

Following *the* Master: Discipleship *in* Action



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 8:14, 15; 10:34–37; 28:18–20; Luke 5:17–26.*

Memory Text: “‘For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”
(*Mark 8:35–37, NKJV*).

This week’s lesson calls us to contemplate what is involved in discipleship. We want to look at discipleship in action. God has called us, but each must discern that call and follow its leadings. Thomas Cameron tells of a famous preacher who said he would have loved “to have blown the bellows for Handel, to have picked up the fallen brush for Michelangelo, to have held the spy-glass for Christopher Columbus, or to have carried Shakespeare’s bag. If men count it an honour to do some humble service for the world’s great heroes, what distinction lay in the opportunity of serving the Savior of men?”—A. Gordon Nasby, ed., *Treasury of the Christian World*, p. 327.

The Week at a Glance: What should be our motivation for service as disciples? What kind of opposition should we expect? What promises do we have as we embark on the work of discipleship?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 1.*

Service and Discipleship

Read Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29–31; and Luke 4:38, 39. What can we learn from these accounts about discipleship? In other words, regardless of the particular circumstances, what principles are seen here that should apply to all of us?

Though all three of these accounts record that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, Luke alone says she was *suffering from a high fever*. This detail, some believe, is indicative of Luke's status as a physician, especially because the phrase itself in the Greek language sounds like one of the technical classes the Greeks used to classify a specific fever.

Notice, too, that in all the accounts it is stressed that the disciples told Jesus about her being sick and that they asked for His help. We should assume, of course, that Jesus already knew all about her problem, yet He still let them tell Him, as well as ask for His divine healing. What lesson could we draw from this about our role as disciples? Is this really discipleship or just plain hospitality?

After Peter's mother-in-law was healed, she did not shrink from service. On recovery, she found a houseful of tired and hungry guests who had been concerned for her. Although she could have, she did not claim exhaustion or fatigue from the malady. Rather, she immediately began to wait on them—she began to serve them. The Greek word used is akin to that meaning a “servant,” “minister,” or “deacon.” Inspired by Jesus, she began her service immediately upon recovery.

What has Christ done for you? What has He saved you from? What has been your response? In what ways should the whole Christian life be a response to what Jesus has done for us?

Jesus and the Paralytic

A well-known story is found in Luke 5:17–26, the story of Jesus healing the paralytic. From it we can learn some important lessons about discipleship in action.

Read verse 17. What powerful and important point can be found there? What message of warning should it have for us, as well?

Here they were, leaders, teachers of the law, coming from all over, apparently to hear Jesus. The text says that at the time, the “power of the Lord was present to heal them.” In other words, Jesus was there; the power of God was there; help, healing, and salvation were there. The only problem was that self, sin, and pride got in their way. What a powerful warning to us all.

Meanwhile, in this story, we can see discipleship in action. First, there were those who brought the paralytic to Jesus. Notice how hard they worked. Unable to get past the crowd, they had to resort to other means. Think about how desperate they were for their friend. How easily they could have given up! Notice, too, how Jesus acknowledged their faith. Whether they had personally been healed by Jesus, the texts do not say. What we do know is that their works truly revealed their faith. They acted as disciples in the sense of bringing someone needy to Jesus.

After the paralytic was healed, he left glorifying God. No doubt his body and his words were a powerful tool for witness and discipleship (*see also vs. 26*).

Meanwhile, as all this is going on, the leaders fulminated in darkness over Jesus’ *blasphemies*. They let their religion, faith, and teaching get in the way of a living experience with Jesus. What a lesson to us all!

In what ways can we, even as professed disciples of Christ, let things get in the way of the Lord working in our lives, or even in the lives of others? What are some of the things that we harbor in our hearts that can blind us to the power of God? Most important, how can we get rid of them?

“To Send Fire on the Earth” (*Matt. 10:34–37*, *Luke 12:49–53*)

Christianity is regarded most often in peaceful terms. At Jesus’ birth, the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (*Luke 2:14*). Even more important, Christianity advocates love, not hate, even for our enemies. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (*Matt. 5:9*). How, then, do we understand what Jesus is saying in these verses?

“Jesus here dispels the mistaken opinion that some of the disciples apparently had, that the message they were to bear would result in nothing but harmony. They were not to be surprised, in their house-to-house work . . . , if differences arose as a result of their ministry. . . . When a [person] accepts Christ his closest friends often turn out to be [the] most bitter and relentless enemies. This is often true, not only in heathen lands, but also in Christian lands and among professed Christians who practice a form of religion but know little if anything of its power to transform the life.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 379, 380.

