

Discipleship¹ Under Pressure



SABBATH—MARCH 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Kings 18; Matthew 26:56; Luke 9:51–56; John 6:1–15; John 12:1–6; John 18:1–11; John 21:15–19.

MEMORY VERSE: “Suppose you have run in a race with other men. And suppose they have worn you out. Then how would you be able to race against horses? Suppose you feel safe only in open country. Then how would you get along in the bushes near the Jordan River?” (Jeremiah 12:5, NirV).

EVER HEAR OF MURPHY'S LAW? Some people think of it as one of the fundamental laws of nature. It reads, “*Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.*”

We have all had moments, even days (or longer), that seem to follow Murphy's law. Sometimes our experiences as disciples² seem to follow it too. We have the promises of God that should help us not to get discouraged. But how easy it is to be tempted to give up without any hope. Of course, no matter what happens, we never should.

This week we will look at some disciples and see what we can learn from their bad days.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON IN BRIEF (SHORT): What warning should we learn from the disciples' fight for political power? What lessons does Judas have for us? What is behind James's and John's wish to destroy those who refused to accept Jesus? What can we learn from Peter's mistake and repentance?³ The disciples have been with Jesus so much. But why did they fail to be with Jesus in the hour of His great need?

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

2. disciples—people who accept and obey Christ.

3. repentance—the act of being sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

SUNDAY—MARCH 2**THE POWER MODEL (EXAMPLE)
(John 6:1–15)**

Religious faith can be a very powerful tool for good or for evil. The good can drive someone to “lose his life” (Matthew 16:25) for Christ’s sake. But that evil can drive others to blow themselves up in the name of God. After all, if you believe that God is calling you to do something who is going to stop you? That is why some governments try to discourage religion among the people. This is because they do not want people having loyalty to God. And you cannot get any higher than God. But governments do try to use the great power of religion to get what they want. The disciple of Christ has to be careful about the different dangers involved in abusing the power of religion.

What lesson can we learn from John 6:1–15 about how the disciple of Christ should use political power?

Jesus’ purpose on earth was not to become an earthly king. But it is clear that gaining earthly political power should not be the same as doing the work of discipleship. God can put people in power, or He can use people in power. But it is not the work of discipleship to try to get a lot of political power. Nothing in the New Testament presents this power model (example) of the gospel. Unfortunately, even Jesus’ closest disciples missed this

important point: “The disciples join with the multitude in announcing that Christ has the right to sit on the throne of David. The disciples claim that Christ is too modest [humble] to accept such honor. . . . The disciples eagerly arrange to carry out their purpose to put Him on the throne.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 378. Building on the highest hope of the crowd, the disciples tried to force Jesus into becoming king over the nation (John 6:14, 15). This was discipleship their way. So, Jesus made the crowd go away, sent the disciples to cross the lake, and went into the mountains alone to pray.



The disciples join with the crowd to force Jesus to be king.

What are ways, even on a more personal level, that we can abuse religion and use it for our own selfish goals?

MONDAY—MARCH 3**THE GREED MODEL (John 12:1–6)**

Someone once said, “If you want to

get rich, start a religion.” How sad! But this can be true. When we deal with religious faith, we are dealing with some of the most important parts of human life. We deal with the meaning of life and with the hope of heaven. And we hope to be forgiven by God for our sins. Jesus Himself gave us an example of living the life of a poor man. And He warned us against becoming too involved in the things of this world. But church history is full of examples of those who have used the power of religion and religious ideas to gain wealth for themselves. They often have done so by crushing the poor.

After reading John 12:1–6, answer the following questions:

1. What symbol do we find in the act of Mary? In other words, in what ways does it show the attitudes (positive feelings) of the true disciple of Christ? Read also Matthew 13:46 and Philippians 3:8.

2. What does this story tell us about the important reasons for our actions?

3. The verses say that Lazarus was at the table with them. Lazarus was the one who had been raised from the dead. Why does that fact make Judas’s actions

even more disgusting? It shows how much Judas failed to realize his own sinfulness.



