose the ones He wanted. This implies, as we have seen, that the initiative resides with Him. He extends the call; we respond. This means that we must be available for service, in whatever capacity we are called to serve in.

How do disciples and apostles differ? Disciples were learners. They followed a master to study with that master. The term *apostle* comes from two Greek words, *apo* and *stello*, implying “to send from.” An apostle was an ambassador or emissary sent to represent a master or a kingdom. While both a disciple and an apostle are students, an apostle received additional training to be sent forth as a representative of the master or organization.

Jesus appointed the Twelve so that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach. Matthew says that, He “gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” (*Matt. 10:1, NIV*). It appears He chose them to provide trained workers to assist in caring for the large throngs that flocked wherever He went (adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 322).

How content are you with the work that you are doing for the Lord? Should you be doing more? Could you be doing more? What is holding you back? In most cases, is it not your own pride and selfishness?

The Sermon on the Mount

Many see the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) as Jesus' inaugural address, in which He outlined the ethics of His kingdom. It is also, in many ways, a manifesto of discipleship, for it holds the keys to being a faithful disciple of Christ.

Read Matthew 5:1. What was the background of the sermon? To whom did He immediately give it?

Who knows how many books have been written expounding upon this sermon? For our purposes, we want to look at what things in it are especially pertinent to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Read Matthew 5:13–16. What is the message there for us, as disciples of Christ? Why are these words particularly important to us as Adventists, given our understanding of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12?

Read Matthew 6:5–13. What important lesson is Jesus giving us here for discipleship?

Read Matthew 6:19–21. Why are these words, in many ways, the essence of what true discipleship is about? Ask yourself, "Where is my treasure [That is, where is my heart?], in heaven or on earth?" If you do not like the answer, what can you do to change?

The Sermon on the Mount, Continued

As said in a previous lesson, one of the greatest struggles we face as a church is retaining new members, keeping them in the flock after we baptize them. All this is linked with the theme of discipleship, the theme of teaching people what it means to be a follower of Christ, a citizen in His new kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount is filled with illustrations and teachings that all disciples of Christ must learn to follow. As we continue studying the sermon, ask yourself, “How can I apply these teachings in my own life? Also, how can our church better teach these things to new members, to make them better disciples of Christ?”

Read Matthew 7:1–5. What important lesson, and warning, is given there that is crucial for all disciples of Christ to learn? What does it mean not to judge?

Read Matthew 7:15–20. What message is Jesus giving to His disciples here? As you read these texts, ask yourself, “What kind of fruit am I, myself, bearing?”

It is one thing to profess being a follower, a student, or a disciple of Christ; it is another to be one. As we seek to make disciples, or to be good disciples ourselves, we must not forget the clear words of Jesus in the following texts.

Read Matthew 7:24–27. Why is it important to understand what Jesus is saying here? What issues are, literally, at stake here? How do we understand these words with the other Bible promises of salvation being by faith and not by works?

Instructions for a Missionary Tour

Jesus' promise that His disciples would be fishers of men (*Matt. 4:19*) was not immediately fulfilled. At first they observed His activities. While ministering in Galilee "preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness," He saw the crowds and had compassion on them, "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (*Matt. 9:35, 36, NIV*). He commented to His disciples, " 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few' " and invited them to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers (*vs. 37, NIV*).

Read Jesus' words to the Twelve (*Matt. 10:1, Matt 10:5–11:1*). What principles are found in these words that would apply to us today in our work of seeking to make disciples?

There is a lot that Christ's modern-day disciples could learn from these texts. One thing, however, that should come through clearly is that witnessing for Christ is not going to be easy. There is going to be opposition, turmoil, and even, in some cases, persecution. Thus, we should not be surprised when these things come. What should concern us is when they do not.

Read again the texts for today. What kind of opposition, turmoil, and suffering should we expect? In what ways have you experienced in your own life some of what Jesus said here almost two thousand years ago?

Jesus did not promise His disciples an easy time of it. The history of the church proves just how accurate His words were. Yet, at the same time, even amid these warnings, the Lord gives these men wonderful words of encouragement and hope. Read those words, those promises, and claim them for yourself. What can you take from them that you need in particular for yourself right now?

Mission of the Seventy

Luke alone mentions that Jesus appointed seventy disciples, whom He sent on a missionary tour (*Luke 10:1–23*; see also *Exod. 24:1, 9*). In many ways, His instructions were similar to what He gave to the Twelve. After instructing them, Jesus sent them two by two to the towns and places He was about to go. It appears that their mission was preparatory to Jesus' own. In a sense, they were to prepare the way for people to accept Jesus when He came. How does that fit in with what we are to do today in helping prepare people to meet Jesus?

What was the advantage of sending them two by two? What can we take from that for ourselves today?

Luke 10:17 says the Seventy returned from their mission with joy because “the devils are subject unto us through thy name.” No doubt, they must have been thrilled at the power given them through Jesus, and they acknowledge that it is His power. Jesus, though, while acknowledging the power given them, tells them to rejoice about the thing that really matters.

Read Luke 10:20. Why did Jesus say this? What message is there for us in these words, as well?

Doing great deeds in the name of Jesus is no guarantee of salvation (*Matt. 7:22, 23*), as some will one day find out. Spiritual position, church authority, and even great success at winning souls are not the things that really matter. What really matters is having our names written in heaven, names that are not blotted out (*Rev. 3:5*), because a name written in heaven means eternal life through Jesus.

We can be so busy working for others that we neglect our own spiritual life and health. How can you avoid falling into that subtle trap? At the same time, how does working for the salvation of others strengthen your own walk with Jesus?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 322–326, 746–750; Ellen G. White, “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 312–314; “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Teacher Sent from God,” pp. 79, 80, in *Education*; Mark 6:6–13.

“In that brief verse [Matthew 5:1] there are three clues to the real significance of the Sermon on the Mount. (i) Jesus began to teach *when he had sat down*. When a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially he sat to teach. . . . So, then, the very intimation that Jesus sat down to teach his disciples is the indication that this teaching is central and official. (ii) Matthew goes on to say that *when he had opened His mouth*, he taught them. . . . In Greek the phrase has a double significance. (a) In Greek it is used of a solemn, grave and dignified utterance. . . . (b) It is used of a person’s utterance when he is really opening his heart and fully pouring out his mind. It is used of intimate teaching with no barriers between. . . . (iii) . . . Now the point is that in the Greek of this sentence, which we are studying, the verb *taught* is not an *aorist* [tense], but an *imperfect* and therefore it describes repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: ‘This is what he used to teach them.’ Matthew has said as plainly as Greek will say it that the Sermon on the Mount is not one sermon of Jesus, given at one particular time and on one particular occasion; it is the essence of all that Jesus continuously and habitually taught his disciples.”
—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 86, 87.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What kind of discipleship program does your own local church have? What are its strong points? Its weak points? What practical steps can your church make to be stronger in the area of discipleship?
- ❷ When a person joins your local church, what can you do, personally, to help disciple that person along? What specific gifts might you have that can be of help? Also, what about your Sabbath School class itself? What role can and should it have in the discipling process?
- ❸ Discipling takes disciples, those who know what it means to follow Jesus, to learn from Jesus, to be an imitator of Jesus. What did you learn this week from the texts we looked at that, if applied in your life, could make you better prepared to disciple new members?

Hope Meets Hopelessness: Part 1

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

S. S. and Geetha Karikalan lived a comfortable life. They bought rice from farmers and sold it to retailers. Then the government cut out the middlemen in order to regulate the rice industry, and suddenly the Karikalans were out of work.

The family was desperate and talked about committing suicide. One day two Adventist women noticed the sad-looking couple getting off the city bus and asked if something was wrong. One of the women, Sahira, offered to pray for the couple there beside the road. Although S. S. and Geetha were of another religion, they accepted the prayers of these devout women. Sahira prayed that God would help them find work and that they would also find peace and hope in their lives.

After Sahira prayed, the couple admitted that they had thought about suicide, but because of her prayer, they felt peace. Sahira had to hurry to an appointment, but she asked permission to visit S. S. and Geetha. The couple gave her the address of Geetha's parents, where they were staying. Sahira invited the couple to visit their church that Sabbath and promised that they would find that Jesus could meet their needs. She gave them the address.

The couple attended the church that week. Sahira welcomed them warmly and gave them a Bible. The next day she visited them. The couple agreed to Bible studies, and Sahira and the pastor studied with them for several weeks. The couple's 13-year-old son, Santosh, joined them for the studies.

One day the pastor needed medicine for his asthma from Santosh's grandfather. Santosh and his grandfather walked to the pastor's apartment to deliver the medicine. While Grandfather talked with the pastor, Santosh went to the roof on the third floor of the apartment building to play cricket

with the pastor's children.

During the game Santosh stepped back and stretched to catch the ball. Suddenly he lost his balance and fell backward off the roof. "Lord, save me!" he cried as he tumbled toward some high voltage wires.

Continued next week



*The Karikalan family (left).
Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of
Mission and "Inside Stories."*

Experiencing Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 17:1–13; 18:1–4, 24; Mark 8:27–30; John 6:43–58.*

Memory Text: “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (*Mark 8:34*).

All through the Gospels, all through the stories of Jesus as recorded there, we can find material that will help us understand what it means to be a disciple.

As we read, one point should come through again and again: *Discipleship is an experience.* To be a true follower of Christ, we need to have an experience with Jesus. We need to know Jesus; we need to have been changed by Jesus; we need to partake of Jesus and what He offers us.

Head knowledge is not enough; being able to recite Bible texts is not enough; knowing doctrines is not enough. To be a disciple of Christ, you must have had a personal experience with Him, one that has changed and is still changing your life.

This week's lesson will help us better understand what some of these experiences must entail.

