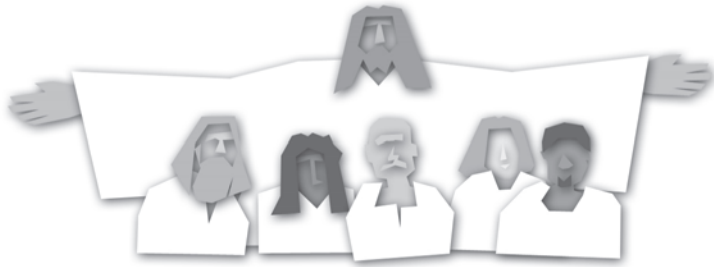


An Overview of Discipleship



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?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Matthew 4:18–22*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe what disciples are and how we become Christ's.

Feel: Sense a desire to commit unreservedly to Jesus.

Do: Determine to make a commitment to draw others to Him.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Master's Calling

A Peter and Andrew cast their nets in the sea one moment then abandoned their boats the next. Why did they respond so immediately to Jesus' call? What does that reveal about becoming disciples?

B Disciple comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, a “learner” apprenticed to a teacher for receiving instruction. One becomes a disciple by answering a call. Who initiates it? How is our response to grace at work?

C Why did Jesus call Peter while he worked? Why might Peter need to be confronted with all he was giving up?

II. Feel: Burning Our Boats

A Sabbath's study tells how Cortez burned his ships after landing in Mexico. How have we had to break with the past, or “burn our ships,” to serve Christ fully?

B Looking at the call of the first disciples, what does the apprenticeship of modern disciples consist of?

C Christ chose—or called—His early disciples. In what sense does He choose—or call—us?

III. Do: Carrying Out Our Calling

A Why answer Jesus' call, given that a disciple's life may be difficult?

B How does Jesus motivate us to grow in discipleship with Him? What are the rewards?

C Jesus called Andrew; Andrew called Peter. Disciples make disciples. How do we call others to Him?

▶ **Summary:** Discipleship is an intimate relationship between Jesus and His followers.

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?

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate!

Key Concept: Those who accept Christ and commit to the task of discipleship are called to surrender completely to Him.

It seems you can't watch the news without hearing about war. You may know someone who has lost a child in combat. When we consider such sacrifice, how does *surrender* make us react?

For some, surrender is worse than death, as history shows.

In A.D. 70, Lucius Flavius Silva marched the Roman Tenth Legion into the Judean Desert. His orders: Quell the Sicarii—the last Jews resistant to Rome. General Silva laid a long, fierce siege to the Sicarii stronghold of Masada, his message ominously clear. None would escape alive.

When the Tenth Legion stepped into the fortress, they heard only silence. They shouted to their enemies to show themselves. Two women climbed out of a cistern and told a gruesome tale. Ten men had been chosen by lot to murder everyone in the fortress. Of the ten, one was chosen to slay the other nine, set fire to the palace, then kill himself. The Romans listened in disbelief. But when they found the 953 dead bodies, they couldn't exult. The fortress's well-stocked storehouses sent a clear message. The Sicarii had not killed themselves because they were starving and wanted to avoid the shame of eating their children. They killed themselves to avoid being taken as prisoners. The Romans could only marvel at the courage of their enemies who would rather die than surrender.

Consider This: Many dictionaries define *surrender* as “to give oneself up, as to an enemy.” Yet, Jesus is our Friend. So, why would such a severe word be necessary to describe what we must do to serve Him? Explore how we, who are the enemies of Christ, must be brought into a right relationship with Him through grace. Review the story of Masada for insights. What did the Sicarii fear they would lose if they surrendered? How does this help us understand what Christ asks us to surrender to follow Him?

► STEP 2—Explore!

Bible Commentary

I. Leaving Our Boats (Review Matthew 4:18–20 with your class.)

Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee on an important mission. For two

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

years He had preached but had not chosen anyone to work directly with Him. Now it was time to call those to Him whom He could train and entrust with the most important work the world has ever been given. Surely Jerusalem, home of Israel's elite, would have been the ideal place to look for candidates for the Twelve.

Jesus stopped and looked out across the water where Peter and his brother Andrew cast nets. The sea of Galilee was known for its sudden and violent storms. The men who fished there, to some extent, had taken on the characteristics of the water itself—generous and strong but also given to fierce temper and outbursts; unstable as a rocking boat, rough as the wind, and unpredictable.

Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist. He and Peter had been “part-time” followers of Jesus for the past two years. During this time, Jesus had been sizing them up for a promotion: Soon their nets would be useless for catching the kind of “fish” Jesus had in mind.

