

Following *the* Master: Discipleship *in* Action



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 8:14, 15; 10:34–37; 28:18–20; Luke 5:17–26.*

Memory Text: “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (*Mark 8:35–37, NKJV*).

This week’s lesson calls us to contemplate what is involved in discipleship. We want to look at discipleship in action. God has called us, but each must discern that call and follow its leadings. Thomas Cameron tells of a famous preacher who said he would have loved “to have blown the bellows for Handel, to have picked up the fallen brush for Michelangelo, to have held the spy-glass for Christopher Columbus, or to have carried Shakespeare’s bag. If men count it an honour to do some humble service for the world’s great heroes, what distinction lay in the opportunity of serving the Savior of men?”—A. Gordon Nasby, ed., *Treasury of the Christian World*, p. 327.

The Week at a Glance: What should be our motivation for service as disciples? What kind of opposition should we expect? What promises do we have as we embark on the work of discipleship?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 1.*

Service and Discipleship

Read Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29–31; and Luke 4:38, 39. What can we learn from this account about discipleship? In other words, regardless of the particular circumstances, what principles are seen here that should apply to all of us?

Though all three of these accounts record that Peter’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever, Luke alone says she was *suffering from a high fever*. This detail, some believe, is indicative of Luke’s status as a physician, especially because the phrase itself in the Greek language sounds like one of the technical classes the Greeks used to classify a specific fever.

Notice, too, that in all the accounts it is stressed that the disciples told Jesus about her being sick and that they asked for His help. We should assume, of course, that Jesus already knew all about her problem, yet He still let them tell Him, as well as ask for His divine healing. What lesson could we draw from this about our role as disciples? Is this really discipleship or just plain hospitality?

After Peter’s mother-in-law was healed, she did not shrink from service. On recovery, she found a houseful of tired and hungry guests who had been concerned for her. Although she could have, she did not claim exhaustion or fatigue from the malady. Rather, she immediately began to wait on them—she began to serve them. The Greek word used is akin to that meaning a “servant,” “minister,” or “deacon.” Inspired by Jesus, she began her service immediately upon recovery.

What has Christ done for you? What has He saved you from? What has been your response? In what ways should the whole Christian life be a response to what Jesus has done for us?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 5:17–26*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify how the paralytic's friends portray faith in action.

Feel: Sense a need to help remove obstacles that keep others from Jesus.

Do: Intercede for those whom sin has paralyzed with doubt or fear.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Faith in Action

A What insights does the story of the paralytic teach about discipleship in action?

B Jesus forgave the paralytic as a result of the faith of His friends. What does this tell us about the power of our intercession on behalf of others?

C After the paralytic was healed, he left glorifying God. How did his body and words serve as a powerful tool for witness and discipleship?

II. Feel: Faith That Moves God's Heart

A Unable to get past the crowd, the friends resorted to other means. How does this show we must persist, leaving nothing undone on behalf of those we are bringing to Jesus?

B What assurance can we offer those whose past sins paralyze them?

III. Do: Bringing Others to Jesus

A The friends had to break through the roof before they could lower the paralytic. What barriers can we break down so others can reach Jesus?

B The friends lowered their friend into Jesus' *presence*. How can we help lift up those to Jesus who cannot lift themselves?

▶ **Summary:** Jesus calls us to bring into His presence those too paralyzed by past sins to reach out in faith to Him and seek forgiveness on their own.

Jesus and the Paralytic

A well-known story is found in Luke 5:17–26, the story of Jesus healing the paralytic. From it we can learn some important lessons about discipleship in action.

Read verse 17. What powerful and important point can be found there? What message of warning should it have for us, as well?

Here they were, leaders, teachers of the law, coming from all over, apparently to hear Jesus. The text says that at the time, the “power of the Lord was present to heal them.” In other words, Jesus was there; the power of God was there; help, healing, and salvation were there. The only problem was that self, sin, and pride got in their way. What a powerful warning to us all.