The Week at a Glance: What does it mean to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ? What lessons about faith can we learn from the Transfiguration? Why does Jesus tell us we must become as little children? What does it mean to bear our cross for Jesus?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 23.*

The Bread of Life

Read John 6:43–58. What important spiritual lesson is Jesus giving here? Why is what Jesus says here so important for all would-be disciples? Why are the truths here so important for those who seek to disciple others?

It is no coincidence that Jesus expressed these words not long after the miracle of feeding the five thousand (*John 6:1–14*). The response of the people, however, showed that their hearts were still set on worldly things, that they saw Jesus as a worldly king, one who could meet their temporal needs. That is not why Jesus came; that was not His primary purpose.

What did the texts for today tell us the purpose of Jesus' coming was? See also *John 6:26, 27*.

“To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

What has been your own experience in eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus? How do you do this, and what changes has this brought to your life? Be prepared to talk about your answer in class.

Children and Discipleship

In Matthew 18:1, the disciples came to Jesus, wondering who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Why would they be asking such a question? Parallel accounts show that the disciples were, in fact, fighting among themselves over which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of God (*Mark 9:33, 34; Luke 9:46–48*). This not only showed insensitivity but demonstrated the disciples' poor understanding of the principles of humility and love, key elements of Jesus' kingdom.

How did Jesus answer them? *Matt. 18:1–4*. **What is it about children that make them such good examples of discipleship?**

Think about the importance of what Jesus is saying. Unless we are converted, unless we become as little children, we shall not enter His kingdom. In other words, we shall be lost!

There are a number of ways to look at what Jesus said. Perhaps the key word in these texts is *humble*. As disciples, we must be humble, like children. We must realize our total need and dependency on God our Father, just as children realize their need of their own parents. Children cannot survive on their own; we cannot survive without God. And it is so crucial that we recognize our need. Sin began on earth with Adam and Eve thinking that they could do things their own way, apart from God.

Children often believe, even without full understanding, what we tell them. In the same way, how often must we learn to believe and trust, without full understanding, what the Lord tells us? If we have to have everything about Jesus and salvation explained to us fully before we will believe, we will never be saved, because we will never believe. We must have the conversion that Jesus talked about, and conversion involves becoming like children, believing in what we do not fully understand. Plus, if we fully understood, then where would be the role of faith?

The Transfiguration and Failure

One of the most amazing experiences recorded in the Gospels is what is called the Transfiguration, in which God manifested His presence in a remarkable way before the eyes of some of Christ's disciples.

Read Matthew 17:1–13. What three specific things happened that should have done much to strengthen the faith of the disciples?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Jesus never calls us to discipleship, to being a follower, without giving us reasons to believe. Not everything, of course, is answered, but we are given enough reasons to have faith, enough reasons to believe even in what we do not fully understand. And though we might not witness the kind of things that the three did on the mountain, as disciples of Christ we have been given enough for us to trust in the Lord and in His goodness. What we do with that faith, that gift (*John 1:9*, *Eph. 2:8*), will determine whether it grows, stagnates, or dies away.

The disciples had the great privilege of seeing things that most of us in this world never will. Still, what do the following texts reveal to us about them? *Matt. 26:56, 69–75; Mark 9:30–32; John 20:19*. What lessons can we draw from their experiences?

Sometimes we can get caught up in the attitude, “Oh, if only God would do this for me, then my faith would be stronger, or if God did that for me . . .” What are the dangers of such an attitude for a disciple of Christ? Instead, what positive things can we do to build up and utilize the faith that we already have been given?

The Olivet Discourse

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus gives what has been called the Olivet discourse (because He gave it on the Mount of Olives). The disciples' action in pointing out the magnificence of Herod's temple formed the background to Jesus' words.

What are some of the major signs of the Advent that Jesus gave the disciples in the Olivet discourse?

Matt. 24:4, 5

vss. 9, 10

vss. 11–13

vss. 23–27

vss. 36–44

There are a number of important things about discipleship that we can take from here. Perhaps one of the most important is that, as disciples, we need to be aware of the spiritual dangers out there. We are in the midst of a great controversy, one between good and evil, one in which we will be subject to many deceptions, some so great that if it were possible even the elect would be deceived (*Matt. 24:24*). And, considering the context of Jesus' message, as we near the end of time, we must be even more vigilant regarding these deceptions.

Thus, we must be sure that we, ourselves, are firmly grounded in what we believe and why we believe it, and that as we bring in new members, discipling must include making new members aware of these deceptions.

Of course, the best way always is to know the truth; to be grounded in what is right is the surest way to know what is error. Especially as we near the second coming of Jesus, how crucial that we make an earnest effort to help all members, especially new ones, to be aware of the signs of the times and dangers we can face in these times.

False christs might not necessarily be manifested as someone coming and claiming to be Jesus. What are other ways we can be led astray by anything that usurps the place that Christ alone deserves in our hearts?

Bearing the Cross

In Mark 8:27–30, Jesus asks the disciples about how He is perceived by others. After getting an answer from them, He asks who they think He is. Of them all, Peter is recorded as confessing Jesus as the Christ. Jesus, though, then tells them basically not to tell others. Why would He say that? Wasn't the whole point of everything He did to get the people to know that He was the Christ?

Why do you think Jesus told them what He did? Could there be a lesson here for us, as disciples, about how time and circumstances must be considered before we act? *See also John 4:25–30.*

Notice what follows next in Mark. Jesus' response to Peter should have basically affirmed for them that He was the Messiah. Imagine what must have gone through their minds when He started telling them what would happen to Him (*Mark 8:31*). Notice, too, it is again Peter who responds, the same Peter who just a few verses earlier professed Jesus as the Messiah (*vs. 32*).

Read Jesus' response to Peter (*Mark 8:33–38*). What crucial message is Jesus giving for all who would be His disciples?

Verse 34 brings in an important element. It says that when Jesus called *the people* along with His disciples, He then began to give them these powerful words about what it means to be a follower, a disciple, of Christ. Though at that time there were certain things only a select few were privileged to know, this message here, about death to self, about bearing a cross, about losing everything for the sake of the gospel, was one everyone who wanted to follow Him needed to hear.

Ask yourself this question: When was the last time I bore a cross for Christ? What does your answer tell you about the kind of disciple you truly are? What changes might you need to make, and how can you make them?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 746–750, 973, 974; Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” pp. 383–394; “The Foreshadowing of the Cross,” pp. 410–418; “He Was Transfigured,” pp. 419–425; “Ministry,” pp. 426–431; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 432–442; “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Our Lord has said, ‘Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. . . . For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.’ John 6:53-55. This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss what it means to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus.
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that we need to be like children. What other traits do we find in children that make them such good examples? How can we be more childlike in our faith? At the same time, in what ways can we take the child analogy too far?
- 3 The lesson this week talked about various deceptions that we will have to face as disciples of Christ. What are some of these deceptions that the church is facing in your area of the world? How are they manifested? What kind of guises do they come in? How easily are our members swayed by them? As a church, what can you do to help protect all members from whatever spiritual traps might come their way?
- 4 What are all the reasons we have been given for faith? In other words, why are we believers? What evidence do we have for our faith? Dwell on your reasons for belief and then as a class discuss your responses.
- 5 Summarize what you understand to be the experience of discipleship. What has that experience been for you? What does it encompass? In class, share your experiences.

Hope Meets Hopelessness: Part 2

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Santosh was playing cricket with the pastor's children on the roof of the apartment building when he lost his balance and fell backward off the roof. "Lord, save me!" he cried as he tumbled toward some high voltage wires. The instant he hit the wires the transformer burst, cutting off all current. The wires broke his fall, and he landed on the ground.

He struggled to get up but couldn't. A crowd gathered, wondering aloud that this boy could have fallen three floors, hit the high voltage wires and the hard ground, and survived. "How did you survive that fall?" someone asked.

"I prayed, 'Lord, save me!'" Santosh said.

The pastor rushed to Santosh's side. He took the boy to the hospital, where he needed surgery to set his broken leg. His parents rushed to his bedside.

Family members learned of Santosh's fall and blamed the family's interest in Christianity. But Santosh strongly disagreed. "God saved me from worse injury because I prayed," he told them.

Santosh's parents worried about his injury, his medical bills, and what may have caused the fall, but Santosh encouraged them to trust God in spite of what the family said. During his two-week stay in the hospital, and afterward as he recuperated at home, Santosh shared his love for Jesus with those who visited him.

Santosh has recovered from his injuries. He and his parents have given their lives to Jesus and have thrown out their idols. Santosh's grandparents, who once opposed Christianity, now attend church with Santosh and his parents. He urges them to trust in Jesus.



Santosh is bright and enjoys studying the Bible with several of his relatives. One aunt has been baptized, though she must sneak to church against her husband's will. Two uncles, another aunt, and his other grandmother attend church because of Santosh's testimony, and several other relatives are studying the Bible.

Your mission offerings help families around the world find the Savior.

SANTOSH (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of Mission and "Inside Stories."

Following *the* Master: Discipleship *in* Action



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 8:14, 15; 10:34–37; 28:18–20; Luke 5:17–26.*

Memory Text: “‘For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”
(*Mark 8:35–37, NKJV*).

This week’s lesson calls us to contemplate what is involved in discipleship. We want to look at discipleship in action. God has called us, but each must discern that call and follow its leadings. Thomas Cameron tells of a famous preacher who said he would have loved “to have blown the bellows for Handel, to have picked up the fallen brush for Michelangelo, to have held the spy-glass for Christopher Columbus, or to have carried Shakespeare’s bag. If men count it an honour to do some humble service for the world’s great heroes, what distinction lay in the opportunity of serving the Savior of men?”—A. Gordon Nasby, ed., *Treasury of the Christian World*, p. 327.

