

The Call to Discipleship¹



SABBATH—APRIL 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Luke 5:1–11; Luke 6:12–16; Luke 9:1–6; Matthew 10:5–15; Luke 10:1–24; Luke 9:23–25; Matthew 16:24–28.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Jesus said to all the people: ‘If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross each day and follow me’ ” (Luke 9:23, CEV).

“DISCIPLE” MEANS A FOLLOWER OR A PUPIL. The word *disciple* appears more than two hundred and fifty times in the Bible, mostly in the Gospels and Acts.

Being a disciple energizes the spirit, challenges the mind, and requires our best efforts in our relationship with God and our fellow humans. Without total loyalty to Christ and the demands of His life and message, there can be no discipleship.

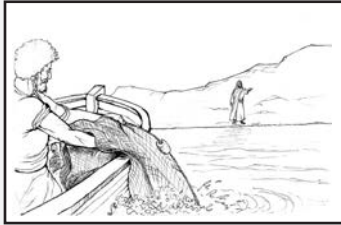
“God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service. That is if they will surrender themselves to Him. If the Spirit of God is received into the soul, He will bring to life all its abilities. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the mind becomes dedicated to God and grows and works well with God’s will. The mind also is strengthened to understand and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak character [thoughts; feelings; acts] becomes changed to a strong one. Continual faithfulness leads to a very close relationship with Jesus so that the Christian becomes like [almost the same as] Him in mind and character.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 251.

This week we will look at how Jesus called those who were to follow Him and see what lesson we can learn that can help us to continue the work that He had started on earth.

DEFINITIONS

1. discipleship—the process during which we believe in, follow, and work for Jesus.

FISHERS OF MEN (Luke 5:1–11)



The first lesson of being a disciple: obedience to Christ's Word.

Simon and Andrew had worked hard all night. As experienced fishermen, they knew how to fish. They also knew when to quit. Nightlong work brought them no fish. In the midst of their disappointment came an unwelcome command: “ ‘Go out into deep water. Let the nets down so you can catch some fish’ ” (Luke 5:4, NIV).

Who is this carpenter advising an experienced fisherman about fishing? Simon could have turned away. But is it possible that Jesus' comforting and true preaching earlier had some influence? So, the answer: “ ‘nevertheless [but] at Your word.’ ”

So, the first lesson of being a disciple: obedience to Christ's Word. Andrew, John, and James also soon learned that the long and fruitless night had given way to a bright and surprising dawn, with a large group of fish caught. At once, Peter fell to his knees and cried out: “ ‘Depart [leave] from me, for I am a sinful man’ ” (verse 8, NKJV). Recognizing the holiness of God and the sinfulness of oneself is another important step in the call to discipleship.

Read Luke 5:1–11; Matthew 4:18–22; and Mark 1:16–20. Consider the miracle, the great surprise of the fishermen, Peter's confession, and Jesus' authority. What does each story say about the path of Christ's disciple?

“ ‘Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men’ ” (Luke 5:10, NKJV). The change from being fishermen to becoming fishers of men is extraordinary (amazing; great): it requires (1) full self-surrender to Jesus, (2) recognizing one's inability and sinfulness, (3) a reaching out to Christ in faith for the strength to walk the lonely and unknown path of discipleship, and (4) continual dependence upon Christ and Him alone. The life of a fisherman is uncertain and dangerous. He has to battle rough waves, unsure of a steady income. The life of a fisher of men is not any different, but the Lord promises, “Fear not.” Discipleship is not an easy road. It has its ups and downs and its joys and challenges. But a disciple is not called to walk alone. The One who said “Fear not” is by the side of the faithful disciple.

Go back and read again Peter's confession about being a sinful man. Notice how his sins pushed him to want to be separated from Jesus. What is it about sin that does that to us, that pushes us away from God?

CHOOSING THE TWELVE (Luke 6:12–16)

We do not make ourselves disciples. It is a result of accepting the call of Jesus. Luke writes that Jesus has already called Peter, Andrew, John, and James (Luke 5:11; Matthew 4:18–22) and Levi Matthew, the tax collector (Luke 5:27–32). Now the writer (Luke) reports that Jesus chose the twelve disciples at the right time. After the Sabbath healing of a man with a withered hand (Luke 6:6–11), the Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) started planning the murder of Jesus. So, the Lord knew that it was time to choose a team of workers whom He could train to carry on the work.

Read Luke 6:12–16 and Luke 9:1–6. What do these verses tell us about the calling of the twelve apostles (teachers and leaders)?

Among the crowds that followed Jesus, there were many disciples. They were the ones who followed Him as students would follow a teacher. But Christ's work is more than just teaching. His work is to build a community of the saved, a church that would take His saving message all over the earth. For that purpose, He needs more than disciples. "From them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles" (Luke 6:13, NKJV). "Apostle" means someone sent with a special message for a special purpose.

