

Discipling *the* “Ordinary”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 2:21–28; Matt. 15:32–39; 16:13–17; Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; James 2:1–9.*

Memory Text: “Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him” (*Mark 1:16–18*).

Christ’s death was the great equalizer: it showed that we all are sinners in need of God’s grace. In light of the Cross, ethnic, political, economic, and social barriers crumble. Sometimes, though, in our soul winning, we forget that crucial truth, and we especially seek to win those who might be deemed “honorable” or “great” in the eyes of the world.

Not so with Jesus, who saw the meaninglessness and emptiness of worldly greatness and honor. In fact, in many cases, it was the most “successful” people—the favorably positioned Pharisees, the wealthy Sadducees, and the Roman aristocracy—who troubled Him the most. In contrast, the “ordinary” people—carpenters, fishermen, farmers, housewives, shepherds, soldiers, and servants—generally thronged and embraced Him.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 8.

Humble Beginnings

Read Luke 2:21–28, Mark 6:2–4, Leviticus 12:8. What do these verses tell us about the economic class into which Jesus was born? How would that class have influenced His ministry?

Joseph and Mary’s purification offering clearly indicated their economically poor background. This tradition sprang from the Mosaic legislation recorded in Leviticus 12:8, and it required that a lamb be brought for this offering. However, a compassionate exemption had been provided for impoverished people. Turtledoves or pigeons could be substituted because of humble circumstances. Thus, right from the start—from His birth in a stable to the offerings given by His parents—Jesus is portrayed as having assumed His humanity in the home of poor and “ordinary” people. In fact, archaeological evidence also seems to indicate that the town of Nazareth, where Jesus spent His childhood, was a relatively impoverished and unimportant town, as well. And though carpentry is an honorable trade, it certainly didn’t place Him among the “elite.”

“The parents of Jesus were poor, and dependent upon their daily toil. He was familiar with poverty, self-denial, and privation. This experience was a safeguard to Him. In His industrious life there were no idle moments to invite temptation. No aimless hours opened the way for corrupting associations. So far as possible, He closed the door to the tempter. Neither gain nor pleasure, applause nor censure, could induce Him to consent to a wrong act. He was wise to discern evil, and strong to resist it.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 72.

The Creator of all that was made (see John 1:1–3) entered humanity, not just as a human being, an infant, which would have been astonishing enough, but by way of the home of a relatively impoverished family! How are we to respond to something so incredible? What is the only way to respond?

Transforming the “Common”

Read John 2:1–11 and Matthew 15:32–39. How did Jesus use simple, everyday desires and needs to make disciples and transform lives?

“Ordinary” people share natural physical, emotional, and social desires. They want physical nourishment, personal significance, and friendship. Jesus understood these characteristics, placing Himself in social situations that provided opportunities to reach people through these universal desires.

Whether Jesus was changing water into unfermented wine from the fruit of the vine, or turning fishermen into preachers (*Mark 1:16–18*), He specialized in transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. Onlookers frequently questioned Jesus’ personal credentials (*Mark 6:3*). They questioned the absence of ostentation. Because they longed for the extraordinary, they overlooked that which they considered to be ordinary and did so at what was potentially an eternal loss.

So often Jesus sought people who were considered to be ordinary because, lacking self-sufficiency, they were prepared to trust God completely for their success. People who are enamored by their talents, abilities, and accomplishments cannot often sense their need of something greater than themselves. What a horrible deception! Many among Christ’s contemporaries possessed superior academic training, social position, or personal wealth. Nevertheless, their names have long been forgotten. Remembered, however, are ordinary people—farmers, fishermen, carpenters, shepherds, potters, housewives, domestic servants—who were transformed into extraordinary witnesses for Christ.

We all tend to be a little enamored by the very successful and the very rich, don’t we? How much of that attitude do you see in yourself? How can you learn to keep before yourself the value of all people, regardless of their status, fame, or wealth?

A Flawed Fisherman's Calling

In the New Testament, Peter stands out as one of the most influential of all the disciples. In fact, he ended up being one of the most influential people in all human history. Talk about changing the “ordinary” into the extraordinary!