The Week at a Glance: What should be our motivation for service as disciples? What kind of opposition should we expect? What promises do we have as we embark on the work of discipleship?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 1.*

Service and Discipleship

Read Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29–31; and Luke 4:38, 39. What can we learn from these accounts about discipleship? In other words, regardless of the particular circumstances, what principles are seen here that should apply to all of us?

Though all three of these accounts record that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, Luke alone says she was *suffering from a high fever*. This detail, some believe, is indicative of Luke's status as a physician, especially because the phrase itself in the Greek language sounds like one of the technical classes the Greeks used to classify a specific fever.

Notice, too, that in all the accounts it is stressed that the disciples told Jesus about her being sick and that they asked for His help. We should assume, of course, that Jesus already knew all about her problem, yet He still let them tell Him, as well as ask for His divine healing. What lesson could we draw from this about our role as disciples? Is this really discipleship or just plain hospitality?

After Peter's mother-in-law was healed, she did not shrink from service. On recovery, she found a houseful of tired and hungry guests who had been concerned for her. Although she could have, she did not claim exhaustion or fatigue from the malady. Rather, she immediately began to wait on them—she began to serve them. The Greek word used is akin to that meaning a “servant,” “minister,” or “deacon.” Inspired by Jesus, she began her service immediately upon recovery.

What has Christ done for you? What has He saved you from? What has been your response? In what ways should the whole Christian life be a response to what Jesus has done for us?

Jesus and the Paralytic

A well-known story is found in Luke 5:17–26, the story of Jesus healing the paralytic. From it we can learn some important lessons about discipleship in action.

Read verse 17. What powerful and important point can be found there? What message of warning should it have for us, as well?

Here they were, leaders, teachers of the law, coming from all over, apparently to hear Jesus. The text says that at the time, the “power of the Lord was present to heal them.” In other words, Jesus was there; the power of God was there; help, healing, and salvation were there. The only problem was that self, sin, and pride got in their way. What a powerful warning to us all.

Meanwhile, in this story, we can see discipleship in action. First, there were those who brought the paralytic to Jesus. Notice how hard they worked. Unable to get past the crowd, they had to resort to other means. Think about how desperate they were for their friend. How easily they could have given up! Notice, too, how Jesus acknowledged their faith. Whether they had personally been healed by Jesus, the texts do not say. What we do know is that their works truly revealed their faith. They acted as disciples in the sense of bringing someone needy to Jesus.

After the paralytic was healed, he left glorifying God. No doubt his body and his words were a powerful tool for witness and discipleship (*see also vs. 26*).

Meanwhile, as all this is going on, the leaders fulminated in darkness over Jesus’ *blasphemies*. They let their religion, faith, and teaching get in the way of a living experience with Jesus. What a lesson to us all!

In what ways can we, even as professed disciples of Christ, let things get in the way of the Lord working in our lives, or even in the lives of others? What are some of the things that we harbor in our hearts that can blind us to the power of God? Most important, how can we get rid of them?

“To Send Fire on the Earth” (*Matt. 10:34–37*, *Luke 12:49–53*)

Christianity is regarded most often in peaceful terms. At Jesus’ birth, the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (*Luke 2:14*). Even more important, Christianity advocates love, not hate, even for our enemies. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (*Matt. 5:9*). How, then, do we understand what Jesus is saying in these verses?

“Jesus here dispels the mistaken opinion that some of the disciples apparently had, that the message they were to bear would result in nothing but harmony. They were not to be surprised, in their house-to-house work . . . , if differences arose as a result of their ministry. . . . When a [person] accepts Christ his closest friends often turn out to be [the] most bitter and relentless enemies. This is often true, not only in heathen lands, but also in Christian lands and among professed Christians who practice a form of religion but know little if anything of its power to transform the life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 379, 380.

From your experience as a Christian, and from what you know of Jesus through other texts, what do you believe Jesus is telling us here, and why are these words so important for discipleship? See also *Matt. 10:24, 25*.

The important point to remember is that following Jesus will cost us big, one way or another. If it does not, then perhaps something is wrong. Maybe we are deceiving ourselves. In the end, we must realize that our witness and life of discipleship, of discipleship in action, can lead to dissension and division among even those to whom we are the closest. It does not always have to be that way, but Jesus wants us to realize that it can and to not be surprised by it when it does.

What has following Christ cost you, at least in terms of relationships with others? What have you learned in your own experience that could help you disciple someone else who is struggling because his or her faith has, as Jesus said it would, brought division into their life?

The Worth of Our Souls

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:35–37, NKJV).

A magazine article told about a special high school where students were doing exceptional work. Their level of academic achievement far exceeded that of most students in the same age bracket anywhere else in the country. These kids, young, ambitious, and bright, seemed destined to go places, to be, by the world’s standards, true success stories. The magazine then quoted one of these young people, who said: “We’re doing all this in order to beat death.”

To beat death? He is going to need more than good grades and a good job to do that.

The fact is that no matter who we are, or what we achieve in this life, sooner or later death comes, sooner or later everything we are ends up in a grave somewhere. And how long do we live, at best? For most of us, not even a hundred years, often not even close. And then it is all gone. What can it mean? What is the purpose of it all, if it all ends in death? What kind of legacy will we leave behind? Thousands of years ago, Solomon mused over these same issues (see *Ecclesiastes 1, 2*), and concluded that this life, in and of itself, with all its toils and troubles, was all *vanity*, from a Hebrew word meaning “breath,” “vapor.”

With this in mind, read over the texts for today, thinking about them in the context of this week’s lesson on discipleship in action. Ask yourself, in light of what Jesus is saying here, “What kind of life should I be living? What does it mean to lose my life for the sake of the gospel? What possibly could be worth my own soul? And what role does my discipling of others play in what Jesus is saying to me?” In other words, what could it cost us here, in this life, to be actively involved in discipleship? What changes do you need to make in order to be truly a disciple of Christ?

“ ‘Go Therefore and Make Disciples’ ”

One of the greatest sections on the work of discipleship, on discipleship in action, is found in Matthew 28:18–20. Read over the verses. Look at all the verbs there: *go, make, baptize, teach* (NKJV). Disciples should be making more disciples. It is as simple as that.

Read through the verses again, focusing on what Jesus said in the beginning, about all authority (or power) being given to Him in heaven and in earth (see Luke 1:32, Acts 10:36, Eph. 1:20, Heb. 1:13). Why are those words so important for all who are involved in the work of making disciples?

Notice, too, what Jesus says is involved in this work. They are to teach *all nations*. No exclusivity here, no ethnic, gender, or national boundaries. The death of Christ was for all humanity, everywhere (Rom. 5:17–19, Heb. 2:9); hence, it only makes sense that the gospel commission would be for all humanity, as well (Rev. 14:6, 7).

Notice carefully that Jesus tells them to teach all nations. Where is His emphasis?

Again, as we can see, discipleship is action. Those who become disciples are those who obey, who do the things that Jesus commanded. With these words, Jesus utterly destroys any notion that salvation is purely an intellectual assent to certain doctrinal truths. Though that is certainly part of what it means to be a disciple, it does not end there. Disciples are those who follow Jesus, and we follow Jesus by obeying Him—and we obey Him, not in order to be saved but because we already are saved, in Him.

Jesus’ promise is that He will be with us until the end of the world. How have you experienced in your own life the reality of that promise? Dwell on the evidences of Christ’s presence with you. Write and/or recite a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for what Jesus has done and is doing in your life.

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 379–381, 746–750; Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 350–358; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 433–436, in *The Desire of Ages*; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Discipleship and the Cross,” pp. 85–104, in *The Cost of Discipleship*; Mark 16:15–20, John 14–17.

“The Saviour bade His disciples not to hope that the world’s enmity to the gospel would be overcome, and that after a time its opposition would cease. He said, ‘I came not to send peace, but a sword.’ This creating of strife is not the effect of the gospel, but the result of opposition to it. Of all persecution the hardest to bear is variance in the home, the estrangement of dearest earthly friends. But Jesus declares, ‘He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.’ ” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 357.

“Jesus sanctioned the binding claims of the fifth commandment and rebuked any attempt to escape the obligations of children toward their parents. . . . Nevertheless, love for one’s parents must never stand in the way of obedience to God in every particular, should the two be in conflict. Love to God and service for Him are to be the supreme rule of life, ‘the first and great commandment’ . . . ; but ‘the second’ table of the Decalogue, which contains the fifth commandment, is ‘like’ the first in nature and importance.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 380.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Do you know of anyone suffering now directly because of their commitment to Jesus? If so, how can you help? What can you as an individual, as a Sabbath School class, or as a church do to bring some relief?
- ❷ Dwell more on the texts for Wednesday’s lesson. What important message is Jesus giving us here? Bring your thoughts to class, and as a class talk about what it means to lose your life for the sake of the gospel. What can you learn from each other’s experiences?
- ❸ This week’s lesson was on discipleship in action. What is going on in your own church in the area of discipleship? What can you as a class do to help the church as a whole take a more active role in this important work? For example, what is being done to help disciple new members?

Wayward Wanderings

by MIKE BROWNHILL

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Cyrus Jacobs hungered after righteousness. The trouble is, like so many others, Cyrus sought it in the wrong places.

Cyrus grew up in Sydney and Brisbane, Australia. This young agnostic thought he had all the answers and loved to debate with Christians. And since most Christians didn’t know the Bible well, he usually won. He experimented with heroin and LSD, which led him to believe he was close to God.

While serving in the Australian army, Cyrus went absent without leave. He was imprisoned and received a dishonorable discharge. Then he met some dubious characters who led him into more trouble, including arson.

In spite of his brushes with the law, God didn’t give up on young Cyrus. The Holy Spirit wooed him throughout the twists and turns of his troubled life. Cyrus decided to embark on a spiritual journey to find himself and God.