The Twelve were not chosen because they were educated, rich, popular, righteous (holy), or worthy of choice. They were common men from common backgrounds: fishermen, a tax collector, a doubter, and one who turned out to be a traitor. They were called for one purpose only: they were to be ambassadors of the King and His kingdom.

"God takes men as they are. Then He trains them for His service, if they will be disciplined and learn of Him. They are not chosen because they are perfect. But through the knowledge and practice of the truth and through the grace [power and mercy] of Christ, they may become more like Him." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 294.

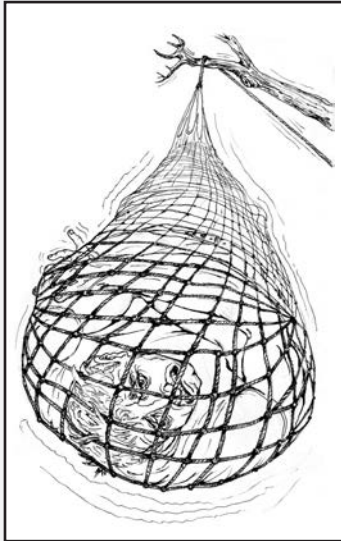
Let us face it: we are not perfect. Neither are others in the church perfect. We all are still growing spiritually (even if others seem to grow more slowly than we would like them to!). In the meantime, how do we learn to work with others and to accept them as they are?



We do not make ourselves disciples. It is a result of accepting the call of Jesus.

PREPARATION AND AUTHORIZATION OF THE APOSTLES (Luke 9:1–6)

Read Luke 9:1–6 and Matthew 10:5–15. What spiritual truths can we learn from the verses about how Jesus called these men?



Sin and Satan have captured the whole person. So the whole person must be brought under the power of Jesus to be set free.

Luke describes the preparation and authorization of the apostles as a three-step process. First, Jesus called them together (Luke 9:1). The word *call* or *calling* is as important to Christian mission as it is to Christian vocabulary. It must be a personal experience. The apostles must accept Jesus who calls, come to Him, and be “together.” Both obeying Jesus who calls and surrendering everything to Him are important for working in unity (oneness) with God and others. And the unity is important for the mission’s success.

Second, Jesus “gave them power and authority” (Luke 9:1, NKJV). Jesus never sends out His workers empty-handed. He does not expect us to be His representatives in our own strength. Our education, culture, social position, or wealth are powerless to succeed in His mission. It is Christ who gives us power to do His work. The Greek word for “power” is *dynamis*. From this Greek word we get “dynamo,” which gives energy for light, and the word *dynamite*. This also gives energy that can plow through a mountain. The power and authority that Jesus gives are plenty to crush the devil and defeat his purposes. Jesus is our power. “When the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes very powerful. Whatever is to be done at His command may be done in His strength. All God’s commands can be done by men with His help.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 333.

Third, Jesus “sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2, NKJV). Preaching and healing go together. And the mission of the disciples is to care for the whole person—body, mind, and soul. Sin and Satan have captured the whole person. So, the whole person must be brought under the holy power of Jesus.

A person can be a good disciple only when his or her life is totally given to Christ, with nothing else in the way. Christ, His kingdom, and the witness to a lost world alone are more important than anything else.

“ ‘Take nothing for the journey’ ” (Luke 9:3, NKJV). What principle (important rule) is shown here that is important for us to understand and to experience for ourselves?

SENDING THE SEVENTY (Luke 10:1–24)

Read Luke 10:1–24. What does this story about the sending out of the 70 teach us about the work of soul winning in face of the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan)?

Paul tells us that Jesus had at least five hundred followers present when He went up to heaven (1 Corinthians 15:6). So, the sending of the 70 does not limit the number of followers that Jesus had. It just suggests His choice of a special group on a limited mission to go into the towns of Galilee and prepare the way for His future visits.

Only the Gospel of Luke tells the story of the 70. This is usual for the missionary-minded Luke. And Luke was a writer with a universal worldview. The number 70 is a special symbol in the Bible and in Jewish history. Genesis 10 lists 70 nations of the world coming from Noah's children. Moses chose 70 elders to help him in his work (Numbers 11:16, 17, 24, 25). The Sanhedrin² was made up of 70 members. We do not know if any of these facts are connected with Jesus' calling of the 70. But what is important is that Jesus is a trainer of leaders for the church. And He has left a plan not to limit power and responsibility to a few. Instead, He spread it among His disciples.

When the 70 returned, they were filled with joy and excitement. Success in soul winning is never the work of the evangelist.³ The evangelist is only a spokesperson for the gospel. The success comes through Jesus. The name and power of Jesus are at the heart of every successful gospel mission.

