

Discipling Spiritual Leaders



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 6:12–16, John 16:7–14, Luke 6:20–49, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15, Acts 1.*

Memory Text: “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (*Luke 6:12, 13, NKJV*).

While Jesus was ever active in making disciples, He recognized that His earthly sojourn was short. Therefore He invested Himself in the training of disciples to continue the work after He left. He was both their Master Teacher and their Master Trainer. While teaching and training are obviously related, *teaching* usually connotes the impartation of knowledge, whereas *training* suggests formation or qualification through practice and discipline.

The disciples' preparation for leadership certainly involved the receiving of knowledge, but spiritual growth was uppermost. They needed an experience in the things of God, of faith, of hardship, of sanctification, and of self-sacrifice, along with an intellectual understanding of doctrine and theology. Knowledge alone was insufficient preparation for the rigorous challenges ahead. Jesus gave them both.

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

Leadership Starts Here

Christ's earthly sojourn was relatively brief. Therefore, the training of disciple-makers was imperative. Whom should He select? How many should He choose? Jesus' disciples doubtless numbered in the hundreds. Should everyone undergo mass education? Christ understood that leadership was cultivated effectively within small groups, not mass-produced through lectureships. Limited numbers would be chosen for Christ's initial graduating class.

Study Luke 6:12–16. What did Jesus do before He chose His disciples, and why was this so important?

Choosing effectively required advanced wisdom. Jesus approached His heavenly Father through prayer to acquire this wisdom. Likewise, prayer should precede the selection of leadership candidates in twenty-first-century disciple-making. Since Christ apparently believed that He needed extensive prayer in order to obtain the wisdom required, how much more should today's Christians petition for divine wisdom when choosing those charged with overseeing the progress of the Great Commission?

Having chosen twelve, Jesus designated them apostles—His commissioned representatives invested with spiritual authority. The larger group of disciples witnessed this ordaining or commissioning with no apparent jealousy or negative feelings. Later, Jesus would commission a larger group of seventy-two and, perhaps, others not recorded within Scripture. The twelve apostles, however, retained the identity of those most closely associated with Jesus; they shouldered the largest responsibilities and, therefore, required the most extensive training and commitment. This arrangement clearly implies intentional organizational structure among the earliest Christians. Christ spiritually invested the leaders within that organization with capabilities and education commensurate to their assigned tasks.

Think through the implications of how much time Jesus spent in prayer. What should this tell us about our own prayer lives? What does prayer do for you?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 1

Information was an irreplaceable component of Jesus' message. Information alone cannot transform, but every transformation includes information. Certainly, concepts possess no inherent power for initiating change; God's Spirit, however, working through human hearts, constitutes the irreplaceable element necessary for conversion.

Read John 16:7–14. What is Jesus saying here that helps us to understand how limited intellectual knowledge is, in and of itself, in the understanding and experiencing of true Christianity?

Biblical knowledge coupled together with God's Divine Spirit form the spiritual combination that transforms individuals and societies. The disciple-maker must strive for both of them in faith and study.

Christianity highly regards intelligence, thinking, and imagination. The existence of reasoned thought throughout Scripture, the tremendous respect afforded teachers within Judaism, and the priceless attention that scribes devoted to preserving ancient writings all testify to the importance of knowledge.

Christianity is not an irrational faith. Nevertheless, certain elements within Christianity have elevated emotion, feeling, and experience above knowledge. This mind-set declares that what people believe is relatively unimportant because experience alone is meaningful. Obedience and adherence to specific truths are deemed relatively unimportant; emotion and religious excitement become the measuring stick for spiritual genuineness.

Scripture's very existence counters this mindless fascination with experience. Experience without knowledge becomes a supercharged missile without direction. Conversely, knowledge without experience becomes lifeless and oftentimes legalistic. True Christian leaders understood the need to cultivate both of these elements, not only in themselves but in those they disciple.

Think through all the good reasons that you have for your faith. At the same time, what role has experience played? Why do we need both?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 2

Read Luke 6:20–49. In what ways are both knowledge and experience revealed in these texts? That is, how are they blended here in a way that shows why both are needed, not only in our own walk with the Lord but in disciple-making, as well?