He sought enlightenment through Eastern meditation and teachings. But God led him to an old Christian farmer who answered Cyrus’s questions with God’s Word. Cyrus found the Bible miraculously relevant to his life. He gave his heart to Jesus and was baptized in a Protestant church that same day.

While sharing his faith in Jesus one night, a deranged man didn’t like what Cyrus was saying and stabbed him in the stomach, the chest, and the throat. Miraculously, Cyrus survived.

From his personal Bible study, Cyrus became convinced that God valued the Sabbath that He had established in Eden. But he found his fellow church members didn’t share his convictions.

Cyrus experienced God’s hand in his life again and again during several years of adventure and study. While scuba diving in Indonesia, he met his wife, Suminah. They returned to Australia and settled in Queensland.

Here they met Rob and Molly Cock, who were studying the Bible with a local pastor. They invited Cyrus and Suminah to join them. Cyrus responded to a television advertisement and requested a free viewing of The Search video series on biblical truths. In time he was rebaptized as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Suminah soon followed.

God follows searching people relentlessly until they find Him. Our mission offerings support evangelistic outreach around the world.

MIKE BROWNHILL is a pastor in South Queensland Conference, Australia.

Discipleship Under Pressure



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 18, Matt. 26:56, Luke 9:51-56, John 6:1-15, 12:1-6, 18:1-11, 21:15-19.*

Memory Text: "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the flooding of the Jordan?" (*Jeremiah 12:5, NKJV*).

Ever hear of Murphy's law? It is considered by some to be one of the fundamental laws of nature, as pervasive as gravity and electromagnetism. Stated briefly, it reads, "Whatever can go wrong will go wrong."

We have all had moments, even days (or longer), that seem to follow Murphy's law. Sometimes our experiences as disciples seem to follow it, as well. No doubt, we have the promises of God that should help us not to get discouraged, but how easy it is sometimes, even with the promises, to be tempted to give up in despair. Of course, no matter what, we never should.

This week we will look at some disciples and see what we can learn from their bad days.

The Week at a Glance: What warning should we take away from the disciples' bid for political power? What lessons does Judas have for us? What was behind James's and John's willingness to destroy those who rejected Jesus? What can we take away from Peter's rashness and repentance? Why, after having seen so much, did all the disciples forsake Jesus in the hour of His great need?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 8.*

The Power Model

Religious faith can be a very powerful tool, either for good or for evil. The same kind of drive that motivates someone to “lose his life” (*Matt. 16:25*) for Christ’s sake can, in other circumstances, drive others to blow themselves up in the name of God. After all, if you believe that God is calling you to do something, who is going to let any kind of earthly or worldly considerations stand in your way? That is why, for instance, some governments seek to quell religion among the people, because they do not want people having allegiance to a higher authority, and you cannot get any higher than the Divine. On the other hand, governments are not immune from seeking to co-opt the incredible power of religion and using it to their own advantage. The disciple of Christ has to be aware of the various dangers involved with abusing the power of religion.

Read John 6:1–15. What lesson can we learn from this about how the disciple of Christ should view political power?

Though, of course, Jesus’ purpose on earth was not to become an earthly king, it is clear that garnering earthly political power should not be equated with doing the work of discipleship. That God can put people in power, or that He can use people in power, is one thing; it is another to somehow view the amassing of political power in the name of God as the work of God, the work of discipleship. Nothing in the New Testament presents this *power model* of the gospel. Unfortunately, even His closest disciples missed this important point: “The disciples unite with the multitude in declaring the throne of David the rightful inheritance of their Master. It is the modesty of Christ, they say, that causes Him to refuse such honor. . . . They eagerly arrange to carry out their purpose.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 378. Building on the eager expectation and enthusiasm of the multitude, they forcefully attempted to take Jesus and make Him King over the nation (*John 6:14, 15*). This was discipleship their way. In reaction to this move, Jesus dismissed the multitude, sent the disciples to cross the lake, and went into the mountains alone to pray.

What are ways, even on a more personal level, that we can abuse religion and co-opt it for our own selfish ends?

The Greed Model

Someone once said, “If you want to get rich, start a religion.” How unfortunate, but there is a lot of truth to that cynical statement. After all, when dealing with religious faith, we are dealing with some of the most important aspects of human existence. We are dealing with the meaning of life, with the hope of eternity, with the belief that we are forgiven by God for our sins. However much Jesus Himself, by model and example, lived a life of self-denial and poverty, however much He warned us against getting caught up in the things of this world, church history is replete with examples of those who have used the power of religion and religious ideas to gain wealth for themselves, often at the expense of the poor.

Read John 12:1–6 and then answer the following questions:

1. What symbolism is found in the act of Mary? In other words, in what ways does it represent the attitudes of the true disciples of Christ? *See also Matt. 13:46, Phil. 3:8.*

2. What does this story tell us about the importance of the motives of our actions?

3. The texts say that Lazarus, the resurrected Lazarus, was at the table with them. Why does that fact make Judas’s actions even more repugnant, more indicative of how blinded he was by his own sin?

It is with good reason that Paul made the famous statement he did in 1 Timothy 6:10. Judas eventually lost his soul over his love of money. From the start, it seems, he was looking out only for number one; he himself, and the desire to gain things for himself, was woven all through his own discipleship. Of course, the other disciples were not totally selfless either, but with Judas it got the best of him.

How can you be sure that greedy motives are not poisoning your role as a disciple of Christ? More so, if you detect some impure motives, how can you be purged of them?

The Thunder Model

There were at least two pairs of brothers among Jesus' twelve disciples. At their call, Jesus surnamed the pair of James and John *boanerges*, or "sons of thunder" (*Mark 3:17*). Some commentators believe that Jesus gave them this name because of their vehement temperaments and fiery tempers. Therefore, we have chosen to call their approach to discipleship the thunder model.

Read Luke 9:51–56. Look at the reaction of the disciples to the rejection of Jesus. As you read this, try to put yourself in the place of these disciples. What reasons would they have for reacting as they did? In other words, what things did they hear Jesus say, or what other Old Testament examples might they have drawn from, that could have caused them to react as they did? See, for example, *Genesis 6, 7, Matt. 8:12, 13:42, Mark 6:11*.

A number of problems exist with the reaction of the disciples. There is zeal for the Lord, which is good, which all disciples should have. But misdirected zeal, even in a good cause, can produce more harm than good. For instance, James and John used the story of Elijah as their model. The only problem is that they misused it. Elijah brought fire down from heaven to consume sacrifices (*1 Kings 18*), not recalcitrant people (he had them slain another way).

Even worse, of course, was their harsh and judgmental attitude toward sinners. The work of every disciple of Christ should be that of seeking ways to bring sinners to the foot of the Cross, to show them the incredible mercy and grace of God, who in Himself bore the punishment of their sins. Thus, no matter how sinful their lives have been, through Jesus they can have full pardon, full forgiveness, and a new life in Him. That is our work as disciples; we can leave the judging to the Lord.

How judgmental are you toward those whom you deem wayward and wrong? How do we show these people the grace and mercy of God, while at the same time not giving the impression that we condone or approve of their lives and/or beliefs?

The Repentant-Peter Model

Peter is known as that impetuous disciple who always had something to say on everything. Luke 22:33, 34 says he was so sure of himself and his discipleship that he promised to go with Jesus even to prison and death. Of course, not long after, he had to retract those words (*Matt. 26:69–75*).

Read John 18:1–11. What does this tell us about the personality and character of Peter, especially in light of Matthew 26:69–75?

We all know about Peter's failure. It exists as a powerful lesson to all disciples of Christ. We cannot work for the Lord in our own power. How crucial it is that we day by day surrender ourselves to Jesus. He is the Vine, we are the branches; without Him we can do nothing, especially not be faithful disciples. Again, zeal for the Lord and His cause is wonderful, but it must be done under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Read John 21:15–19. What does this teach us about what Jesus can do for those of His disciples who, repenting of their mistakes, do not give up on Christ?

“Here is given a lesson for all Christ's followers. The gospel makes no compromise with evil. It cannot excuse sin. Secret sins are to be confessed in secret to God; but, for open sin, open confession is required. . . . By giving proof of repentance, the disciple, so far as lies in His power, is to remove this reproach. . . . Three times Peter had openly denied his Lord, and three times Jesus drew from him the assurance of his love and loyalty, pressing home that pointed question, like a barbed arrow to his wounded heart. Before the assembled disciples Jesus revealed the depth of Peter's repentance, and showed how thoroughly humbled was the once boasting disciple.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 811, 812.

Notice what Jesus said to Peter in John 21:18, 19. Jesus, basically, was telling Peter that in the end, Peter would end up dying for the Lord he so fervently loved. Peter's words, in the end, came true, but only after he had learned some hard lessons about discipleship.

Have you made boastful promises, only to fail time and again, from fulfilling them? What can you take away from the story of Peter that can help you not to give up?

The Flight Model

“Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled” (*Matt. 26:56*).

The disciples spent three and a half years with Jesus. They had privileges that very few in the world ever had. They saw things few humans ever did. After all, among the world’s billions, how many ever saw Jesus in the flesh? More so, how many ever interacted day after day with Him while He was here in the flesh? These disciples were among the most privileged humans ever to have lived.

Of course, that was part of the problem—they were humans, fallen humans, and thus, no matter what the Lord did for them, the lessons were not easily learned.

Skim through a Gospel, any Gospel. What were the amazing things that Jesus said and did in the sight of His disciples? How much incredible proof did He give them concerning who He was? After going over those incidents, look at the text for today. What fearful message, even warning, can we draw from this for ourselves?

Knowing He would be leaving them, Jesus prepared the disciples for His departure, but they did not listen. Knowing what would happen in Jerusalem, He prepared them for His passion, but they did not listen. They arrived in Jerusalem totally unprepared.

