

# Discipleship<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—MAY 30

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Exodus 18:13–27; Matthew 4:19; Matthew 9:9; Mark 3:13–19; Mark 8:31–38; Romans 8:18.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘When you bear a lot of fruit, it brings glory to my Father. It shows that you are my disciples [followers]’ ” (John 15:8, NIV).

**IT IS IMPORTANT** that we understand to the best of our abilities what God has shown to us. But perfect knowledge of all doctrine (church beliefs) is not required for salvation.<sup>2</sup> God has commanded us to do all the things that we have been taught to do. To be a disciple is to be a lifelong learner and follower of the Master.

What is a disciple? *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* describes it as “one who follows . . . the teaching of another; for example, a public teacher. In the New Testament ‘disciple’ is the translation of the Greek word *mathētēs* . . . which means *manthanō*, ‘to learn.’ It also means ‘a learner,’ ‘a pupil,’ ‘a follower.’ ” —Page 288, adapted. Let us look a little closer at what it means to be a disciple.

**A QUICK LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** A disciple is a lifelong learner. When Christ calls us, we are to follow, wherever He leads, no matter how much suffering is involved. Discipleship involves suffering because it involves sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> The rewards for discipleship seem rather small. But when we fully understand the meaning of Christ, we realize it is worth suffering for, no matter the cost here and now.

1. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

2. salvation—God's plan of saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

3. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as time or money or a life to save or help someone or something.

**SUNDAY—MAY 31****FOLLOWERS AND LEADERS  
(Exodus 18:13–27)**

**What principles of leadership can we find in Exodus 18:13–27? What can we learn from them about leaders and followers?**

All people are equal in the eyes of God. But there are major differences in the way we are. Some have the gift of leadership. Every organization<sup>4</sup> within our society would soon fold up if there were no leaders. Even in heaven, there appears to be a clear difference in roles: for example, there are angels and archangels! When God called His people out of Egypt, He chose leaders. When God organized a sanctuary service,<sup>5</sup> He made sure there would be good leadership. God worked through judges, prophets (spokespersons for God), kings, and so forth.

But leaders are useless without followers who are willing to accept their leadership. They need a group of close workers who are willing to learn from their leader and to help them reach goals.

**Jesus called 12 disciples. Read Mark 3:13–19 for a version of His choice of 12 men. According to Mark 2:18, what other examples of**

**teachers who surrounded themselves with disciples do we find in a Gospel<sup>6</sup> story?**

There was nothing unusual in the fact that Jesus had a group of disciples. It was normal for teachers to have a following of “interns [trainees; learners].” What was interesting was the kind of men Jesus chose. Jesus saw some good in these men that most of us would not have noticed! What also is wonderful was their quick willingness to leave their daily business and follow Jesus of Nazareth. They clearly saw something unusual in this Man that even most of His own relatives had not seen yet.

The Twelve Disciples are a very special group. But there are many others who are “disciples” too.



**Jesus saw something good in the disciples that most people would not have noticed.**

4. organization—the leaders who oversee the members and business of a large group of people, such as a worldwide church.

5. sanctuary service—the offering of animal blood as payment for sin. The animal blood was offered in place of the sinner's blood. This service represented Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died, this law was not needed.

6. Gospel—one of the first four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

There are some people who show an attitude (thought or feeling) against leadership. But there are also some people who follow their leaders blindly. Which group is in your society? How do you keep a proper balance?

### MONDAY—JUNE 1

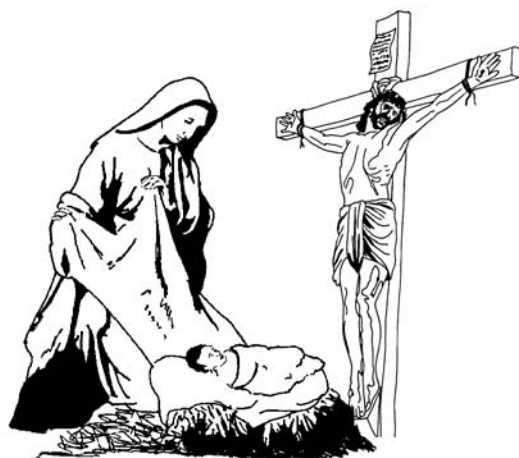
#### SIGNS OF DISCIPLESHIP: OBEDIENCE AND LOYALTY (Matthew 4:19)

Jesus did not just share knowledge with His disciples. It must have been a great honor to hear Jesus explain Bible verses and answer many questions from the spiritual leaders of His day. But they quickly noticed what others also understood. Jesus taught with more authority (power) than the experts of His time. He separated ideas and rules from the real-life issues that God's Word addresses. But there was more the disciples needed to learn. They also needed to learn to surrender (give) their own will to God's will.