Spiritual knowledge is indispensable for spiritual transformation. Christ Himself was regarded as the Master Teacher. In open classrooms bordered by seashores, mountains, and God’s created wonders, Christ disseminated transformative knowledge. The Holy Spirit awakened previously seared consciences to accept these truths. Disciple-making is incomplete without experience, but experience must be directed by knowledge.

Twenty-first-century disciple-makers must thoroughly acquaint themselves with Scripture, the source of authentic spiritual information. Likewise, they should disseminate doctrine and teachings without regard to popularity or convenience. God expects seasoned believers to withhold nothing, patiently guiding infant converts into an ever-expanding understanding and appreciation for the wonderful, life-changing truths of Christianity—especially the present truth of the three angels’ messages.

In the context of making disciples, what does Jesus say in Luke 6:39 that everyone who seeks to make disciples must keep in mind? How can we be sure that we are not like that which Jesus is warning about here?

In the end, a combination of knowledge and experience that produces unselfish love will be the most potent force for any disciple-maker to possess.

The Early Leaders

It is of no small interest and importance that in choosing leaders, Jesus picked from among the humbler, less-educated class of people. Christ did not choose the learning or eloquence of the Sanhedrin. Passing by the self-righteous teachers, the Master Worker chose humble, unlearned men to proclaim the truths that were to move the world. These men He purposed to train and educate as the leaders of His church. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel message. “That they might have success in their work they were to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by human might or human wisdom was the gospel to be proclaimed, but by the power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 17.

What do the following texts tell us about why Christ chose the ones He did to lead His church, as opposed to those whom many might deem as having the qualities needed for leadership? *Zeph. 2:3, Matt. 11:29, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15.*

We must be careful, though, to not make wrong assumptions about why Jesus chose the ones that He did. Jesus was not against the educated or learned class; He Himself displayed, at a young age (*Luke 2:46, 47*), a great deal of knowledge. It’s just that so often those with the most education, wealth, or power aren’t ready to humble themselves in the way that people, especially leaders, need to in order for the Lord to be able to use them. This is not always the case, of course; the Lord did use such men (think of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea; see also *Acts 6:7*). It just means that so often these types tend not to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Philippians 2:3. What traits are expressed here, and why are these traits so crucial, not just for a leader but for anyone who professes the name of Christ? How can we learn to possess these traits in our own lives?

What Jesus Left

Future generations testify regarding the success of previous efforts. Whenever those efforts generate lasting results, the principles underlying those accomplishments should be studied and replicated. Did Christ's disciple-making methodology produce significant outcomes?

Of course it did. It changed the world. None of us, in fact, would be reading this Bible study guide more than two thousand years later, were it not for Christ's success in His training of the early church leaders.

Read Acts 1. What does this first chapter in the formation of the early church show us about the need for God-ordained leaders? What were they looking for in a leader? (See vs. 22.) What can we take away from this need for ourselves as we seek the right leaders?

Jesus established His kingdom and exemplified the principles that would perpetuate its growth. Pioneering the pathway through darkness to sunrise, Christ selected leaders whose weaknesses were overshadowed by His strength because they completely depended upon Him. Although lightly esteemed by the religious leaders and academically deficient, they outshined the Pharisees where it counted: transparency, humility, dependence, and authenticity. How crucial that all of us, whatever our positions in the church, display such characteristics. Over time, those who possessed a substantial formal education and an elevated social standing became part of the church.

“As Christ's representatives the apostles were to make a decided impression on the world. The fact that they were humble men would not diminish their influence, but increase it; for the minds of their hearers would be carried from them to the Saviour, who, though unseen, was still working with them. The wonderful teaching of the apostles, their words of courage and trust, would assure all that it was not in their own power that they worked, but in the power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 22, 23.

What do you look for in church leaders? Why? What are the top three things that you want to see in them? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath and compare answers.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358; “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pp. 488–496; and “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*. “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; and “The Seven Deacons,” pp. 87–96, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“All over the field of Christ’s labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for truth. The time had come to send the tidings of His love to these longing hearts. To all these the disciples were to go as His representatives. The believers would be led to look upon them as divinely appointed teachers, and when the Saviour should thus be taken from them they would not be left without instructors.