During Jesus’ ministry, the disciples seemed to look at what He did rather than to listen to what He said. His deeds confirmed their Messianic hopes, and that pleased them very much. At the Transfiguration the heavenly Voice called them to listen to Jesus, yet they did not benefit from His instructions about the Passion.

Following the Passover meal, Jesus tried to show His followers what lay ahead, but they would not listen. In the Garden, He tried to get them to pray to gain strength, but they slept.

Meditate on all that Jesus has done for you: the promises, the hope, the gifts given you, the changes made in your life, the evidences for your faith, all through Christ. How can we, by clinging to these things, avoid the mistakes of the disciples?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 208–211, 465, 466, 524–529, 595–597, 635, 636, 775, 776, 962, 963, 2020, 2021; Ellen G. White, “Give Ye Them to Eat,” pp. 364–380; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 437–438; “The Law of the New Kingdom,” pp. 547–551; “A Feast at Simon’s House,” pp. 559–565; “By the Sea Once More,” pp. 809–817, in *The Desire of Ages*; “John the Beloved,” pp. 539–543, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The love of money in the heart of Judas was growing with the exercise of his shrewd abilities. His practical financiering ability, if exercised and enlightened and moulded by the Holy Spirit, would have been of great service to the little church, and by the sanctification of his spirit he would have had a clear insight, a correct discernment to appreciate heavenly things. But worldly policy plans were constantly cherished by Judas. There was no outbreaking sin on his part, but his sharp scheming, the selfish, parsimonious spirit that took possession of him, finally led him to sell his Lord for a small sum of money.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1101.

“Judas was with Christ through the entire period of the Saviour’s public ministry. He had all that Christ could give him. . . . Had he sought to be a blessing, instead of a questioning, criticizing, selfish man, the Lord would have used him to advance His kingdom. But Judas was a speculator. He thought that he could manage the finances of the church, and by his sharpness in business get gain. He was divided in heart. He loved the praise of the world. He refused to give up the world for Christ. He never committed his eternal interests to Christ. . . . Judas was a religious fraud.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1101, 1102.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If disciples are followers, are those who follow their own ideas and programs still disciples? Dwell on that question and your answer.
- ❷ What other models of discipleship under pressure can you think of, and what lessons can we learn from them?
- ❸ While we can find in Peter someone who jumped ahead too fast, only to stumble and fall, what are the dangers of being too cautious? In what ways can we go too far the other way? Think about this and bring some thoughts to class. As you do, think about your local church as a whole. Is your church too ready to jump ahead of the Lord, or does it tend to be too timid to follow the leading of the Lord? What can you do, as a class, to help your church strike the right balance?

Death in the Night

by JAMES APPEL

A cool east wind chilled my tired body. Sarah and I prayed then crawled into bed to sleep. The chirping of thousands of African insects lulled me to sleep.

A soft tap, tapping on the door pulled me awake. “Doctor?” David’s voice stirred my consciousness.

“Yes,” I replied groggily.

“One of the patients has died. The family has arrived with their ox cart to take the body to their village for burial. But I can’t open the combination lock on the gate.”

I became aware of the wails and shrieks of mourning as I pulled aside the mosquito net and grabbed my flashlight.

“I’m coming,” I mumbled as I searched for my clothes. I pushed open the metal door, slipped on my flip flops, and followed David toward the hospital.

“Aaaahh! Ohhh, ohhh, ohhh! Aye yi yi yi yi yi!” The nightmarish sounds wafted across the campus as we approached the gate. I dialed the combination and tugged the lock open. David opened the gate, and two shadowy forms slipped silently past us. Outside a group of women, one with a baby strapped to her back, danced the dance of death, their arms flailing the air. Others sat in a tight bunch accompanying the dancers with chants, wails, and moans of death. A man beat his breast as an agonizing yell tore from his throat. Dogs barked at the nighttime disturbance.

Anger, pity, and sorrow welled up within me. These same people had let their relative lie sick for a week before bringing him to the hospital. They couldn’t afford to pay \$20 for his treatment; yet now they will spend hundreds of dollars to feed relatives and friends who will come for his funeral. People will gather and “weep” to prove their sorrow and to be sure that his spirit doesn’t come back to haunt them.

I am sick of the fear of death, the spirits, and the hauntings that these people endure. It breaks my heart to see the ignorance that holds them captive. I know the One who has promised to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (*Heb. 2:15*).

But fighting against so much superstition and fear and tradition seems so overwhelming.

The two men reappear pulling the ox cart past us. We replace the lock, then I walk back home as the sounds of the funeral procession fade into the dark African night.

“Lord Jesus,” I pray, “what can I do to show them Your way? How can I teach them to trust You with their lives—and their death?”

JAMES APPEL is a missionary doctor serving Béré, Chad.

More Lessons *in* Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 14:22–33; Mark 4:36–41; 6:51, 52; Luke 8:25; 24:37; John 6:19.*

Memory Text: “But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.’” (*Matthew 14:27*).

Jesus selected His disciples so that they could be with Him and could learn from Him. Apparently, they were not as sharp and quick-witted as one would expect. How much different are we? Some of us have been walking with God for several years, and we still do not understand fully what the demands of discipleship are. As in the natural world, so it is in the spiritual. Growth is essential for life. Every day should bring some growth in depth, width, or height. What preparation of soil and nutrients are you making to assure growth and success in discipleship?

This week's lesson will look at more examples from the Word of God that can help us understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

The Week at a Glance: Why were the disciples of Christ often full of fear? What can we learn from Jesus' warnings about the leaven of the Pharisees? How do we respond to those who purposely close their hearts to our witness?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 15.*

Lessons at Sea

By the time of the events in Mark 4, the disciples had already been with Jesus for a while. How much they must have learned at the foot of the Master.

Read Mark 4:36–41. What is so revealing about their words to Him in verse 38? How often do we find ourselves having a similar response in frightful times?

It is so easy for us to do the same thing, to wonder, when tragedy and problems strike, if God cares at all. The irony, of course, is that Jesus was right there the whole time. He was the One who first told them to take the boat across to begin with. This storm did not take Him by surprise, and neither do our trials.

What significance (if any) can be found in the fact that the disciples, not the storm, woke Jesus?

Notice the element of fear in the disciples all through the account. They feared the storm; and then, after the storm was calmed, they seemed to fear Jesus. The manifestation of such power was impressive, of course, but one would have thought by now that, after their time with Christ, they would have known that they had nothing to fear from Him. On the contrary, this power should have been a source of great hope and comfort to them, because by now they should have known the character of the One who possessed all that power. This account shows that these men still had a lot to learn about what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

When was the last time you wondered if the Lord cared about you and your situation, whatever it was? What lessons did you learn from that trial that you could use next time you face a trial or tragedy?

Lessons at Sea (Continued)

If you think about it, the sea is a good place to learn lessons about discipleship. After all, though as humans we are totally dependent upon God for everything (*see Job 12:10, Dan. 5:23, Acts 17:28*), it is not so easy to forget it when you are out on the water, where what is beneath your feet will not hold you up but will swallow you instead. Perhaps that is why the Lord chose to use the sea to teach His disciples a few more lessons about faith, the key element for any successful discipleship.

Following a successful missionary tour (*Mark 6:6–13*), the feeding of the five thousand, and their first encounter on the lake, the disciples finally should have been catching on. The evening after the feeding of the five thousand, another storm overtook them on the lake, this time without Jesus in the boat with them.

Read Matthew 14:22, 33 and Mark 6:45–52. What are the numerous mistakes the disciples made in these two accounts?

Though one account omits the story of Peter walking on the water, one point both make is that those who witnessed what happened were duly impressed. Some openly called Jesus the Son of God; in Mark's account, they were amazed beyond measure about what they had experienced. It was one thing to be able to get the weather to obey Him, but to have the power to walk on water, especially during a storm? Truly they had been witnesses to the power of God in ways that few people have ever seen.

Read Mark 6:51, 52. What point do you think Mark was making about faith and belief? What lessons might there be for us in that point?

The Leaven of the Pharisees

Read Matthew 16:1–12 and then answer the following questions:

1. What evidence do we have that the leaders who came to Jesus were not sincere in their question? After all, what is wrong with having a sign from heaven? Is the Bible not full of signs from heaven? What point should we as disciples take from what is happening here? *See earlier chapters in Matthew; see also Luke 16:29–31.*

2. Look carefully at Jesus' words to the Sadducees and the Pharisees. What is the principle behind the specific warning to them (*Matt. 23:23*)?

3. Read Jesus' words to the disciples in Matthew 16:8–11. What point is Jesus making to them? Why do we find it so easy to do the same thing; that is, to forget the great things God has done before our eyes?

What a contrast between the Bread of Life and the leaven of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and yet how easy to get them confused. All disciples of Christ need to be aware that belief or following traditions or *defending* the faith are not always the same as being a disciple of Christ. How easy, once we get established, even comfortable, in what we believe, or in how we worship, or in how we practice our faith, to let these things become ends in and of themselves, instead of a means to an end. That end, of course, is to be a faithful disciple of Christ, doing His will and revealing His love and His character to the world.

Lessons From Fear

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear”
 (1 John 4:18).

Perhaps you have noticed something through the course of this study, and that is how often the disciples were afraid. All through the Gospels, we find time and again the disciples in various situations, and time and again the Bible records them as being afraid.

What was it in these various situations that caused them to fear?
Matt. 14:27; 17:6, 7; Mark 10:32; Luke 8:25; 24:37; John 6:19.
What can we learn from their experiences?

Read Mark 9:30–32. **What** made them fearful here? **What** important point can we take away from this example?

What is so sad about this case is that they were fearing the one thing that offered them the greatest hope they could possibly have: salvation through the atoning death of Jesus on their behalf. They feared what they did not understand; they feared what they did not want to hear. Had they understood what the Cross was all about, they would not have feared. Hence, it was their ignorance that kept them fearful.

