

The Call *to* Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:1–11, 6:12–16, 9:1–6, Matt. 10:5–15, Luke 10:1–24, Luke 9:23–25, Matt. 16:24–28.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” (*Luke 9:23, NKJV*).

Disciple” means a follower, or a pupil. The word *disciple* occurs more than two hundred fifty times in the Bible, mostly but not exclusively in the Gospels and Acts.

Being a disciple energizes the spirit, challenges the mind, and demands our utmost in our relationship with God and our fellow humans. Without total allegiance to Christ and the demands of His life and message, there can be no discipleship. What higher calling could one have?

“God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, will quicken all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 251.

This week we’ll look at how Jesus called those who were to follow Him and see what lesson we can learn that can help us in our continuation of the work that He had started on earth.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 25.

Fishers of Men

Simon and Andrew had toiled all night. Seasoned fishermen, they knew the art of fishing, and they knew when to quit. Nightlong work yielded nothing. In the midst of their disappointment came an unsolicited command: “ ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch’ ” (*Luke 5:4, NKJV*). Simon’s response was one of hopelessness and anguish: “ ‘We have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word . . .’ ” (*vs. 5, NKJV*).

Who is this carpenter counseling a fisherman about fishing? Simon could have turned away, but is it possible that Jesus’ comforting and authentic preaching earlier had some effect? Hence, the response: “ ‘nevertheless at Your word.’ ”

Thus, the first lesson of discipleship: 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 astonishing dawn, with a multitude of fish caught. At once, Peter fell to his knees and cried out: “ ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man’ ” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). Recognition of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of oneself is another essential step in the call to discipleship. As Isaiah had (*Isa. 6:5*), Peter had taken that step.

Read *Luke 5:1–11, Matthew 4:18–22, and Mark 1:16–20. Consider the miracle, the astonishment of the fishermen, the confession of Peter, and the authority of Jesus. What does each one of these accounts say about the path of discipleship?*

“ ‘Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men’ ” (*Luke 5:10, NKJV*). The transition from being fishermen to becoming fishers of men is extraordinary: it requires absolute self-surrender to the Master, recognition of one’s inability and sinfulness, a reaching out to Christ in faith for the strength to walk the lonely and unknown path of discipleship, and continual reliance on Christ and Him alone. The life of a fisherman is uncertain and dangerous, battling ruthless waves, unsure of a steady income. The life of a fisher of men is no less so, but the Lord promises, “Fear not.” Discipleship is not an easy road; it has its ups and downs, 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 sinfulness prompted him to want to be separated from Jesus. What is it about sin that does that to us, that pushes us away from God?

Selection of the Twelve

Discipleship is not self-made. It is a result of responding to the call of Jesus. Luke mentions that Jesus has already called Peter, Andrew, John, and James (*Luke 5:11*) and Levi Matthew, the tax collector (*vss. 27–32*). Now the writer places the selection of the Twelve in a strategic location in his narrative: immediately after the Sabbath healing of a man with a withered hand (*Luke 6:6–11*), which led the Pharisees to plot the murder of Jesus. The Lord knew that it was time to consolidate His work and prepare a team of workers whom He could train and prepare for the task beyond the cross.

Read *Luke 6:12–16, 9:1–6*. What do these verses tell us about the calling of the twelve apostles?

Among the multitudes that followed Him, there were many disciples—ones who followed Him as students would follow a teacher. But Christ’s task is more than that of teaching. His is to build a community of the redeemed, a church that will take His saving message to the ends of 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. Luke uses the word six times in the Gospel and more than twenty-five times in Acts (Matthew and Mark use it only once each).

The Twelve were chosen not because of their education, economic background, social prominence, moral eminence, or anything that marked them as worthy of selection. They were ordinary men from ordinary backgrounds: fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot, a doubter, and one who turned out to be a traitor. They were called for one purpose only: to be ambassadors of the King and His kingdom.

“God takes men as they are, with the human elements in their character, and trains them for His service, if they will be disciplined and learn of Him. They are not chosen because they are perfect, but notwithstanding their imperfections, that through the knowledge and practice of the truth, through the grace of Christ, they may become transformed into His image.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 294.

Let’s face it: we’re not perfect, nor are others in the church perfect. We all are in a process of growing (even if others seem to grow more slowly than we would like them to!). How, in the meantime, do we learn to work with others and accept them as they are?