Read the following texts. How do they help us to understand how Peter was so radically changed, despite tremendous faults?

Luke 5:1–11. What did Peter say here that showed that he was open to his need of Jesus? Why is this trait so crucial to cultivate in our own lives?

Matthew 16:13–17. What do these verses tell us about Peter and openness to the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 26:75. What do we also see here that gives us insight into Peter and how God was able to use him?

Jesus, no doubt, spent a great deal of time with Peter, and Peter had many powerful experiences with Him. Though only an “ordinary” fisherman with plenty of faults, through his time with Jesus, Peter was radically converted—even after making some grievous errors, including denying Jesus three times, just as Jesus told him he would.

Though many points emerge from the story of Peter, the moment he first caught a glimpse of who Jesus was, he was aware of his own faults and admitted them. Hence, through patience and forbearance, Jesus was able to turn Peter's flawed character into someone who helped to change history.

Why must we be so careful about making judgments about those whom we might not deem as “savable”? Why is that so easy to do?

Heavenly Evaluation

An evangelist once celebrated (perhaps bragged about) the attendance of quality upper-class people at his seminars. (One would hope he equally celebrated the attendance of the more “ordinary” types, as well.)

With Christ, however, no class distinctions existed; no one was “ordinary”; everyone was an exception. Not surprisingly, Jesus reached the masses with commonplace illustrations and straightforward speech. Nothing about His manner suggested that anyone was excluded from His concern. Modern disciple-makers must likewise carefully guard against giving the impression that they regard some more highly than they do others in terms of outreach.

Read Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; Matthew 6:25–30. What do these texts teach us about the worth of every person? Of course, it is easy for us to say that we believe this, but in what ways might we be guilty of harboring the kind of distinctions that the universality of the Cross has eradicated forever?

The cheapest birds in the temple marketplace were sparrows. Pairs could be purchased for an *assarion*, the smallest, least valuable copper coin. Nonetheless, commonplace, insignificant sparrows were not forgotten in heaven.

How much more is this the case with human beings, the ones for whom Christ died? Christ died for us, not for birds. The Cross proves, in ways that we cannot begin to fathom, the “infinite worth” (to borrow from a phrase that Ellen G. White used a lot) of every human being, regardless of his or her status in life—a status that is often nothing more than a human concoction based on concepts and attributes that are meaningless in heaven, or even contrary to the very principles of heaven itself.

Ellen G. White wrote that “Christ would have died for one soul in order that that one might live through the eternal ages.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 73. One soul! Dwell on the implications of this incredible concept. How should this influence the ways in which we view not only others but ourselves, as well?

A Classless Society

Perhaps the most socially attractive feature of primitive Christianity was the absence of class distinctions. Dividing walls had crumbled beneath the gospel's weight. The common person triumphed through Christ. Christ transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary. Carpenters, tax collectors, stonemasons, queens, domestic servants, priests, Greeks, Romans, men, women, the wealthy, and the destitute all became equals within Christ's kingdom of grace. In reality, the Christian community was to be a "classless society."

What do each of the following texts teach about our common humanity? Considering the cultural background of the time, and of the Bible writers themselves, why might it not have been so easy for them to grasp this crucial concept?

Gal. 3:28, 29 _____

James 2:1–9 _____

1 Pet. 1:17, 2:9 _____

1 John 3:16–19 _____

Read Acts 2:43–47, 4:32–37. In what ways did early Christians apply, in practice, the principle of universal acceptance? How did the notion that God loves ordinary, everyday people enable the explosive expansion of primitive Christianity? At the same time, we need to ask ourselves, How well do we, individually and collectively, apply these principles to the ways in which we minister to the world? What kinds of things hold us back from doing better in this important area?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Lifework,” pp. 269, 270, in *Education*; and “Laboring for the Middle Class,” pp. 564–566, in *Evangelism*.