Meanwhile, in this story, we can see discipleship in action. First, there were those who brought the paralytic to Jesus. Notice how hard they worked. Unable to get past the crowd, they had to resort to other means. Think about how desperate they were for their friend. How easily they could have given up! Notice, too, how Jesus acknowledged their faith. Whether they had personally been healed by Jesus, the texts do not say. What we do know is that their works truly revealed their faith. They acted as disciples in the sense of bringing someone needy to Jesus.

After the paralytic was healed, he left glorifying God. No doubt his body and his words were a powerful tool for witness and discipleship (*see also vs. 26*).

Meanwhile, as all this is going on, the leaders fulminated in darkness over Jesus’ *blasphemies*. They let their religion, faith, and teaching get in the way of a living experience with Jesus. What a lesson to us all!

In what ways can we, even as professed disciples of Christ, let things get in the way of the Lord working in our lives, or even in the lives of others? What are some of the things that we harbor in our hearts that can blind us to the power of God? Most important, how can we get rid of them?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

After Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, He was brought before the council of the high priest to be questioned. Peter waited outside in the high priest's courtyard, hoping to be unnoticed. A couple of people pointed him out, but Peter denied having any association with Jesus. Then someone said to the frightened disciple, “ ‘Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you’ ” (*Matt. 26:73, NKJV*). Here is Peter trying to deny the Lord, but his efforts are foiled by his own speech.

The disciples of Christ are a reflection of Him. They walk as He walked, talk as He talked, and do as He did. He taught, He preached, He healed, He fed, He comforted, He forgave. Jesus was a Man of action. And His followers will be men and women of action, too. (*See Matt. 4:23.*)

Consider This: As a follower of Jesus, “What must I do?” *John 8:31; John 15:4, 5, 8; 1 Cor. 13:4–7; Gal. 5:22, 23.*

According to the verses above, those who *abide* in Christ are His disciples. We abide in Christ through the power of His indwelling Spirit. And abiding in Him brings about certain actions. In the Bible these actions are called fruits. They are actions prompted by love. This love can exist in our hearts only through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Bible Commentary

I. “If You Love Me”

John 14:15 is expressed this way in the NIV, “ ‘If you love me, you will obey what I command.’ ” Those who choose to follow Christ do so because they love Him. And *if* we truly love Him, we *will* keep His commandments. It's automatic. The things we do will be behaviors that are induced by the love we have in our hearts for the Lord.

C O N T I N U E D 

“To Send Fire on the Earth” (*Matt. 10:34–37, Luke 12:49–53*)

Christianity is regarded most often in peaceful terms. At Jesus’ birth, the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (*Luke 2:14*). Even more important, Christianity advocates love, not hate, even for our enemies. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (*Matt. 5:9*). How, then, do we understand what Jesus is saying in these verses?

“Jesus here dispels the mistaken opinion that some of the disciples apparently had, that the message they were to bear would result in nothing but harmony. They were not to be surprised, in their house-to-house work . . . , if differences arose as a result of their ministry. . . . When a [person] accepts Christ his closest friends often turn out to be [the] most bitter and relentless enemies. This is often true, not only in heathen lands, but also in Christian lands and among professed Christians who practice a form of religion but know little of anything of its power to transform the life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 379, 380.

From your experience as a Christian, and from what you know of Jesus through other texts, what do you believe Jesus is telling us here, and why are these words so important for discipleship? *See also Matt. 10:24, 25.*

The important point to remember is that following Jesus will cost us big, one way or another. If it does not, then perhaps something is wrong. Maybe we are deceiving ourselves. In the end, we must realize that our witness and life of discipleship, of discipleship in action, can lead to dissension and division among even those to whom we are the closest. It does not always have to be that way, but Jesus wants us to realize that it can, and not to be surprised by it when it does.

What has following Christ cost you, at least in terms of relationships with others? What have you learned in your own experience that could help you disciple someone else who is struggling because his or her faith has, as Jesus said it would, brought division into their life?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

In Romans 13:9 the commandments are summed up with the expression, “You shall love you neighbor as yourself.” When we love others the way that Jesus wants us to love, the love in us will move us into action. We do for others because we love them, in the same way that we obey the Lord because we love Him.