As disciples, as followers of Christ, we should, of all people, have the least to fear. The same Jesus who could walk on water during a storm, who could bring healing to a paralytic, who could feed five thousand with just a few loaves of bread, is the same Jesus who revealed His love to us by dying on the cross as our Substitute. Sure, sin is real, the devil is real, hell will be real, and we need to be aware of the dangers to our souls (*Matt. 10:28*), but in the end, as disciples, as long as we cling to the reality of God’s love as revealed in Christ, we should learn to live within the hope and comfort of God’s amazing love for, and grace toward, us.

Discipleship and Witness

“I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that.”
—Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 130.

Look at the above quote. As disciples, what is to be our attitude toward someone like that? Which Bible texts come to mind as you think about this person? Write out the texts.

Now that you have written down the texts, take the time to go over them. Does a particular theme come through? Are your texts those of compassion, judgment, sorrow, or retribution? Or something else? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

An inseparable part of what it means to be a disciple is, of course, witnessing. All through the Gospels, we see Jesus preparing His disciples to lead others to salvation. Some folk believed quite readily; others seemed determined to reject Jesus no matter what.

No question, as disciples of Christ, as we witness, we will come across all types, including those who, perhaps not as honestly as the man quoted above, will nevertheless reflect the same kind of attitude.

How do we respond to these people? Anger? Love? A feeling of personal failure? All or none of the above?

What can we learn from the life and teachings of Jesus that will help us, as disciples of Jesus, to deal with those who are determined to close their hearts and minds? At what point, if ever, does our responsibility toward them end?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 415–417, 426–441, 746–750; Ellen G. White, “Peace be Still,” pp. 333–341; “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–382; “The Foreshadowing of the Cross,” pp. 410–418; “He Was Transfigured,” pp. 419–425; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Sower Went Forth to Sow,” p. 40, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Light Through Darkness,” pp. 349–350, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Although Peter had been long with the Master, he had a very imperfect conception of the plan of salvation. He did not desire to see the cross in the work of Christ; but it was through the cross that life and hope were to come to dying men.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 7, 1891.

“God’s children are not to be subject to feelings and emotions. When they fluctuate between hope and fear, the heart of Christ is hurt; for He has given them unmistakable evidence of His love. He wants them to be established, strengthened, and settled in the most holy faith. He wants them to do the work He has given them; then their hearts will become in His hands as sacred harps, every chord of which will send forth praise and thanksgiving to the One sent by God to take away the sins of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 518, 519.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the things that you fear? How can you learn to overcome those fears? On the other hand, are there things that we should rightly fear? Be prepared to discuss your answers in class on Sabbath.
- 2 What are ways we can become modern-day Sadducees and Pharisees? Why is that easier than we think? How are these attitudes manifested in the church today? Also, what are the steps that one takes in going from being a disciple to being a Pharisee? Are they easier than going from being a Pharisee to a disciple? Be prepared to discuss your thoughts in class.
- 3 What would you classify as the leaven of the Sadducees and Pharisees in the church today?
- 4 As a class, talk about the attitude of the man expressed in Thursday’s lesson. In what ways are the principles of the attitude manifested in us, even as Christians? Are there things about our faith or doctrines that we shut our minds to because we simply do not want to believe them? Could it be that we have a hard time learning the lessons the Lord wants to teach us because we do not want to learn them?

More Than Adventure

by PATRICIA GONZÁLEZ

Ruben González of Argentina loves adventure. He loves sharing his faith even more. On a bus, in the market, wherever he goes he talks to people about Jesus. He led the members of one Protestant church, including their pastor, into the Adventist faith.

Four years ago Ruben heard a mission report in Sabbath School that spoke of the struggles Adventists in Spain face in leading people to Christ. When his nephew in Spain offered him work, Ruben decided to go to Spain. He was 59.

The family borrowed money to buy his airline ticket, and with \$33 in his pocket, he left on his mission adventure to Spain. He spent his last pesos on a visa and a taxi to take him to his nephew's home. But when he arrived, he learned that his nephew's shop had closed down the day before.

Ruben had no money and no place to stay. He found a cheap hostel and left his passport and clothes as guarantee of payment. Then he went looking for work. Praying as he went, he knocked at shops and houses offering to cook, cut grass, paint, build—whatever people needed. But nothing opened up for him. Then Sabbath came.

Ruben worshiped in the hostel on Sabbath. Then in the afternoon he went to visit Don Salvador, a man he had met earlier that week. Not many people liked Don Salvador, but Ruben and Salvador became friends. When Don Salvador realized that Ruben was hungry, he offered him food. The next morning Don Salvador paid Ruben's bill at the hostel and invited him home.

"For lunch?" Ruben asked.

"No, come and live in my house." Ruben gladly accepted.

Don Salvador introduced Ruben to a man who offered Ruben a job. He found an Adventist church and started worshiping with them. The church was large but had only a handful of members. "There are many empty chairs here," Ruben told the members. "We must invite more people to come." He worked with the church members and shared his zeal for evangelism. His enthusiasm sparked the members to invite others to worship, and the church grew to 128 members.

Ruben began preaching and sharing his testimony in churches throughout Spain. His desire to see the church there grow has had an impact on the work. The adventurer found more than adventure in Spain, and the kingdom of God has grown because of his work.

Our mission offerings support many forms of evangelism around the world.

PATRICIA GONZÁLEZ is Ruben González's daughter. She lives in Argentina.

Mission and Commission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 25:31–46; Mark 16:14–20; Luke 24:36–53; John 3:14–19; Rom. 5:6–10; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3, 4; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:22–25.*

Memory Text: “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (*Luke 24:46*).

As Adventists, we understand much of our role in the *Great Commission* to be linked to the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. At the center of these messages is the *everlasting gospel*. We have nothing to give to the world unless we give them, above anything and everything else, the great truth of justification by faith alone.

“Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel's message in verity.’”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890. Thus, for Ellen G. White, central to our mission is the proclamation of justification by faith alone, the great news that salvation comes only through the grace of God poured out upon undeserving sinners and not through any works on our part.

This week we will look at the gospel in the context of the Great Commission.

The Week at a Glance: What role do works of charity have in the life of those who are disciples? What role did Jesus give to the Scriptures in explaining His life and death? How central is the gospel in the Great Commission that Jesus gave to His church?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 22.

End-Time Drama and Discipleship

Read Matthew 25:31–46. This passage is part of Jesus’ Olivet discourse given during His final week of Judean ministry. It is part of the last words of His final pre-Passion discussion.

How are we to understand these words in Matthew 25:31–46, especially in the area of discipleship and witness?

This passage conveys a truth about the mission of disciples. Jesus clearly indicates that part of the work of disciples involves mission to the poor, the sick and suffering, the imprisoned; thus, to all the needy. The ultimate manifestation of discipleship is revealed in how we treat those around us who are in need.

“Thus Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its decision as turning upon one point. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering. In that day Christ does not present before men the great work He has done for them in giving His life for their redemption. He presents the faithful work they have done for Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 637.

The Bible does make it clear, in numerous places, that salvation is not earned by our works but comes solely by God’s grace. How, then, are we to understand what Jesus is saying? As you seek to answer this question, keep in mind the idea of who a true disciple is: someone who has surrendered himself/herself totally and completely to Jesus, claiming for themselves “the great work He [Jesus] has done for them in giving His life for their redemption.” How does keeping this important truth before us help us better understand what Jesus is saying? After all, who of us could feed enough poor, or clothe enough naked, to earn redemption?

The Commissioning in Mark

In an earlier lesson, we looked at the Great Commission as presented in Matthew 28:18–20. Read those texts again; review the highlights, particularly the commands and the promises. Ask yourself, when done: “What role am I playing in the fulfillment of these words?”

Read Mark 16:14–20 and compare it with Matthew 28:18–20. What elements are found in one and not the other?

After you have noted the differences, read both accounts again. There is an unmistakable harmony between them. The basic message is the same.

What is Jesus’ message to us, as found in both these accounts?

In both accounts we are told that there was some doubt (*Matt. 28:17*), some hardness of heart, on the part of the disciples. In Mark’s account, Jesus *upbraided* them for this doubt, even though the Greek verb there can be translated into stronger language, such as “reproached,” “denounced,” or even “insulted.” The point was that even after all this time, even after all these things, some among them still struggled with faith. Jesus had to deal firmly with them.

Notice, too, that only after Jesus dealt with their hardness of heart did He give them their commission. Jesus knew that for them to succeed they needed to be strong in faith. His physical presence would soon be gone from them, for He was to be “received up into heaven” (*Mark 16:19*). Anything they were to do for Him from then on would have to be done by faith alone.

Though faith is a gift, it is a gift that needs to be cultivated. What things can you do on a daily basis to nurture, protect, and strengthen your faith?

Discipleship and the Gospel

Let us look at something else in Mark’s account of the Great Commission. In Mark 16:15, 16, Jesus says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Thus, we see that at the foundation of the commission is the call to preach the gospel.

With that in mind, read Revelation 14:6. How do these verses help us understand what our work is, not just as disciples but as Seventh-day Adventist disciples?

With the work of preaching the gospel so central to discipleship and with the making of disciples, how crucial that we understand what the *gospel* message really is. Jesus, however, right there in those verses in Mark, pretty much gives us the *gospel*. Believe it, and you shall be saved; reject it, and you shall be lost.

Compare what Jesus said in Mark with John 3:14–19. How does what John writes help us to understand what Jesus is saying in Mark?

How crucial that as disciples we be rooted firmly in the gospel that we are called to preach. Because of sin, the world stood condemned; Jesus bore that condemnation, fully and completely, in Himself. Through this wonderful provision, anyone who believes in Him no longer has to face the condemnation that came through sin; instead, thanks to God’s unfathomable grace, that person—regardless of how sinful his or her past has been—is pardoned, forgiven, and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. This message must be at the foundation of all that we preach and teach to the world.