“In this closing work of the gospel there is a vast field to be occupied; and, more than ever before, the work is to enlist helpers from the common people. Both the youth and those older in years will be called from the field, from the vineyard, and from the workshop, and sent forth by the Master to give His message. Many of these have had little opportunity for education; but Christ sees in them qualifications that will enable them to fulfill His purpose. If they put their hearts into the work, and continue to be learners, He will fit them to labor for Him.”
—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 269, 270.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why was Jesus so effective in making disciples among the common people? Why was His message not as readily received among the wealthy and socially elite? How might Jesus’ humble upbringing have contributed to His effectiveness in reaching the hearts and minds of ordinary people? How effective in reaching the average person might Jesus have been if He had come as a royal prince or a wealthy landowner?
- 2 Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 in class together. What are the key points? Read carefully where Paul wrote that God chose “the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (*NKJV*). What does that mean? How, in the context of being a Christian, are we to understand this fascinating idea? In what ways do these verses show just how twisted and perverted the ways of the world are? How can we make sure that we ourselves don’t get caught up in these corrupted ways?
- 3 What can our Bible study groups do to become more user-friendly for ordinary people? How might that affect our choice of Bible translations? Why should disciple-makers concentrate on practical subjects rather than theoretical ones, especially when first reaching out to people who are hurting and in need of help?

Just in Time

Megy groaned as another contraction tore through her body. She had been in labor for 18 hours, and her baby hadn't arrived yet. Four men carried Megy on a stretcher toward the river several miles away, where they hoped to meet a public vehicle that could take Megy to the government clinic.

Storm clouds gathered on the horizon and threatened heavy rain. If the men couldn't reach the river before the rains swelled it, they couldn't cross. Megy's life and the life of her unborn baby hung in the balance.

Megy and her husband live in a large village in eastern Papua New Guinea. Most women give birth at home or in the simple birthing center in the village. But the birth attendants aren't equipped to handle complicated births. If they can't cross the rain-swollen river, women and their infants often die en route to help.

The men hurried on as large drops of water began pelting them. They reached the river and carefully picked their way across the swirling waters. Once on the other side, the men scrambled up the rocky shore to the place where public vehicles stopped. Soon a vehicle came, and Megy's husband helped her into the back.

The vehicle bumped along the rough road, drawing more groans from Megy. Thirty minutes later, the driver stopped at the government clinic, and Megy's husband helped her down. Soon she was inside, where the government nurse could help her safely deliver her child.

The next day, Megy and her husband rode another public vehicle back to their village with their new son. Megy survived because she made it to the government clinic in time. Other women in her village weren't so fortunate. Megy yearned for the day when her own village would have a decent clinic.

Thousands of people who live in and around Megy's village in Papua New Guinea are rejoicing today because the Seventh-day Adventist Church has built a government-certified clinic in their village. The villagers don't know much about Adventists yet, but they do know that Adventists care for them enough to meet their medical needs and teach them how to live more healthful lives. The Adventist nurse at the clinic has the equipment to deliver their babies and the medicines to treat their illnesses.

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build more clinics in Papua New Guinea. The people are eager to hear about the God that Adventists worship because they see God's love through the Adventists who care for them. Thank you for helping save lives and leading people to Jesus in Papua New Guinea and around the world.

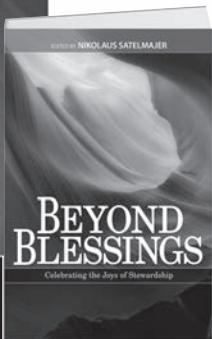
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HOPE AND A FUTURE



Less than half the children in Benin, a country in western Africa, can read and write. Instead of attending school, many children spend their days helping their parents work the family's garden to raise enough food to keep them alive.

Parakou, a city in central Benin, is largely Muslim. Most of the people who live there want their children to receive an education, but there aren't enough schools to meet their needs.

An Adventist school in this area will light the

path to a better future for thousands of children while bringing the message of God's love to entire families.

I'm glad our church cares for the people of Benin. I'm glad our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide them with tools to have better lives and hopes for the future through Adventist education.

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