Consider This: What can we learn from Peter and Andrew's response to Jesus' call? Did they hesitate or ask Him for time to think it over, saying they'd get back to Him in a few days? How does this teach us to respond to Jesus' call? How is Jesus' call not just a call to faith but a call to action?

■ *Whom does Jesus call? Why did He pass over the intellectual elite for these rough-spoken men of little education or standing? What does that tell us about whom He can use? What hope does that give us?*

II. The Sons of Thunder and the Prince of Peace (Review Matthew 4:21, 22 with your class.)

Jesus continued His walk by the water. He saw two brothers in a boat with their father mending nets. James and John, along with Zebedee, were in a business partnership with Peter. The nets they were mending could have been dragnets used by fishermen on Galilee for deep-sea fishing. The net would be spread out in the water and then the two ends pulled together to trap the fish. Men who knew how to cast a net like this knew how to get results; they knew the patience of waiting for their quarry; and they knew how to ensnare—what great qualities to have on a résumé of those in training to catch souls for heaven.

But any human resource director in Jerusalem, who might have been given their résumés to look at for the position of disciple, might find reasons to caution Jesus from hiring them. James and John were called “the

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

sons of thunder”—by Jesus Himself. Not a very promising start for two men who were going to work for the One known as the Prince of Peace. If anything, such a name conjures association of storms and hail and lightning, the latter being a comparison, in Jesus’ own words for Lucifer. “‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” Could Jesus really be serious when He told men like this to follow Him?

Consider This: Why would Jesus call such outwardly “unpromising” men? How does their response help us understand why Jesus called them? What does this tell us about how Jesus views qualifications for service? How does this help us define who a disciple is?

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Thought Questions:

- 1 Christ’s calling is a divine initiative that begins with Him. This calling inspires a vision of the future in which we learn from Jesus and become like Him. How do we begin to “look” and “sound” like Him so that people know we are His?
- 2 Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, with all their character flaws still needing to be ironed out and many of their ruthless ambitions still in tact. How was this work the disciples did not just what Jesus was doing through them for others but work He was doing for them? In other words, how were they teaching and learning at the same time? How does that help us know what our apprenticeship to Jesus consists of?

Application Questions:

- 1 Disciples confess Christ before others. Confessing involves more than telling people about Jesus. How can your actions show to others that you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself?
- 2 Andrew and Peter, James and John made a complete break with their past to join Christ. How might we too have to break with our pasts?

Witnessing

Anyone who has ever grown grapes will know that the grapevine often behaves less like a plant and more like fire. It grows aggressively and needs excessive pruning and constant care.

Two thousand years ago, as Jesus walked with His disciples at night to

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Gethsemane, the moon shone down illuminating a grapevine. Jesus pointed to the vine as a symbol of Himself. Grapes may spread like fire, but the wood is weak, needing support. And Jesus, because of His humanity, needed to be supported by God the Father. In that sustaining relationship is a promise for us. Just as the Father supports the Son, the Vine, Jesus will support the branches, His disciples.

Consider This: How does the Lord constantly care for and prune us? In what ways is He vigorously cutting us back and for what purpose?

The branches that flower but produce no fruit are a drain on the plant. What things drain us? How can we let God prune them from our lives?

This story took place at night before the terrible separation between Christ and His disciples. How do we draw comfort from the fact that when things are spiritually dark, we can still have a sustained connection to Christ?

► STEP 4—Apply!

“Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unre-served surrender to His service.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 674.

Consider This: Ask class members to share the ways in which they stay connected to Jesus. Offer the following suggestions to those who might find it difficult to know how to sustain that daily contact.

1 Just as the branch that bears fruit must be kept in constant connection with the vine to draw nourishment, we must have a vibrant prayer life. Ask Jesus to enrich your prayer life. Take time to pray every morning. Start out by thanking God for what He has done for you. Thank Him for Jesus. Then ask Jesus to forgive your sins and write your name in His book of life. Now bring your petitions to Him. If you don’t see answers right away, don’t give up. Keep praying, waiting patiently for Him. Remember that Jesus may not always give us what we want, but He will always give us what we need.

2 Here is an activity for a group. Jesus often drew on the things around Him to illustrate deep spiritual truth to His disciples. As a disciple of Jesus, remember that you are still a full-time student in the school of Christ. It is a school from which we will never graduate. Take your class out into nature and ask Jesus to teach you, through the things around you, how to stay intimately connected to Him. What other things might be good object lessons about how to abide in Jesus? Share your object lessons with one another.

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?