

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 Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Mark 1:40–45*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Recall that Jesus is the pattern for compassion.

Feel: Sense the compassion Jesus felt for outcasts.

Do: Emulate Jesus' compassion toward all.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus, the Pattern of Compassion

A Jesus was “moved with compassion” at the leper’s request for healing. In Greek the word *compassion* means someone moved to the very depths of his being. What do Jesus’ actions tell us this kind of compassion means?

B Mark uses the word *moved*, to describe the compassion Jesus felt, turning love into an action that flowed out from Him in a healing touch. Why must true compassion, which starts as a feeling, end up in action? Conversely, why must every action spring from love?

II. Feel: Rooted in the Gospel

A What does Jesus say to the leper before touching Him? What does His willingness and readiness reveal about the need to be ready to help others that come to us?

B Jesus didn’t have to touch the leper to heal Him. He healed others at a distance. Why was touch so important in this case? What does it teach us about the importance of human contact and of treating those we help with dignity and respect?

III. Do: Following the Pattern

A How has compassion—either helping someone else or being the recipient of compassion—affected your life?

B What does Jesus’ example tell us about dealing with others?

C How can we turn compassion into action?

▶ **Summary:** To be a disciple of Jesus means to live His life of compassion.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

The best way to teach this lesson is to present each day’s topic as a significant attitude or practice that Jesus brought to His ministry and (to the point) that shaped His training of the disciples. After a whole quarter of studying discipleship, it may be a good time to remind your class that being a disciple isn’t just a matter of a single, one-time decision to believe in Jesus but a lifelong commitment to following Him. The attitudes and practices of discipleship must be remembered, renewed, and practiced throughout one’s life. Compassion and forgiveness, seeking the marginalized and including the ostracized, encouraging diversity and acceptance, participating in the work of ministry and prayer—none of these automatically falls into place at the moment of conversion. Each requires intention, discipline, and lifelong self-examination.

Consider This: The Greek philosopher Socrates famously said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” How can we help Christians to be willing to examine their lives in order to go beyond simple professions of belief and lists of doctrines to actually living and acting like Christ?

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Bible Commentary

I. Compassion and Forgiveness

The Greek word used in Matthew 14:14 and elsewhere concerning Jesus’ compassion originates in the word for entrails or organs (*splanchna*, pronounced SPLANK-na). In the form in which it is used of Jesus’ feelings, (*splanchnizomai*, pronounced splank-NEEZ-oh-my), it means literally that His organs were convulsed by what He saw—that He was emotionally

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

moved so deeply as to have physical symptoms. This, then, is no casual pity—a shake of the head and a click of the tongue and walking on—but a gut-wrenching experience of empathy and love that spurred Jesus to help.

II. The Ostracized and Marginalized

Though Mahatma Gandhi was not a Christian, he once advised some Christian missionaries with regard to their attitude toward the poor and marginalized. “It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2,000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you. . . . It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words.”

Consider This: We Adventists have a number of distinctive teachings that we articulate to the world. Do our lives speak as clearly as our words?

III. Diversity and Discrimination (*Read Acts 17:24–26.*)

“This pairing of one God with one species implies that the ‘many’ who physically descended from common parents . . . share an inherent religious sensibility, whether this God is recognized or not.”—*The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X, p. 247.

Consider This: Do you agree with this statement? If so, what are the implications of our sharing a “common religious sensibility” with Muslims, Buddhists, even atheists, who don’t recognize the Christian God? (*Compare Romans 1:18–20.*)

IV. The Church

“[The church] is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 12.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: How does your being a player in “the theater of His grace” equip you to assist your pastor in spreading the gospel?

V. The Prayer Factor

Jesus had only about three years in which to do the most important activities that anyone had ever done in the history of the world. One would assume that He would work continually to get it all done. Yet, the striking thing about Jesus (as pointedly illustrated in this lesson’s texts) is that the busier He got, the heavier His responsibilities; the bigger the decisions facing Him, the more likely He was to take time for prayer.

Consider This: When faced with a major decision or crisis, how likely are you to spend thoughtful, contemplative time in prayer, preparing for it?

► STEP 3—Practice!

Perhaps your Sabbath School class could be the catalyst for incorporating discipleship attitudes and practices into church life. Consider the following ideas and attempt to interest your class in doing one of them.

- Look around for the people in your congregation who don’t stand out from the crowd. Make a plan for your class members to pointedly make their acquaintance. Organize a Sabbath lunch for people to whom others rarely pay much attention. (This must be done, of course, with diplomacy and care.)
- Ask your pastor or elder if your class can plan a “Diversity Sabbath.” You may invite someone of a different ethnic or national background to speak to you. Or interview an immigrant, or a handicapped person,

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to find out how it feels to be different from most others in the culture.

- Interview a pastor about sharing ministry responsibilities with laypeople. What areas of work would he or she most like help with? Is he or she willing to train people in these areas? Ask your pastor whether class members can join him or her to do visits to the hospital or shut-ins, for example, or while giving someone a Bible study.
- Organize your class as a prayer team to pray for one specific event in the life of your congregation (an evangelistic crusade, a church-school event, a mission trip), or a specific person (a needy or ill person, a missionary, a church worker). Several weeks later, evaluate your experience. Did prayer make a difference?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

It is a sad fact that we Christians have not done as well as we ought to on any of the attitudes and practices highlighted in this week's lesson. Historically, Christians have been tragically discriminatory and excluding. Some congregations appear no better at forgiveness and compassion, even to one another, than non-Christians. The work of ministry is in most churches left almost entirely to the professional clergy. And we are prone to acting first and praying afterward. In short, the way we Christians "do church" appears to militate against the kind of discipleship Jesus encouraged. These problems must be pointedly and deliberately corrected if we are to succeed in being and making disciples.

Why, when we have so gladly accepted Jesus, have we done so poorly on the tasks of discipleship? While we may affirm John 3:16, if our Christianity goes no further than our saying we believe in Jesus—if we don't back up our beliefs with inclusive, compassionate, prayerful, participatory discipleship—our profession of faith is relatively meaningless. James correctly observed that you cannot divorce faith from actions: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? . . . Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (*James 2:14, 17, NIV*).

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?