**What principles (rules) of discipleship can we find in Matthew 4:19; Matthew 9:9; and Mark 8:34?**

“Yes, follow Jesus through evil as well as through good report. Follow Him in making friends with the poorest and most friendless people. Follow Him in forgetting self and getting involved in acts of self-denial and

self-sacrifice to do others good. When attacked, do not fight back. Show love and mercy for sinners. Jesus did not hold His life dear but gave it up for us all. Follow Him from the lowly manger [cradle] to the cross. He was our Example.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*<sup>7</sup> for the Church, volume 2, page 178.



Jesus was our Example from the manger to the cross.

**According to John 6:60–70, what did Peter do when many followers deserted Jesus?**

Not all disciples stayed with Jesus. Many turned away. Peter spoke for the disciples when declaring their loyalty. With the exception of Judas, they proved themselves to be faithful followers. They became leaders in the early church. But they had moments of serious doubt and discouragement when their Master was taken prisoner and killed. Their experience gives us great comfort. Many of us have had

<sup>7</sup>. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

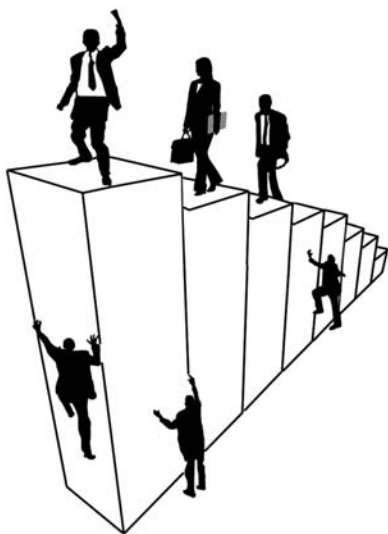
moments of doubt. But as in the case of the loyal disciples, we should never let our weaknesses overcome us.

**If someone were to ask you, “How loyal are you to Jesus?” how would you answer, and why? What proof do you give of your loyalty to Him?**

## TUESDAY—JUNE 2

### SACRIFICE (Matthew 20:20–23)

Most of us like to be with important people. Meeting a government leader or a famous person makes interesting conversation. Knowing someone important, or even knowing someone who knows someone important, seems to give us some glory. People like to climb up the social ladder rather than remain at the bottom. Jesus’ disciples were the same.



**People like to climb up the social ladder rather than remain at the bottom.**

**How did some disciples (and their relatives) hope that following Jesus would improve their social standing? What was Jesus’ answer in Matthew 20:20–23 and Mark 10:35–41? Read also Isaiah 14:12–14.**

Jesus did not promise His disciples wealth and high standing in society. Instead, He prepared them for a different kind of life: following Him is a costly business.

**What do you learn from Mark 8:31–38 about the cost of discipleship?**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young German thinker and leader who was murdered by the Nazis in 1945. In his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he points out that God’s grace<sup>8</sup> does not come cheap. And following Christ is not an easy thing to do. It will involve suffering. Just as Christ said that He “must suffer,” we must too. If we want to be like Jesus in His life, we also must be like Him in His suffering and death. “To accept the cross fully is not a terrible thing. No, it is the suffering which is the fruit of a special loyalty to Jesus Christ. When the suffering of the cross comes, it is not an accident, but a must. . . . Only a man . . . totally dedicated to discipleship can experience the true meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning. All he has to do is to pick it up. There is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself.

8. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

There is no need for him to chase after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him. This is a cross planned and chosen by God.”—Adapted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1965), page 98.

**What is the cross that God has given you to carry? What has following Christ cost you? If your answer is “Nothing, really,” maybe you need to take a closer look at how closely you are following the Master.**

### WEDNESDAY—JUNE 3

#### THE REWARDS OF DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 9:57, 58)

Jesus left His disciples with no doubt that following Him would require sacrifice. He did not try to hide anything from them as to what they should expect.

**According to Luke 9:57, 58 and John 15:18–25, what did Jesus promise as far as a short-term reward for following Him as a disciple? What certain “promise” in John 21:15–19 did Jesus have for Peter? What does this tell us about the cost of following Christ?**

The disciples, except Judas, later became the apostles. From the first chapters of the book of Acts, it is clear that these men had learned

many lessons. They had been with Jesus. Now, with the power of the Spirit, they were able to deal with suffering and attacks against them. We cannot totally be sure about the details. But we have good reason to believe the history of the early church that all apostles died for Jesus Christ. All suffered cruel deaths, except John. But John’s imprisonment on Patmos was not a vacation. John also was a “follower of Jesus . . . in patiently enduring the suffering that comes to those who belong to his Kingdom” (Revelation 1:9, TEV).

