

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.

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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.

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