“On this first tour the disciples were to go only where Jesus had been before them, and had made friends. Their preparation for the journey was to be of the simplest kind. Nothing must be allowed to divert their minds from their great work, or in any way excite opposition and close the door for further labor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 351.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss your answer to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from each other’s answers?
- 2 Read Acts 6:1–6. Why does the incident here reveal one of the reasons as to why the church needs good leaders?
- 3 Dwell more on this idea of a balance between experience and knowledge in the Christian life. Is it possible that different people will need different balances; that is, some people will put more of an emphasis on experience than they do on knowledge, while others will focus more on knowledge than they do experience? If so, how can we learn to be sensitive to these differences in our efforts to make disciples? How can we learn that perhaps what we need isn’t exactly what others will need? Also, look at this text: “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22). How does this text reveal the differences between knowledge and experience?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 6:12, 13*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that Christ's influence as an individual was directly related to the extent that His disciples embraced and embodied the values of God's kingdom.

Feel: Long to be effective in fulfilling his or her mission for Christ by being intentional about developing Christian characteristics in others.

Do: Mentor four or five individuals to be Christ's disciples in order to build up God's kingdom.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christ's Ministry on Earth Was Made More Effective by Those Whom He Chose as His Disciples.

A What characteristics did Jesus look for as He surrounded Himself with people who would help Him in His mission?

B While it's sometimes simpler just to "do it myself," why is it important to give others opportunities to serve as disciples?

II. Feel: Christ Was Always on the Lookout for People Who Were Open to Being His Disciples.

A What did Jesus know about the disciples that made them good candidates to lead His church after He ascended to heaven?

B Why didn't He choose more disciples that were cultured and educated?

III. Do: God Has Called Us to Make Disciples, as Well as to Be Disciples.

A What do you see as the major impediment to making disciples by being a mentor?

B What have you learned from the disciples who mentored you?

▶ **Summary:** No one is indispensable. When we're gone, somebody will take our place. Jesus left behind His disciples. Who are we training to help finish the work?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Luke 6:12, 13*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Just as Jesus called His first disciples based on factors that would serve His kingdom, He still ordains leaders who will build up His church.

Just for Teachers: You're a living, breathing example of the principles you will be discussing in this week's lesson. At some point someone recognized in you a talent for teaching. This talent may have been something you knew about for years, or it may have come to you as something of a surprise. No matter; here you are, preparing to teach this week's lesson.

So, here's your assignment, teacher: your job this week is to help the members of your class understand that they also have gifts that will enable them to provide leadership at some level to your church congregation.

Opening Activity/Discussion: Ask each of your class members: As a child, what did you hope to do for a living?

As you grew older, went to school, and thought about a future career, what career(s) did you consider?

What did you study? And how does that relate to what you're doing now?

Now that you've been doing what you're doing for a certain period of time, do you see a career change in your future? If so, to what?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: There's a great difference between Jesus calling the 12 disciples and having the church nominating committee choose people to fill different offices in the church. Or is there?

By the time Jesus chose the Twelve, He knew pretty well their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their personalities and characters. If we don't know our fellow church members as well, we ought to. After all, people should be paired with jobs that suit them. As they say about careers, "Find something you love to do, and you'll never work a day in your life!"

Bible Commentary

I. He Chose Twelve *(Review Luke 6:12–16 with your class.)*

Before Jesus chose the Twelve who would spend the most time with Him

in His earthly ministry, He spent the night in prayer.

We know *whom* He chose, but we don't know *why* He chose them. Were they the best candidates available? With the benefit of hindsight, we know that some of them took some less-than-positive personality traits into their roles as apostles. And why not? Very few of us have spotless personalities.

What bears mentioning is a definition of the word *apostle*. *Apostle* is a highly technical word. It means literally "one who is sent." Therefore, those named as apostles had all the authority of the One who sent them, of the One they represented. In a secular setting, it meant someone could go to the market, buy something, and sign the master's name. The apostle's signature was as good as the master's.

One other thing: an apostle had an effectiveness of one generation. In other words, Jesus could make Peter an apostle, but Peter couldn't name somebody else as an apostle of Jesus. Technically, the title "an apostle of Jesus Christ" couldn't be transferred beyond those first Twelve Apostles (with the exception of Matthias, in Acts 1).