II. Qualities of Love

The attributes of love or the fruits (actions) of the indwelling Spirit are shown in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 and Galatians 5:22, 23. These two passages parallel each other. The qualities spoken of in these verses are reflections of the character of Christ.

Expressing the characteristics of Christ requires some action or actions from those who follow Him. You must do something to be long-suffering, to be gentle, or to resist being easily provoked. Expressing kindness involves some kind of action. Even if it is simply a smile or a glance. Jesus often expressed kindness with a simple touch.

Actions of love—godly love—do not always come so easily to the natural man or woman. Our human bodies, minds, and spirits are weakened by sin. That is why Jesus promised to send us a Helper (*see John 14:16, NKJV*). The Holy Spirit provides the desire and the power to do good.

Consider This: In many cases the Holy Spirit waits for us to call on Him for help in times of need (*see Luke 5:18, 19; John 15:7*). Can you think of a time in your personal experience when you may have asked for the Holy Spirit’s help?

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

- 1 There are many “works” or actions that we as disciples are familiar with, such as visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, or helping those in

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The Worth of Our Souls

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (*Mark 8:35–37, NKJV*).

A magazine article told about a special high school where students were doing exceptional work. Their level of academic achievement far exceeded that of most students in the same age bracket anywhere else in the country. These kids, young, ambitious, and bright, seemed destined to go places, to be, by the world’s standards, true success stories. The magazine then quoted one of these young people, who said: “We’re doing all this in order to beat death.”

To beat death? He is going to need more than good grades and a good job to do that.

The fact is that no matter who we are, or what we achieve in this life, sooner or later death comes, sooner or later everything we are ends up in a grave somewhere. And how long do we live, at best? For most of us, not even a hundred years, often not even close. And then it is all gone. What can it mean? What is the purpose of it all, if it all ends in death? What kind of legacy will we leave behind? Thousands of years ago, Solomon mused over these same issues (*see Ecclesiastes 1, 2*), and concluded that this life, in and of itself, with all its toils and troubles, was all *vanity*, from a Hebrew word meaning “breath,” “vapor.”

With this in mind, read over the texts for today, thinking about them in the context of this week’s lesson, on discipleship in action. Ask yourself, in light of what Jesus is saying here, “What kind of life should I be living? What does it mean to lose my life for the sake of the gospel? What possibly could be worth my own soul? And what role does my discipling of others play in what Jesus is saying to me?” In other words, what could it cost us here, in this life, to be actively involved in discipleship? What changes do you need to make in order to be truly a disciple of Christ?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

need. How do the attributes of love apply to these ministries? (*See 1 Cor. 13:4–7; Gal. 5:22, 23.*)

2 Is it possible to do the “actions” of a disciple without being motivated by love?

Application Questions:

1 Love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (*1 Cor. 13:6, NKJV*). How can you apply this to your personal lifestyle?

2 What actions in your everyday life show that you are a disciple?

Witnessing

The impressions that are left by a person when he is gone could have a great influence on the people he leaves behind. We often reflect on the attitudes and actions of people we’ve known or have come in contact with when we are no longer with them. This is why it is so important for us to live life as a witness for Christ in every word and action. Once we are gone, whether in life or death, whatever is done, is done. What kind of impressions should we leave with others?

► STEP 4—Apply!

Earlier we spoke of loving your neighbor as yourself (*Rom. 13:9*). This is a very familiar verse, but how do we apply this to our personal, everyday lives? The first question we should ask ourselves—as someone once asked Jesus—is, who is my neighbor?

Neighbor in this context refers to anyone that we may come in contact with—a relative, a friend, a coworker, a fellow church member, the person who lives next door, a complete stranger whom we pass in the street.

The next question is, how can I love someone else, as I love myself?

Consider This: Some of the definitions for the word *as* in *The American Heritage College Dictionary* are: “to the same extent or degree,” or “equally,” or “in the same manner or way that.”—Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997, p. 78.

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“Go Therefore and Make Disciples”

One of the greatest sections on the work of discipleship, on discipleship in action, is found in Matthew 28:18–20. Read over the verses. Look at all the verbs there: *go, make, baptize, teach* (NKJV). Disciples should be making more disciples. It is as simple as that.

