

Contents

1	An Overview of Discipleship — <i>December 29–January 4</i> —————	6
2	Discipleship Then and Now — <i>January 5–11</i> —————	14
3	Called to Discipleship by Jesus — <i>January 12–18</i> —————	22
4	Lessons From Would-be Disciples — <i>January 19–25</i> —————	30
5	Gender and Discipleship — <i>January 26–February 1</i> —————	38
6	Ethnicity and Discipleship — <i>February 2–8</i> —————	46
7	Preparation for Discipleship — <i>February 9–15</i> —————	56
8	Experiencing Discipleship — <i>February 16–22</i> —————	64
9	Following the Master: Discipleship in Action — <i>February 23–29</i> —	72
10	Discipleship Under Pressure — <i>March 1–7</i> —————	80
11	More Lessons in Discipleship — <i>March 8–14</i> —————	88
12	Mission and Commission — <i>March 15–21</i> —————	96
13	Patterns of Discipleship — <i>March 22–28</i> —————	104

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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
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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.

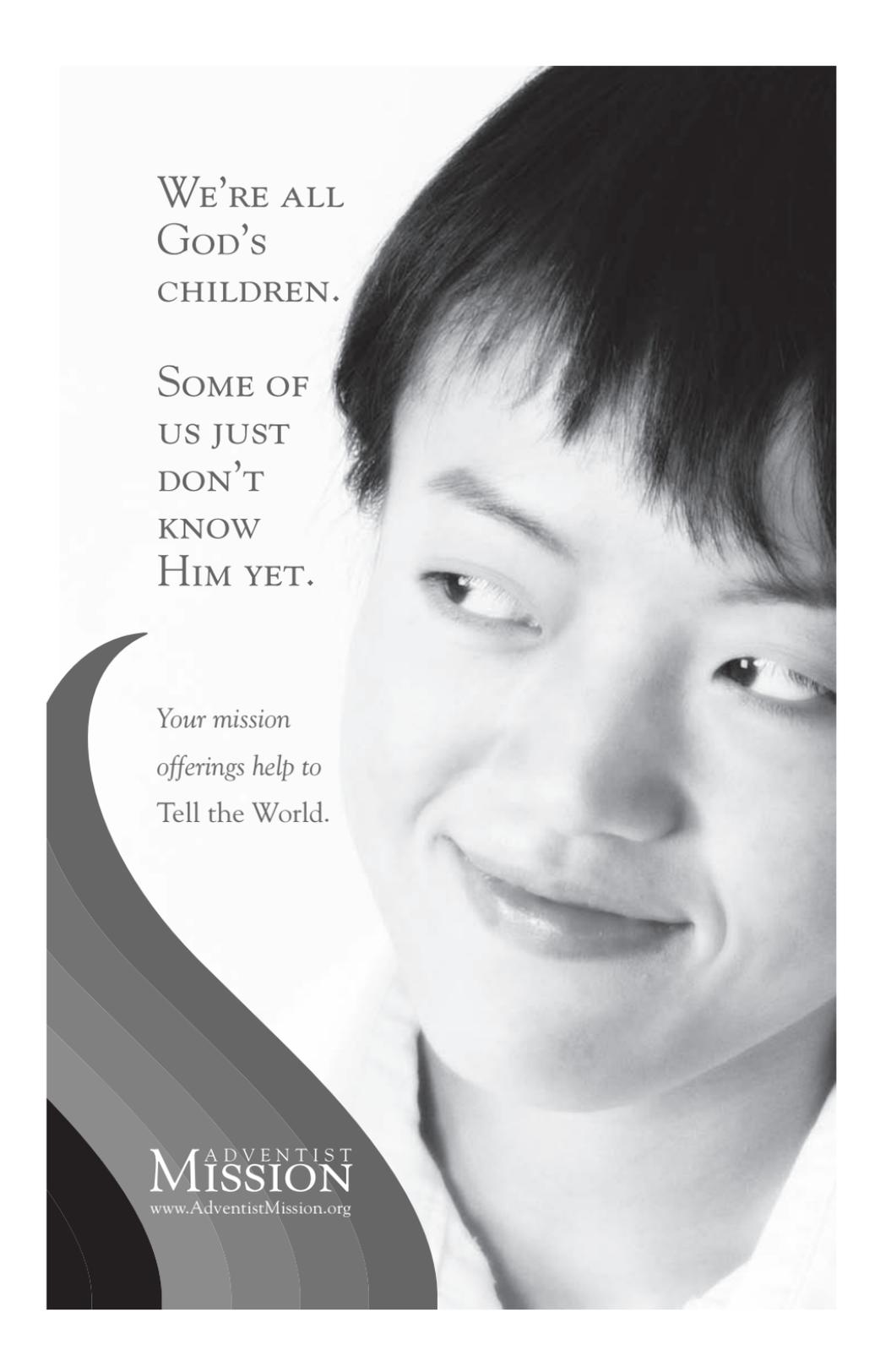
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