Mary washes Jesus’ feet. Her unselfish act shows how a true disciple serves the Lord.

It is with good reason that Paul made the famous statement he did in 1 Timothy 6:10. Judas later lost his soul over his love of money. From the start, it seems that Judas was looking out only for number one—himself! This desire to gain things for himself was not pure. And it was woven all through his own discipleship. The other disciples were not totally unselfish. But greed got the best of Judas.

How can you be sure that greed is not poisoning your work as a disciple of Christ? If you are aware of some of your own impure ambitions (goals; desires), how can you be cleansed of them?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 4**THE THUNDER MODEL
(Luke 9:51–56)**

There were two pairs of brothers among Jesus' twelve disciples. At their call, Jesus names the pair of James and John *Boanerges*, or "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Some Bible experts believe that Jesus gave them this name because of their terrible tempers. So, we have chosen to call their kind of discipleship the "thunder model."

Notice how the disciples felt when the people refused to accept Jesus in Luke 9:51–56. As you read this, try to put yourself in the place of these disciples. What reasons would they have for feeling the way they did? In other words, what things did they hear Jesus say? Or what other Old Testament examples might they have learned from that could have led them to feel the way they did? Read, for example, Genesis 6; Genesis 7; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 13:42; Mark 6:11.

Many problems appear because of the way the disciples feel and act. The disciples are eager to serve the Lord, which is good. This is something which all disciples should do. But wrong actions, even in a good cause, can cause more harm than good. For example, James and John used the story of Elijah as their model (exam-

ple). But they misused it. Elijah brought fire down from heaven to burn up sacrifices (offerings) (1 Kings 18), not rebellious (sinful) people. (They were killed another way.)

Even worse, the disciples had a cruel and judgmental attitude (feeling) toward sinners. Every disciple of Christ should work to bring sinners to the foot of the Cross and to show them the wonderful mercy and grace of God. They should believe that God accepted the punishment of their sins. They should show that through Jesus the sinners can have full pardon, full forgiveness, and a new life in Him. That is our work as disciples. We can leave the judging part to the Lord.



Our job as disciples is to forgive one another and leave the work of judging to the Lord.

How judgmental are you toward those whom you think are wrong? And how can we show mercy to others without giving them the idea that we agree with their lives and/or beliefs?

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 5**THE REPENTANT (SORROWFUL)-
PETER MODEL (John 18:1–11)**

Peter is known as that disciple who always rushed into saying something on everything. Luke 22:33, 34 says he was so sure of himself and his discipleship that he promised to go with Jesus even to prison and death. But, not long after, he had to “take back” those words (Matthew 26:69–75).

What does John 18:1–11 tell us about the personality and character of Peter? Read Matthew 26:69–75.

We all know about Peter’s failure. It serves as a powerful lesson to all disciples of Christ. We cannot work for the Lord in our own power. How important it is for us to surrender ourselves to Jesus day by day. He is the vine. We are the branches. Without Jesus, we can do nothing. We cannot be faithful disciples without Him. Again, desire to do the Lord’s work is wonderful. But it must be done under Jesus’ control.

What does John 21:15–19 teach us about what Jesus can do for those of His disciples who repent of their mistakes and do not give up on Christ?

“Here is given a lesson for all Christ’s followers. The gospel⁴ makes no excuses for evil. It cannot excuse



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sin. Secret sins are to be confessed in secret to God. But, for open sin, open confession is required. . . . By giving proof of repentance, the disciple is to remove this sin. . . . Three times Peter had openly denied his Lord. And three times Jesus made Peter promise his love and loyalty to Him. This drove home that pointed question, like a barbed arrow to Peter’s wounded heart. Before the group of disciples Jesus showed how truly Peter repented. And He showed how fully humbled was the once boasting disciple [Peter].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 811, 812.

Notice what Jesus said to Peter in John 21:18, 19. Jesus was telling Peter that in the end, Peter would end up dying for the Lord he loved so much. Peter’s words, in the end, came true.

4. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

But it was only after he had learned some hard lessons about discipleship.

