

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 folks 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 Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 7:1–5*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discuss how God judges us by how we judge others.

Feel: Cultivate a desire to be merciful instead of judgmental.

Do: Choose to leave the judging to God.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Judge Not

A What does it mean not to judge?

B What warning is Jesus giving in the Sermon on the Mount about judging that is essential for all disciples to understand? How does it teach us to follow Christ more successfully?

C What does the “plank” in our eye suggest happens to our vision the moment we shift our focus away from our own weakness to the weakness of others?

II. Feel: The Mercy of Jesus

A The Bible talks about two kinds of judging. One is condoned, the other condemned. What is the difference between a judgmental attitude and true discernment?

B How does faultfinding snuff out mercy?

III. Do: Taking Out the Plank

A What can we do to change a faultfinding spirit?

B Notice Jesus uses the word *brother*—not *enemy* or *stranger*—to refer to the person being judged. In light of this, how should we treat church members who have made mistakes?

C Jesus doesn’t say we can’t help remove the speck out of a brother’s eye. We just need to remove the larger obstruction in our own first. How does He help us to do that?

► **Summary:** Looking at others’ faults blinds us to their spiritual needs—and our own.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

What happens once an individual becomes a disciple? What is his or her commission? The answer can be found in Matthew 28:19, which tells us to go and make disciples of others, baptize them, and teach them.

Consider This: Is everyone called to be a disciple, or must individuals have certain qualifications to be called to discipleship? (*See Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15.*)

One of the functions of the church—the group of believers who have already responded to the call to follow Christ—is to go into all the world, to every nation and to all people, and make more disciples. I tell someone, and that someone tells someone else, and that someone tells another someone, and so on. . . .

But just like the first disciples of Christ, those who are called must go through a training process so that they can effectively reach others. The first step in this process is for an individual to recognize the call to discipleship. In many cases, people join the church and don't even realize that they have been called to discipleship—to service. They join a group of believers with the desire to be fed rather than the determination to feed. It is the responsibility of the church to help new believers understand that they have been called to service.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Bible Commentary

I. Fishers of Men

When Jesus called the first disciples, He said that He would make them fishers of men (*Matt. 4:19*). They were to go and draw others to Christ, making more disciples, who would then go and draw others to Christ. But before they could be effective, the disciples spent some time with Jesus, observing and learning just what it was that they were called to do.

C O N T I N U E D 

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 there? 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: What are some of the things the disciples learned by following and observing the Savior? (*Matt. 10:16; 10:37; 12:1, 2, 8–12; 17:20, 21; Acts 10:34, 35.*)

■ *What kind of programs can be implemented in the churches today to prepare individuals for discipleship?*

II. Freely Give

We learned earlier that becoming a part of the body of Christ—the church—is a call to service. We don’t become Christ’s followers just to receive; we become His followers to give—to give of our time, our talents, our prayers, and our resources. In the words of Jesus Himself, “freely you have received, freely give” (*Matt. 10:8*).

Consider This: Are all of Christ’s disciples expected to do the same things, or does the capacity in which we serve depend on our various talents and abilities? Is one person called to do one thing, while another person is called to do something else? Discuss your answers with the class. (*See Romans 12:4–8.*)

III. Prepare Ye the Way

“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (*Luke 10:1, NKJV*).

Just like the disciples of old, the followers of Jesus today are to prepare the way of the Lord. We are to proclaim to others that He is coming and to encourage all to be ready to meet Him when He does.

Consider This: Below is a list of some of the things the first disciples were called to do. How many of the things on the list are we called to do today? Are there things that the first disciples did that we cannot do today?

- Raise the dead (*Matt. 10:8*)
- Cast out demons (*Matt. 10:8*)
- Baptize and make new disciples (*Matt. 28:19*)
- Preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ (*Acts 4:31*)
- Heal the sick (*Acts 3:1–9*)
- Minister to the poor (*Gal. 2:10*)

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- Comfort and exhort one another (*Heb. 3:13*)
- Help the fatherless and widows (*James 1:27*)

► **STEP 3—Practice!****Thought Questions:**

1 Do you consider yourself a disciple of Christ? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

2 What can you personally do to prepare yourself for discipleship?

3 If you are not now active in your church or community, can you think of a ministry that you can join or personally initiate to become an active disciple?

4 Is it really necessary for those who follow Christ to go through a training process to prepare them for discipleship? If so, why? If not, explain your answer.

5 What criteria, if any, is used to determine when a new believer is ready for service in the church or in the field (community)?

Application Question:

Considering the following texts (*Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; John 8:31; John 15:8*), can you be a Christian without being a disciple?

Witnessing

Discipleship is a function of every Christian. Those who choose to follow Christ have been called not only to follow but also to serve. As we witness to others about the good news of the gospel—that Jesus came to save

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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 visit. 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, 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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

them—we must also tell them of their calling to become His disciples.

► STEP 4—Apply!

“He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” (*Luke 5:16, NKJV*). Christ is our perfect Example in all things. Prayer was His connection to His Father. It was His lifeline. In the same way, prayer is our connection to the heavenly Father, to the Savior. It is our lifeline. Without prayer, we have no power.

The disciples of old had Jesus in the flesh. We have Jesus by faith, through His indwelling Spirit. As we commune with Him in prayer, we become more cognizant of His continuing presence in our lives.

To be effective disciples, we need to have a connection with the Lord, who will enable us to do all of the things that a disciple is called to do (witness, baptize, heal, comfort, exhort, teach, preach, etc.). As we continue in prayer and the study of God’s Word, we will be continually in His presence.

Consider This: How much time do you spend in prayer? Why is prayer an essential part of discipleship? Bible study is also essential for the followers of Christ. How do Bible study and prayer go hand in hand? Can you have one without the other?

“ ‘If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them’ ” (*Matt. 18:19, 20, NKJV*).

Prayer is not only essential for each individual, but it is also necessary for the strength of the church as a whole. It is vital for members of the church family to come together as a group or in small bands to spend time in prayer. Jesus tells us that it is only through prayer and fasting that we will have faith that is strong enough to move mountains (*Matt. 17:20, 21*).

■ *Is fasting still necessary today? What does fasting teach us?*

■ *Are prayer, fasting, and Bible study integral parts of your church group? If so, give some examples. Show how these things prepare individuals, including new believers, for discipleship.*

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

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:

- 1 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?
- 2 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?
- 3 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?