The Commissioning in Luke

Read Luke 24:36–53, another account of Jesus appearing to His disciples and giving them the call to preach to the world.

In this account, as the disciples gathered, the two disciples who met the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus joined them and shared their encounter. During their discussion, Jesus joined them.

Read this account. What were the first two things that Jesus did to help increase the faith of the disciples?

Notice, however, that Jesus did not stop with just giving them physical evidence, evidence that they could see and feel. No, that was only part of it. He then took them into the Scriptures, showing them from the Word of God that what had happened to Him had been predicted.

What lesson should Christ's use of the Scriptures here teach us?

We see an important principle here: Sure, experiences, physical manifestations, and miracles all have their role and can have a major part in giving people what they need in order to have faith in Jesus. At the same time, however, Scripture must be the foundation of all our faith. Despite the miracles, Jesus affirmed their faith, using the Scriptures to do it. He used the Scriptures to confirm all that had happened to Him and buttress all that He had said to them. *If Jesus Himself used the Scriptures to justify all that He did, how much more so should we?*

Christ's words and actions here are a stinging, powerful rebuke against any and all attempts to weaken the crucial and foundational role of the Bible in the life of the church and in our work as disciples.

There are so many forces, even within the church, that work to weaken our trust in the Bible. What are some of these forces, and how can we protect ourselves from anything that calls into question the authority of the Scriptures?

“Witnesses of These Things”

Yesterday, in looking at the Great Commission as presented in Luke, we saw the primacy that Jesus gave to the Scriptures, that He used them to justify all that had happened. He also used the Scriptures to give the disciples their commission to the world.

According to Jesus, what was the message of the Scriptures that the disciples were to take to the world? *See Luke 24:45–48.* **How does this fit in with what we looked at in Tuesday’s lesson? How does this fit in with our understanding of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14?**

Here again, central to the whole call to make disciples is the death and resurrection of Jesus, all for the *remission of sins*. Jesus Himself points not just to the events that surrounded His life and death but to the meaning of those events. This is what Jesus told them to preach to the world. What would make their testimony so powerful, too, was that He said to them, “ye are witnesses of these things” (*Luke 24:48*); that is, the things surrounding His death and resurrection.

How do the following texts help us to understand the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection? *Rom. 5:6–10; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3, 4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:22–25.*

The disciples apparently were powerful witnesses, too. What began in Jerusalem as primarily a Jewish affair became a worldwide movement within 50 years. Acts 1–7 show the growth in Jerusalem and Judea; chapters 8–12 show how persecution and other influences took the movement beyond to Samaria, Ethiopia, Syria, and other Gentile territories. Acts 13–28 show how Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor turned Christian, took it in ever-widening circles until it reached Rome.

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 553–560, 658–660, 881–887, 1110; Ellen G. White, “The Lord Is Risen,” pp. 779–787; “Why Weepst Thou?” pp. 788–794; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801; “Peace Be Unto You,” pp. 802–808; “By the Sea Once More,” pp. 809–817; “Go Teach the Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*; “God’s Purpose for His Church,” pp. 9–16; “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 21, Acts 1, 2.

“Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we understand Mark 16:16? Is Jesus saying that you have to be baptized to be saved? In what ways does the text itself supply the answer? What is our understanding, as a church, of the meaning and importance of baptism?
- 2 Think about your local church and how it fits in with the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as given to us in the texts for this week. What role does your church have? What part is it playing? How can you, working through even your Sabbath School class, help get your church more involved in the work of spreading the gospel to all nations?
- 3 Why is it so important for us, as disciples, to understand the gospel before we can be effective witnesses for Jesus? What is your understanding of the gospel? Write it out in a single paragraph. Bring it to class and be prepared to share it with others there. What insights can you gain from the above Ellen G. White quote?
- 4 What more can your local church do to help the poor and the needy in your area? What kind of commitment does your church have to this important aspect of being a disciple?

What Took So Long?

by PRUDENCIO TORRES

My brother, Hipolito, accepted the Adventist faith while living in New York City some years ago. When he returned to Puerto Rico, he shared his faith with me and invited me to church. I was still a teenager and was not sure how my family would feel if I visited another church. I knew they felt there was only one church—our church.

I visited the Adventist church occasionally and made some friends there. But for the most part what I learned didn't change my life. I married, and we moved to our own home. Some Adventists lived nearby and visited us often. We agreed to study the Bible with them, and the next year my wife accepted Jesus and joined the Adventist Church. But I didn't. I attended church with her and returned tithe, but I didn't take a stand for God.

Then my mother became terminally ill. My brother and I took the Adventist pastor to visit her often. We shared Bible promises with her, and she accepted Jesus as her Lord before she died.

The church we attend divided itself into small groups that meet in members' homes. We opened our home for one small-group meeting and invited our neighbors. The group grew to 13 members, and we decided to start a new congregation. My father gave us a piece of land on which to build a small chapel, and we set to work. Everyone helped when they could, but my wife and I did most of the work or paid to have it done. The small group grew and was organized into a company with 25 members.

Finally, after waiting 27 years, I sealed my commitment to Christ and was baptized. Today our congregation is an organized church with more than fifty members. My father visits our little church occasionally, and two other brothers and their families are attending church. One is preparing for baptism.

What took me so long? I have no excuse. My unwillingness to make a commitment to Christ cost a lot of years and missed opportunities to share my faith. But God was patient and gracious to me. He waited for me, and He has saved me. However, I wonder how my life would have been different if I had made my decision years ago when I first knew these wonderful truths.

Mission offerings help raise up new churches in Puerto Rico and around the world.

PRUDENCIO TORRES *lives in Las Piedras, Puerto Rico.*

Patterns of Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 6:12, 13; 16:19–31; 17:4, 5; 18:9–14; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 5:16.*

Memory Text: “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (*Matthew 10:8*).

During this quarter, we have looked at Jesus, the disciple-gathering Teacher. We have looked at those He chose to follow Him, the training He gave, the behavior He modeled, and the instructions He gave. From Him we have been given all that we need to be disciples.

This week recaps some of the main highlights of this quarter's study. It seeks to ascertain some of the traits, themes, and practices of Jesus that may have positively influenced the disciples—elements that must form the foundation of our work as disciples, as well. Ultimately, the goal is to seek applications that can provide patterns for discipleship in the twenty-first century.

The Week at a Glance: What role should compassion and forgiveness have in the life and ministry of disciples? What model did Jesus give to us regarding how we should treat the marginalized, the outcasts, and those from ethnic backgrounds different from our own? How important is the church itself in the work of discipleship? What can we learn from Jesus about the centrality of prayer?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 29.*

Compassion and Forgiveness

When Jesus was here, He displayed compassion, sometimes translated pity (see *Matt. 14:14, 15:32, 20:34, Mark 1:41, 6:34, Luke 7:13*). In Greek, the word most commonly translated “compassion” or “pity” gives the idea of someone being moved to the very depths of his or her being. If, in our fallen condition, with our hard, selfish hearts, we can be moved with pity and compassion for others, how much more so would the sight of suffering humanity touch the innermost being of the sinless Son of God?

Look up those references listed above. What were the things that Jesus showed compassion over? Why is such compassion so important for us as disciples?

Besides compassion, Jesus showed forgiveness. Time and again the disciples observed Jesus forgive the sins of so many people. They saw how He treated Simon, the former leper, who looked down on Mary (*Luke 7:36–50*). The disciples saw Jesus’ ultimate act of forgiveness in His prayer for His enemies while they hung Him on the cross (*Luke 23:34*). Peter, too, experienced Jesus’ forgiveness in a special way. At the arrest, he forsook Jesus and fled. Later at the trial, three times he denied knowing Jesus. Yet, Jesus forgave him and restored him to fellowship in the presence of his fellow disciples (*John 21:9–17*).

What role should forgiveness play in our experience as disciples, and in our work of making disciples? See *Luke 17:3–5, Eph. 1:7, 4:32, Col. 1:14*.

Our God is a compassionate God, and one result of that compassion was that He chose to save us from our sins, to forgive what, otherwise, would have led to our eternal loss. How crucial that, as disciples, we keep before ourselves this compassion and forgiveness; after all, what better motivation could we have for leading others to, and nurturing them in, what means so much to us?

The Ostracized and Marginalized

Jesus' ministry and training of His disciples took place in a highly stratified society. The lines were clearly drawn between men and women, religious hierarchy and the common people, rich and poor, and Pharisees and publicans. The woman's place was in the home, and then only certain portions of it.

Read Luke 16:19–31. What message about class distinctions is pictured here? From this parable, what can we learn about how the Lord viewed the attitude and actions of the *wealthy establishment*?

Read Luke 18:9–14 and answer the same questions, this time about how Jesus viewed the actions and attitudes of the *religious establishment*.

Jesus neither followed nor advocated the status quo, because He obviously saw many of the problems that had arisen in it. Instead, He openly associated with, taught, and advocated for the marginalized people in His society. In the Gospels we can see the kind of people that Jesus worked with and for. Sure, He sought to reach the upper classes as well, but at the same time He ministered to Gentiles, disreputable women, lepers, publicans, demoniacs, Romans, those with disabilities, the blind, the poor, a whole host of those considered outcasts, marginalized in one way or another from society.

Again, considering what He came to the world to do, to die for the sins of every human being, it makes perfect sense that while He was here He would minister to everyone who would be ministered to.

What is your attitude toward the marginalized and outcasts in your society? What is your church's attitude toward them? How can you tell if you really care or if you are just expressing the expected platitudes?

Diversity and Discrimination

Yesterday we saw how Jesus ministered to the downtrodden, the outcasts of society. Today we want to focus on that a little more but with the emphasis more on national or ethnic diversity.