Have you made boastful promises, only to fail time and again from fulfilling them? What can you learn from the story of Peter that can help you not to give up?

THURSDAY—MARCH 6

THE FLIGHT MODEL (Matthew 26:56)

The disciples spent three and a half years with Jesus. They had special honors that very few in the world ever had. They saw things few humans ever did. After all, among the world's billions of people, how many ever saw Jesus as a human? More so, how many were ever with Him day after day while He was here on earth? These disciples were among the most honored humans (people) ever to have lived.

Of course, that was part of the problem. The disciples were humans, sinful humans. No matter what the Lord did for them, the disciples did not learn the lessons well.

Quickly read through a Gospel,⁵ any Gospel. What were the wonderful things that Jesus said and did in front of His disciples? How much wonderful proof did He give them to help them know who He was? After going over those events, look at the

verse for today. What fearful message, even warning, can we learn from this for ourselves?

Jesus knew He would be leaving His disciples soon. So, He prepared the disciples for His death. But they did not listen. Jesus knew what would happen in Jerusalem. He tried to prepare them for His death on the cross. But they did not listen. They arrived in Jerusalem not ready for what would happen.

During Jesus' ministry, the disciples seemed to value what He did more than to listen to what He said. Jesus' actions seemed to prove their hopes for a Messiah. And that pleased them very much. At the Transfiguration (read Lesson 8—Tuesday, February 19), the Father's voice warned the disciples to listen to Jesus. But they did not learn from His warnings about His upcoming death on the cross.

Following the Last Supper meal, Jesus tried to show His followers what would happen in the near future. But they would not listen. In the Garden, He tried to get them to pray to gain strength. But they slept.

Think about all that Jesus has done for you: the promises, the hope, the gifts given you, the changes made in your life, the examples of proof for your faith, all through Christ. How can we, by holding on to these things, avoid the mistakes of the disciples?

5. Gospel—one of the four books in the Bible that tell the story of Jesus' life and teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

FRIDAY—MARCH 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 208–211, 465, 466, 524–529, 595–597, 635, 636, 775, 776, 962, 963, 2020, 2021; Ellen G. White, “Give Ye Them to Eat,” pages 364–380; “Who Is the Greatest?” pages 437–438; “The Law of the New Kingdom,” pages 547–551; “A Feast at Simon’s House,” pages 559–565; “By the Sea Once More,” pages 809–817, in *The Desire of Ages*; “John the Beloved,” pages 539–543, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The love of money in the heart of Judas was growing with the use of his clever abilities. His ability in managing money would have been of great service to the little church if he had let the Holy Spirit help him live a holy life. And had Judas done so, he would have had a clear and correct understanding of heavenly and spiritual things. But Judas was interested in only worldly policy plans. There was no outbreking sin on Judas’s part. But it was Judas’s sharp plotting [evil planning] and selfish, greedy spirit that took control of him. This finally led him to sell his Lord for a small sum of money.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 1101.

“Judas was with Christ through the entire period of the Saviour’s public ministry. He had all that Christ could give him. . . . Suppose Judas had tried to be a blessing, instead of being a questioning, criticizing, selfish man.

The Lord would have used him to advance His kingdom. But Judas was a gambler. He thought that he could manage the finances [money] of the church. By his sharp business deals he could get worldly gain. But he was really divided in heart. He loved the praise of the world. He refused to give up the world for Christ. He never dedicated his eternal interests to Christ. . . . Judas was a religious fake.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 1101, 1102.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ If disciples are followers, are those who follow their own ideas and programs still disciples? Think about that question and your answer.
- ❷ What other models of discipleship under pressure can you think of, and what lessons can we learn from them?
- ❸ We can find in Peter someone who jumped ahead too fast, only to make mistakes and fall. But what are the dangers of being too careful? In what ways can we go too far the other way? Think about this and bring some thoughts to class. As you do, think about your local church as a whole. Is your church too ready to jump ahead of the Lord? Or is it too timid (weak) to follow the leading of the Lord? What can you do, as a class, to help your church have the right balance?