Consider This: Some of the disciples—Peter, John, James, Thomas, Andrew, Matthew—are somewhat well-known to us. Others, like Simon the Zealot; Bartholomew; and James, son of Alphaeus, we only know by their names. Yet, for some reason, Jesus called them to join Him as His apostles. It just goes to show that not all of Christ's followers need to be well-known. James and John were known as the "sons of thunder" (*Mark 3:17*). Thomas has been known as a doubter (*John 20:27*). If someone were to describe you in one or two words, what would those words be? What makes you a likely candidate to be one of Christ's disciples (which you are)?

II. Guided by the Holy Spirit (*Review John 16:5–15 with your class.*)

When Jesus left His disciples and returned to heaven, He left them with something extremely valuable—the Holy Spirit. Jesus admitted that He didn't have time to tell His disciples everything they needed to know but that " 'when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth' " (*vs. 13, NIV*).

By providing the Holy Spirit, Jesus was allowing for His work to expand exponentially. Christ's earthly ministry was limited by time and space; He could be in only one place at a time. But His apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, could take His message to 12 times as many places as He could.

And Christ's followers ever since have accomplished much for God's kingdom by staying open to the influence of the Holy Spirit and establishing new frontiers for Christ. Through 2,000 years of Christian history, God

has used countless dedicated people with their wide variety of gifts. Look around: your contemporaries are part of that great heritage.

Consider This: Christ said the Holy Spirit would guide His followers into “all truth” (*vs. 13*). Does that mean the disciples still had more truth to learn? How about us? Is there still more truth for Christ’s disciples to discover today?

III. A Graceful Church (*Review Acts 4:32, 33 with your class.*)

Sometimes we point to the thousands who were baptized at Pentecost as an endorsement that the early Christian church was blessed by the Holy Spirit. But that’s like going to camp meeting, being blessed by the church’s best music and preaching, and expecting the same thing when you return to your local church.

Yes, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples as a rushing, mighty wind at Pentecost, and there were tokens of Holy Spirit power beyond that. But the real power of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated when, week after week, month after month, year after year, local church members use their spiritual gifts “to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (*vs. 33, NIV*).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the local church not only helps members identify and understand their spiritual gifts, it also keeps them motivated and encouraged as they use their gifts. How does your congregation reinforce and support its members in the use of their spiritual gifts?

Consider This: Some people are so preoccupied with the “latter rain” (*Joel 2:23*) that they don’t recognize the Spirit’s movement in thousands of congregations around the world. When the church is a sanctuary for all those beaten down by the tragedies and hardships of life, that’s tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit is active, because “much grace” (*Acts 4:33, NIV*) is upon them all.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 You know the leaders of your church’s congregation. Which ones do you look up to the most? Why?
- 2 Who else in your local congregation shows signs of some kind of spiritual leadership? What are those signs? What are you doing about it? What does your local church do to help its members identify their spiritual gifts?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This is not just a theoretical exercise. Every year (sometimes more often) people in your congregation look for qualified people to fill this position or that. How would this lesson improve that process in the future?

Life Application: You're starting a church from scratch. You have to make sure things get done.

First, identify the things the church ought to be doing (don't forget preaching, witnessing, ministries to children, the poor, and the elderly, et cetera). Second, decide who's going to do those things. Third, describe the process by which the Holy Spirit puts the right person with the right gifts and talents in the appropriate role.

How much of the process is guided by the experience of the first Christians? How much of the process is colored by how your congregation has always done things in the past?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: It's time to see how your vision of the church and its ministries translate to a first-century setting.

Activity: Jesus Chairs the Nominating Committee

Write this sample list of officers from a typical nominating committee on a flip chart or white board, if available (alternately, if supplies are not available, read the list and then discuss the activity questions that follow):

- Children's Sabbath School Coordinator
- Clerk
- Communication Director
- Deacon/Deaconess
- Elder
- Fellowship Dinner Coordinator
- Home and School Leader
- Personal Ministries Director
- Risk Management Coordinator
- Sabbath School Superintendent
- Sabbath School Secretary
- Social Committee Chair
- Treasurer

Ask: How essential is a list like this to the mission of our church? Does a list like this enhance or impede the mission of the church? What would Jesus do with a list like this? What would He add? What would He take away?