Ethnic and national bigotry was very common in the ancient world. Various groups saw themselves as superior to those around them. The ancient Greeks, for instance, viewed non-Greeks as *barbarians*. All through ancient literature we find this kind of bigotry. Unfortunately, Jesus' contemporaries were not immune to that same kind of thinking, no matter how exalted their religious profession.

Read Exodus 12:38; 18:1; Numbers 12:1; Ruth 1:16, 17; and Matthew 23:15. What should these texts tell us about the ethnic diversity that made up the nation of Israel?

From its beginning as a nation, Israel was never a *pure stock*. The idea of a *pure lineage* is a more modern conception, an offspring of evolutionary ideology. God has made all humanity “one blood” (*Acts 17:26*); we are all offspring of Adam and Eve, our first parents. And through faith in Jesus, we all—regardless of color, nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion—become the “sons of God” (*John 1:12*).

This point cannot be overemphasized: Christ's death on the cross, for every human being, should once and for all denude all disciples of any sense of ethnic or national superiority. More so, it should remove all sense of bigotry toward any group of people. Before Jesus on the cross, upon whom all our sin, everyone's, fell, we all stand equal. More than anyone else in the world, Christ's disciples, those who follow Him, should be purged of the kind of prejudices and ethnic tensions that seem to be inbred in every culture and society. In the end, there are only two classes of people: the saved and the lost. And we who are saved should be busy going around, as did our Master, seeking to find the lost and pointing them to the only thing that makes us different from them, the promise of salvation that we have claimed for ourselves.

To what degree have you been tainted with the prejudices and bigotries inherent in your own society?

The Church

As we have seen all through this quarter, God calls us as disciples to do many things: spread the gospel, minister to the outcasts and the needy, make disciples, and on and on. And this should be happening in every nation around the world. The question is: How are we supposed to do this?

How do the following texts help answer the above question? *Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:14–22; Eph. 4:11–13; Col. 1:17, 18.*

Jesus was indeed a disciple-gathering teacher. He used every opportunity to call, train, educate, and nurture disciples. He was never too busy to help a needy soul. Disciple-training was at the center of His ministry.

We believe and suggest strongly that just as the tasks of disciple-making, teaching, training, and nurturing were central to Jesus' ministry, even so they must be central to the mission of every church in the twenty-first century.

Yet, no one can do it alone. That is why there is the church. Nor is that task limited to pastors, Bible workers, elders, deacons, and other church officers. It is the task of every member; Jesus' commission excluded no disciple. Christ's words, "Go ye" (*Matt. 28:19*), means you.

Some members may feel uncomfortable with this idea because they lack training. Yet, when Jesus called fishermen for discipleship, they were untrained. He had to train them. Likewise, every church must make provisions for the discipling of every member. Each new member should be placed in a discipleship class for training and nurture. Advanced classes for seasoned disciples must be instituted, and every trained disciple should be put to work for the Master.

Before departing, Jesus gave His disciples the mission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (*Matt. 28:19, NIV*). This command has not changed. This gospel of the kingdom still must be preached in all the world before the end comes (*Matt. 24:14*). Unless Jesus were to make the stones cry out to complete the task, He has no other agents than His church to do the job.

How involved are you in the work that Jesus has called us all to do? Or are you too busy doing your own thing? When are you going to make the changes you know in your heart should have been made long ago?

The Prayer Factor

Read the following quote from Ellen G. White. What principles can we take away from this for ourselves?

“The Majesty of heaven, while engaged in His earthly ministry, prayed much to His Father. He was frequently bowed all night in prayer. . . . The Mount of Olives was the favorite resort of the Son of God for His devotions. Frequently after the multitude had left Him for the retirement of the night, He rested not, though weary with the labors of the day. . . . While the city was hushed in silence, and the disciples had returned to their homes to obtain refreshment in sleep, Jesus slept not. His divine pleadings were ascending to His Father from the Mount of Olives that His disciples might be kept from the evil influences which they would daily encounter in the world, and that His own soul might be strengthened and braced for the duties and trials of the coming day. All night, while His followers were sleeping, was their divine Teacher praying. The dew and the frost of night fell upon His head bowed in prayer. His example is left for His followers.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 167.

Read the texts below. What were the occasions that prompted these prayers? What can they teach us, as disciples of Christ, about prayer and the centrality of prayer in our mission?

Luke 5:15, 16

Luke 6:12, 13

Luke 9:28–31

If Jesus, the God-Man, relied so much on prayer for success while on earth, how much more do we, as sinful humans, need it for successful discipleship? How satisfied are you with your prayer life? What do you pray about? How much time do you spend praying? What changes might you need to make in your own prayer life?

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 345–348, 553–560, 658–660, 881–887, 1110; Ellen G. White, “Come Rest Awhile,” pp. 359–363; “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–379; “The Foreshadowing of the Cross,” p. 411; “He Was Transformed,” pp. 419–421; “Gethsemane,” pp. 687–693, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Teacher Sent From God,” p. 80; “Faith and Prayer,” p. 259, in *Education*.

Here are some of the practical things that our church can do in the area of discipleship:

1. Designate disciple-making as its primary goal.
2. Formulate plans and methods to accomplish the task.
3. Train individuals for leadership for each program.
4. Mobilize all members for involvement in discipleship.
5. Institute a program of discipleship training.
6. Ascertain the types of people living in the community surrounding the church and their needs.
7. Institute a bridge-building program that will break down barriers, then meet the needs of and forge relations with the community surrounding each church.
8. Introduce programs to use the skills of new converts, to incorporate them into the local church, and develop a deeper commitment to Christ.
9. Develop programs that will assist members, especially new converts, in discovering, developing, and putting to use their spiritual gifts.
10. Ensure that there are adequate programs designed for making and nurturing disciples.

Discussion Questions:

1 Take a prayerful look at those steps listed above. What might you add or embellish that would be important for a church to be successful at making disciples? What can you do to help see these steps, or some like them, implemented at your local church level?

2 How much time do you spend in prayer for the work of the church as a whole? Determine to spend a certain amount of time each day praying for our worldwide mission. Why not have your Sabbath School class set aside a certain time during each class to pray for the work of the worldwide church?

3 How can we help both the clergy and the laity better understand that the work of discipleship is the work of every member of the church? How can you help the local church better utilize the gifts and talents of members? What are the kinds of things that tend to get in the way of the laity being involved in the work of discipleship and witness?

Finding Faith in Tete

by CELIA BAIONETA

I grew up in Mozambique, following the beliefs of the church my family attended. We didn't go to church every week, but we never missed Christmas and Easter. As a teenager I had a friend, Maria, who went to church every Saturday. She often brought friends home after church, and they spent the afternoon singing. Watching Maria, I asked my mother why we didn't go to worship every week. She answered, "If you want, you can go to church every week."

Maria invited me to visit her church, and my mother gave her permission. I loved it, especially the singing and the sense of unity I found there. I loved how they hugged and shook hands, and I appreciated that they made me, a visitor, feel welcome. That afternoon some members of the church came to my house to pray with me. Even my mother was impressed.

I continued attending Maria's church, and when I became sick and unable to go, Maria and her friends came to pray for me.

I joined the baptismal class to learn what the Bible teaches, and I accepted everything. I asked my mother if I could be baptized. She agreed. However, I still had issues to deal with. I liked playing basketball and soccer, and when a game was scheduled for Sabbath I had to choose between the church and sports. I often chose sports. Then I began skipping church even when no games were scheduled. I started staying out late with my friends.

I hardly noticed that I was slipping away. But my mother noticed and warned me that I was walking down the wrong path. I made a stronger effort to return to the church.

Then I met Fidelino, a dedicated Adventist young man who encouraged me to give my life completely to God. He prayed with me and for me, and his encouragement helped me realize what was really important in life. The following year we were married.

We moved to another city to live, and the next year we invited my mother to visit for a month. She was surrounded by Adventists and couldn't escape. She visited church, and now she attends church near her home. The next year my father visited. He, too, was impressed with our home and our close circle of Adventist friends. He went home and started attending the Adventist church. Recently he was baptized. My two younger brothers now attend church.

God used my friend Maria's witness and a boy's attention to draw me to His love and to a church family I truly enjoy.

CELIA BAIONETA *lives in Tete, Mozambique.*

Next quarter's Bible study guide will center on Jesus, on who He was, on what He taught, on what He did—and on what He is doing right now. *The Wonder of Jesus* by Roy Adams aims to give us a complete picture of Jesus' past ministry on earth, the work He does for us now in the sanctuary, and His second coming.

Lesson 1—Who Was Jesus?

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Not the Baptist (*Matt. 3:11, 12; 16:14*)

MONDAY: Not Elijah or Jeremiah or Some Other Prophet (*John 1:1–5, 17:5*)

TUESDAY: The Fascination Continues—1 (*Luke 1:1–4, 2 Pet. 1:16–21*)

WEDNESDAY: The Fascination Continues—2 (*1 Cor. 1:18–27*)

THURSDAY: Messiah, Son of God (*John 17:3*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 16:13*

Sabbath Gem: The same fundamental concerns expressed by the people of Jesus' own time concerning His identity have framed the debate about the Son of God across the centuries, heightening the mystique about Him.

Lesson 2—The Mystery of His Deity

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: His Preexistence—What It Means to Us (*Isa. 9:6*)

MONDAY: The Witness of the New Testament (*John 8:58*)

TUESDAY: Apparent Contradictions (*John 3:16*)

WEDNESDAY: The Deity of Christ (*John 1:1*)

THURSDAY: And There's More (*1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 13:14, Rev. 20:6*)

Memory Text—*John 1:1–3*

Sabbath Gem: The preexistence of Christ is a difficult concept to understand. When Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Christ told him that this knowledge came from God the Father. Only through Divine wisdom from God's Word and the Holy Spirit can we hope to understand such mysteries of the Bible.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.