Read through the verses again, focusing on what Jesus said in the beginning, about all authority (or power) being given to Him in heaven and in earth (see Luke 1:32, Acts 10:36, Eph. 1:20, Heb. 1:13). Why are those words so important for all who are involved in the work of making disciples?

Notice, too, what Jesus says is involved in this work. They are to teach *all nations*. No exclusivity here, no ethnic, gender, or national boundaries. The death of Christ was for all humanity, everywhere (Rom. 5:17–19, Heb. 2:9); hence, it only makes sense that the gospel commission would be for all humanity, as well (Rev. 14:6, 7).

Notice carefully that Jesus tells them to teach all nations. Where is His emphasis?

Again, as we can see, discipleship is action. Those who become disciples are those who obey, who do the things that Jesus commanded. With these words, Jesus utterly destroys any notion that salvation is purely an intellectual assent to certain doctrinal truths. Though that is certainly part of what it means to be a disciple, it does not end there. Disciples are those who follow Jesus, and we follow Jesus by obeying Him—and we obey Him, not in order to be saved but because we already are saved in Him.

Jesus’ promise is that He will be with us until the end of the world. How have you experienced in your own life the reality of that promise? Dwell on the evidences of Christ’s presence with you. Write and/or recite a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for what Jesus has done and is doing in your life.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Let's substitute the word *as* in Romans 13:9 with these definitions:

1. You shall love your neighbor to the same extent or to the same degree that you love yourself.
2. You shall love your neighbor equally with yourself. Or, you shall love your neighbor and yourself, equally.
3. You shall love your neighbor in the same manner or in the same way as you love yourself.

The real truth of this verse tells us that we should treat others as *good* as we treat ourselves. And, in most cases, *I* will make sure that my own needs are met. And *I* want the best for myself. Another way to say that is, *I* will *give* myself the best. Or, *I* should give myself the best.

It's not a bad thing to treat yourself well. In fact, that is what God expects of us. Not to be self-centered or self-absorbed, but in the natural processes of life, we must take care of ourselves. And we should do that in the best possible way. And this is how we should also treat (love) others—in the best possible way.

If we don't treat ourselves right, we will not treat others right. If we don't love ourselves, we cannot love others. And if we don't think well of ourselves, we will have a very hard time thinking good thoughts of others.

■ *How can you think well of yourself but not think too highly of yourself? How can you love yourself and still put others first?*

■ *What actions do you show toward your enemies or to those who are unkind to you?*

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 379–381, 746–750; Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 350–358; “Who Is the Greatest,” pp. 433–436, in *The Desire of Ages*; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Discipleship and the Cross,” pp. 85–104, in *The Cost of Discipleship*; Mark 16:15–20, John 14–17.

“The Saviour bade His disciples not to hope that the world’s enmity to the gospel would be overcome, and that after a time its opposition would cease. He said, ‘I came not to send peace, but a sword.’ This creating of strife is not the effect of the gospel, but the result of opposition to it. Of all persecution the hardest to bear is variance in the home, the estrangement of dearest earthly friends. But Jesus declares, ‘He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.’” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 357.

“Jesus sanctioned the binding claims of the fifth commandment and rebuked any attempt to escape the obligations of children toward their parents. . . . Nevertheless, love for one’s parents must never stand in the way of obedience to God in every particular, should the two be in conflict. Love to God and service for Him are to be the supreme rule of life, ‘the first and great commandment’ . . . ; but ‘the second’ table of the Decalogue, which contains the fifth commandment, is ‘like’ the first in nature and importance.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 380.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Do you know of anyone suffering now directly because of their commitment to Jesus? If so, how can you help? What can you as an individual, as a Sabbath School class, or as a church, do to bring some relief?
- 2** Dwell more on the texts for Wednesday’s lesson. What important message is Jesus giving us here? Bring your thoughts to class, and as a class talk about what it means to lose your life for the sake of the gospel. What can you learn from each other’s experiences?
- 3** This week’s lesson was on discipleship in action. What is going on in your own church in the area of discipleship? What can you as a class do to help the church as a whole take a more active role in this important work? For example, what is being done to help disciple new members?