But note three wonderful things Jesus says about the success of the mission of the 70. First, in the success of evangelism,⁴ Jesus sees a defeat of Satan (verse 18). Second, the more deeply a worker is involved in the gospel work, the more power he or she receives from Jesus (verse 19). Third, the evangelist's joy should be not in what has been done on earth. Instead, he or she should be more joyful because his or her name is written in heaven (verse 20). Heaven celebrates and takes note of every person won from the reach of Satan. Every soul won to the kingdom is a blow to Satan's evil plans.

Read again Luke 10:24. What are some of the things that we have seen that prophets (special messengers from God) and kings wanted to see but did not? What should that mean to us?



Your joy should not be in what you have done on earth but in the fact that your name is written in heaven.

DEFINITIONS

2. Sanhedrin—the leading Jewish council in Jesus' day.

3. evangelist—someone who travels from place to place preaching the gospel.

4. evangelism—the act of spreading the gospel from place to place through preaching.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 9:23–25)

Socrates had Plato.⁵ Gamaliel⁶ had Saul. Leaders of different religions had their faithful followers. What is the big difference between discipleship of worldly leaders and the discipleship of Jesus? The answer is that the worldly leaders depend on human philosophy (study of truth). But the followers of Jesus depend on Jesus Himself and on what He has done on earth. Meanwhile, Christian discipleship depends on both Christ's teachings and what He did for human salvation. So, Jesus commands all His followers to fully dedicate themselves to Him, to take up their cross, and to follow His leadings. Without people walking in the footprints of Calvary, there is no Christian discipleship.

Read Luke 9:23–25; Matthew 16:24–28; and Mark 8:34–36. What is the very important message for anyone who claims to be a Christian?

Luke describes the cost of discipleship in Luke 9:23: “If anyone wants to follow me, he must say no to himself. He must pick up his cross every day and follow me” (Luke 9:23, NIV). Note these words: “deny,” “take up,” and “follow” (NKJV). When we read that Peter denied Jesus, we could not have a better description of “deny.” Peter was saying, “I do not know Jesus.” So, when the call to discipleship requires that I deny myself, I must be able to say I do not know me; self is dead. In its place, Christ must live (Galatians 2:20). Second, to take up the cross every day is a call to experience self-crucifixion (death to self) all the time. Third, to follow requires that the goal of life is Christ and Him alone.

Jesus explains the cost of discipleship more deeply, as Luke 9:57–62 shows. Nothing comes before Jesus. He and He alone comes as first in friendship and fellowship, work and worship. In Christian discipleship, death to self is not a choice. It is a must! “When Christ calls a man, he commands him ‘come and die.’ . . . It is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ. It is the same as the death of the old man at his call. . . . Only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.”—Adapted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965), page 99.

What has following Christ cost you? Think hard about your answer and what it means to you.

DEFINITIONS

5. Socrates and Plato—famous Greek thinkers who lived long before Jesus was born on earth.

6. Gamaliel—a famous Jewish teacher who once had Saul (who later became Paul) as his student.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Lifting the cross cuts away self from the soul. It puts man where he learns how to accept and carry Christ’s burdens. We cannot follow Christ without wearing His yoke, without lifting the cross, and without carrying it after Him. Suppose our will is not in agreement with Jesus’ requirements. Then we are to deny our wishes, give up our favorite desires, and step in Christ’s footsteps.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, page 69.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Go back and look at the question at the end of Wednesday’s study about Luke 10:24. What are some of the things that we today have seen that “many prophets and kings” would have liked to see but did not? What about, for example, the fulfillment of prophecies (special messages from God)? Think about how much of Daniel 2, 7, and 8 were still in the future for many of those prophets and kings but are now historical facts for us. What else can you think of?
- ② Think more deeply on the words of Jesus about someone gaining the whole world but losing his or her soul. What does He mean by that? Or what about losing one’s life to save it? What does that mean? It is one thing for nonbelievers to hold on selfishly to the things of this world. Why? This is because that is all they believe that they have. Even as believers in Jesus, we know that this world will end and a new one will one day start. But why are some of us trying to gain as much of this world as we can? How can we protect ourselves from this very dangerous spiritual trap?
- ③ Read Luke 10:17–20. We can understand the excitement of these people as they saw that even demons obeyed them in Christ’s name. Look at Jesus’ answer to them. What was He saying that is so important for anyone involved in outreach work to understand?
- ④ Who are some people, not in the Bible, who have chosen to follow Christ and have paid a heavy cost, maybe more than most of us? In class, ask yourselves, “What did these people lose? What did following Christ cost them? Would I be willing to do the same?”