Commissioning of the Apostles

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?

Luke describes the commissioning of the apostles as a three-step process.

First, Jesus called them together (*Luke 9:1*). The word *call* or *calling* is as vital to Christian mission as it is to Christian vocabulary. Before it can become a theological term, it must become a personal experience. The apostles must heed the One who calls, come to Him, and be “together.” Both the obedience to Him who calls and the surrender of everything to Him are essential to experience the unity that is vital for the mission to succeed.

Second, Jesus “gave them power and authority” (*vs. 1, NKJV*). Jesus never sends His emissaries empty-handed. Nor does He expect us to be His representatives in our own strength. Our education, culture, status, wealth, or intelligence are powerless to accomplish His mission. It is Christ who enables, equips, and empowers. The Greek word for “power” is *dynamis*, from which we derive “dynamo,” a source of light, and “dynamite,” a source of energy that can plow through a mountain. The power and authority that Jesus gives are sufficient to crush the devil and defeat his purposes. Jesus is our power. “As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 333.

Third, Jesus “sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (*vs. 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, and the whole person must be brought under the sanctifying power of Jesus.

The life of discipleship can be maintained only when that life is totally given to Christ, with nothing coming in between. Neither gold nor silver, neither father nor mother, neither spouse nor child, neither life nor death, neither the contingencies of today nor the emergencies of tomorrow shall come between the disciple and Christ. Christ, His kingdom, and the witness to a lost world alone matter.

“**Take nothing for the journey**” (*vs. 3, NKJV*). What principle is expressed here that’s important for us to understand and to experience for ourselves?

Sending the Seventy

Read Luke 10:1–24. What does this account, of the sending out of the 70, teach us about the work of soul winning amid the reality of the great controversy?

During His ministry, more than the Twelve followed Jesus. When Peter addressed the believers leading to the selection of a substitute for Judas, the group consisted of at least one hundred twenty believers (*Acts 1:15*). Paul tells us that Jesus had at least five hundred followers at His ascension (*1 Cor. 15:6*). So, the sending of the 70 does not limit the number of followers that Jesus had but only suggests His choice of a special group on a limited mission to go before Him into the towns of Galilee and prepare the way for His subsequent visits.

Only the Gospel of Luke records the account of the 70, very typical of the missionary-minded Luke. The number 70 is symbolic in Scripture, as well as in Jewish history. Genesis 10 lists 70 nations of the world as descendants of Noah, and Luke was a writer with a universal worldview. Moses appointed 70 elders to assist him in his work (*Num. 11:16, 17, 24, 25*). The Sanhedrin was made up of 70 members. Whether all these have any significance in Jesus' calling of the 70 is not mentioned in Scripture and need not detain us in speculation. But what is important is that Jesus, as a trainer of leaders for the church, has left a strategy not to concentrate power and responsibility in a few but to spread it across the spectrum of disciples.

Joy and fulfillment marked the return of the 70. They reported to Jesus: “ ‘Even the demons are subject to us in Your name’ ” (*Luke 10:17, NKJV*). Success in soul winning is never the work of the evangelist. The evangelist is only a medium. The success comes through “Your name.” The name and power of Jesus are at the heart of every successful gospel mission.

But note three remarkable reactions of Jesus to the success of the mission of the 70. First, in the success of evangelism, Jesus sees a defeat of Satan (*vs. 18*). Second, the more involved one is in gospel work, the more authority is promised (*vs. 19*). Third, the evangelist's joy should be not in what has been accomplished on earth but because his or her name is written in heaven (*vs. 20*). Heaven rejoices and takes note of every person won from the clutches of Satan. Every soul won to the kingdom is a blow to Satan's schemes.

Read again Luke 10:24. What are some of the things that we have seen that prophets and kings wanted to see but didn't? What should that mean to us?

The Cost of Discipleship

Socrates had Plato. Gamaliel had Saul. Leaders of various religions had their devout followers. The difference between discipleship in such cases and the discipleship of Jesus is that the former is based on the content of human philosophy, whereas the latter is rooted in the person and accomplishment of Jesus Himself. Thus, Christian discipleship rests not just on Christ's teachings but also on what He did for human salvation. Hence, Jesus bids all His followers to fully identify themselves with 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 crucial message here for anyone who claims to be a Christian?