**According to John 10:10 and Romans 8:28–39, what part of discipleship goes beyond all suffering that might come our way as we follow Christ?**

Those who follow Christ will face many challenges. If they stay loyal to their Master, they will be able to deal with whatever happens. They will have something that is important beyond words. Jesus gives them His peace, which is unlike the imperfect and short-term kind of peace the world offers (John 14:27). It is the peace that goes beyond all understanding (Philippians 4:7). That peace is the foundation of the full life that Christ gives to His disciples (John 10:10). No matter what troubles and temptations we have, this is the kind of life that goes beyond the satisfying level of those who choose to live without Christ.

And, even more so, faithful followers

of Christ have the assurance (promise) of eternal (forever) life. They have the assurance that whatever they struggle with now cannot be compared with the promise of eternity (life without end) that waits for them.

**What hope and comfort can you receive from Romans 8:18 for yourself? Why should it tell you to never, never give up?**

#### THURSDAY—JUNE 4

### THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST (John 20:28)

Being a disciple suggests that we are willing to follow and serve. Our relationship to others usually finds expression in the manner in which we address them.

**According to John 20:28 and 1 Corinthians 16:22, what was one of the titles given to Christ by His followers?**

The New Testament uses many names for Jesus. He is called the Son of God but also the Son of Man or the Messiah. Hundreds of times Jesus is spoken of as the Lord. This word, at first, was quite broad in its meaning. But it became an important word for the early Christians. The Roman emperor claimed that he was a god and wanted to be addressed as the lord. To confess that Christ was their true Lord rather than the Roman

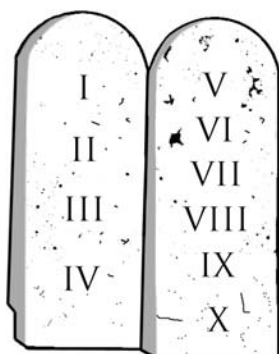
Caesar was not just giving an opinion. It really could be a matter of life and death. Those who lived in the Roman era should only have one *Kyrios* (lord). To use this title to mean any person other than the emperor could end in prison and death.

So, it required faith and faithful discipleship to call Jesus “Lord.” But today it is a serious thing to call Jesus our Lord and truly mean it. If He is our Lord, He is the Ruler over our whole life, over all that we say and do.

**What important part of Matthew 7:22, 23 and Luke 6:46 shows how serious it is to call Jesus “Lord”?**

It is one thing to call Jesus our Lord and our God and to profess faith, love, and loyalty to Him. It is quite another thing to truly live it. Jesus was clear: our faithfulness to Him will be shown by our obedience to Him and to His commands. In fact, the word for *iniquity* (sin) in Matthew 7:23 means “lawlessness.” No question, a true follower of Jesus, a true disciple, will obey His commandments (John 14:15).

**Imagine how different our church would be if everyone who claimed to follow Christ were truly disciples of Jesus. What differences would we find? While you cannot change others, what difference could you make if your life were dedicated to Jesus’ will?**



A true follower of Jesus will obey His commands.

## FRIDAY—JUNE 5

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** For comments on the calling of the disciples, read Ellen G. White, “‘We Have Found the Messiah,’ ” pages 132–143, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“It was not enough for the disciples of Jesus to be taught about the nature of God’s kingdom. What the disciples needed was a change of heart that would bring them to follow the principles of the Bible. Calling a little child to Him, Jesus put him in the middle of a group of children. Then He held the little one tenderly in His arms and said, ‘You need to change and become like little children. If you [do not], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ [Matthew 18:3, NIV]. The simple trust, the unselfishness, and the love of a little child are the values that Heaven wants. These are the character traits<sup>9</sup> of real greatness.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 437.

9. character traits—qualities, such as being honest and faithful, that make a person who he or she is.

10. human—having to do with men, women, or children.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ As a class, go over the question of what it costs to be a true follower of Christ. Ask those who are willing to discuss it about what it cost them to follow the Lord. Ask, too, why they believe it was worth it.

❷ What can we do to help the new believers among us become better disciples of Christ? Why is being a disciple so much more than just accepting a number of doctrines, or even more than just believing that Jesus died for your sins?

❸ We are called to be disciples of Jesus. But on the human<sup>10</sup> level, we also have role models. Is it wise to consider ourselves also disciples of a human leader we respect? If so, how could we do this while at the same time not forgetting to whom we owe our true loyalty?

❹ How can we fight the sinful human desire for more self-glory, more praise, more power, and more honor? Why do such desires not agree with all that it means to be a disciple of Christ?

**SUMMARY:** To be a disciple of Christ is very serious. It requires a lot of courage and a willingness to follow the Lord, no matter how much suffering we have in our lives. To be a disciple of Christ means to live by faith, to trust God even in the hardest of times. It means to be willing to die to self and live for the good of others and for the glory of God.