Christian discipleship is an operative link between the saved and the Savior; as the saved, we are to follow the Savior. Thus Paul could say, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (*Gal. 2:20, NIV*).

The cost of discipleship is defined in Luke 9:23: “‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’” (*Luke 9:23, NKJV*). Note these operative words: “deny,” “take up,” and “follow.” When we read that Peter denied Jesus, we could not have a better definition of “deny.” Peter was saying, “I do not know Jesus.” So, when the call to discipleship demands that I deny myself, I must be able to say I do not know me; self is dead. In its stead, Christ must live (*Gal. 2:20*). Second, to take up the cross daily is a call to experience self-crucifixion on a continual basis. Third, to follow demands that the focus and direction of life is Christ and Him alone.

Jesus expands the cost of discipleship even further, as revealed in Luke 9:57–62: nothing takes precedence over Jesus. He, and He alone, stands supreme in friendship and fellowship, work and worship. In Christian discipleship, death to self is not an option; it is a necessity. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. . . . It is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. . . . Only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 99.

What has following Christ cost you? Think hard about your answer and the implications of it.

Further Study: “Lifting the cross cuts away self from the soul, and places man where he learns how to bear Christ’s burdens. We cannot follow Christ without wearing His yoke, without lifting the cross and bearing it after Him. If our will is not in accord with the divine requirements, we are to deny our inclinations, give up our darling desires, and step in Christ’s footsteps.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 69.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Go back and look at the question at the end of Wednesday’s study, in regard to Luke 10:24. What are some of the things that we, living in this day and age, have been privy to witness that “many prophets and kings” would have liked to see but didn’t? What about, for example, the fulfillment of prophecies? 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** Dwell more on the words of Jesus about one gaining the whole world but losing one’s soul. What does He mean by that? Or what about losing one’s life in order to save it? What does that mean? It’s one thing for a nonbeliever to cling selfishly to the things of this world. Why not, because that’s all they believe that they have? What else would they cling to? But why, even as believers in Jesus, those who know that this world will end and a new one will one day start, do we find ourselves so readily seeking 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. One can understand the excitement of these people as they saw that even demons were subject to them in Christ’s name. Look at Jesus’ response to them. What was He saying that’s so important for anyone involved in outreach to understand?
- 4** Who are some people, besides Bible characters, whose choice to follow Christ has cost them a lot, perhaps more than most of us? In class, ask yourselves, “What did these people lose, what did following Christ cost them, and would I be willing to do the same?”

“I’ve Been Waiting for a While”

A PASTOR, CHINA

Since the 1990s, we have had some religious freedom and now have a few church buildings. One Seventh-day Adventist church is located near a large factory of an import-export business. The business owner is a friend of an Adventist church member, and the two women often talk together. One day the subject of faith came up, and the Adventist shared her belief in God, the Bible, and what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

The businesswoman was impressed and told her friend, “You have a good church. Your doctrines can really help people. Would you be willing to talk to my employees?” The Adventist considered the invitation but felt intimidated. *All of the employees are nonbelievers, even atheists*, she thought.

After some time, her friend brought it up again. “Hey, I’ve been waiting for a while. Why didn’t you send someone?” The church member realized that this was an opportunity, and she let the Adventist pastor know.

When he arrived at the factory, the owner invited the department heads to a meeting. The pastor spoke about Jesus and His teachings. “This is a good message and can help our employees have better, more positive lives,” the department heads told him. “Why don’t you come and speak to our employees?”

A date was arranged, and the pastor returned. About sixty employees came to the voluntary meeting, and the presentation was well received. The pastor accepted the invitation to give presentations to the employees every two weeks. After six presentations, the pastor invited the employees to accept Jesus as their Savior, and 30 responded with a Yes.

At Christmastime, the Adventist church organized a big event for all 200 employees of the factory. The factory owner also invited other nearby companies to join them. When the other business owners came, they told the woman that they noticed her employees had changed. “After your employees believed in God, they seem very nice. We also want to encourage our employees to do the same.” Now the Adventist pastor is meeting with the employees every Sunday evening. Additionally, the businesswoman owns other factories and plans to start a similar program at the other locations.

Following the Christmas event, the businesswoman came to the Adventist church and attended the Communion service. Her friend warmly welcomed her and encouraged her to continue coming. She plans to be baptized soon, along with 30 of her employees.