From your experience as a Christian, and from what you know of Jesus through other texts, what do you believe Jesus is telling us here, and why are these words so important for discipleship? See also *Matt. 10:24, 25*.

The important point to remember is that following Jesus will cost us big, one way or another. If it does not, then perhaps something is wrong. Maybe we are deceiving ourselves. In the end, we must realize that our witness and life of discipleship, of discipleship in action, can lead to dissension and division among even those to whom we are the closest. It does not always have to be that way, but Jesus wants us to realize that it can and to not be surprised by it when it does.

What has following Christ cost you, at least in terms of relationships with others? What have you learned in your own experience that could help you disciple someone else who is struggling because his or her faith has, as Jesus said it would, brought division into their life?

The Worth of Our Souls

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:35–37, NKJV).

A magazine article told about a special high school where students were doing exceptional work. Their level of academic achievement far exceeded that of most students in the same age bracket anywhere else in the country. These kids, young, ambitious, and bright, seemed destined to go places, to be, by the world’s standards, true success stories. The magazine then quoted one of these young people, who said: “We’re doing all this in order to beat death.”

To beat death? He is going to need more than good grades and a good job to do that.

The fact is that no matter who we are, or what we achieve in this life, sooner or later death comes, sooner or later everything we are ends up in a grave somewhere. And how long do we live, at best? For most of us, not even a hundred years, often not even close. And then it is all gone. What can it mean? What is the purpose of it all, if it all ends in death? What kind of legacy will we leave behind? Thousands of years ago, Solomon mused over these same issues (see *Ecclesiastes 1, 2*), and concluded that this life, in and of itself, with all its toils and troubles, was all *vanity*, from a Hebrew word meaning “breath,” “vapor.”

With this in mind, read over the texts for today, thinking about them in the context of this week’s lesson on discipleship in action. Ask yourself, in light of what Jesus is saying here, “What kind of life should I be living? What does it mean to lose my life for the sake of the gospel? What possibly could be worth my own soul? And what role does my discipling of others play in what Jesus is saying to me?” In other words, what could it cost us here, in this life, to be actively involved in discipleship? What changes do you need to make in order to be truly a disciple of Christ?

“ ‘Go Therefore and Make Disciples’ ”

One of the greatest sections on the work of discipleship, on discipleship in action, is found in Matthew 28:18–20. Read over the verses. Look at all the verbs there: *go, make, baptize, teach* (NKJV). Disciples should be making more disciples. It is as simple as that.

Read through the verses again, focusing on what Jesus said in the beginning, about all authority (or power) being given to Him in heaven and in earth (see Luke 1:32, Acts 10:36, Eph. 1:20, Heb. 1:13). Why are those words so important for all who are involved in the work of making disciples?

Notice, too, what Jesus says is involved in this work. They are to teach *all nations*. No exclusivity here, no ethnic, gender, or national boundaries. The death of Christ was for all humanity, everywhere (Rom. 5:17–19, Heb. 2:9); hence, it only makes sense that the gospel commission would be for all humanity, as well (Rev. 14:6, 7).

Notice carefully that Jesus tells them to teach all nations. Where is His emphasis?

Again, as we can see, discipleship is action. Those who become disciples are those who obey, who do the things that Jesus commanded. With these words, Jesus utterly destroys any notion that salvation is purely an intellectual assent to certain doctrinal truths. Though that is certainly part of what it means to be a disciple, it does not end there. Disciples are those who follow Jesus, and we follow Jesus by obeying Him—and we obey Him, not in order to be saved but because we already are saved, in Him.

Jesus’ promise is that He will be with us until the end of the world. How have you experienced in your own life the reality of that promise? Dwell on the evidences of Christ’s presence with you. Write and/or recite a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for what Jesus has done and is doing in your life.

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 379–381, 746–750; Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 350–358; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 433–436, in *The Desire of Ages*; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Discipleship and the Cross,” pp. 85–104, in *The Cost of Discipleship*; Mark 16:15–20, John 14–17.

“The Saviour bade His disciples not to hope that the world’s enmity to the gospel would be overcome, and that after a time its opposition would cease. He said, ‘I came not to send peace, but a sword.’ This creating of strife is not the effect of the gospel, but the result of opposition to it. Of all persecution the hardest to bear is variance in the home, the estrangement of dearest earthly friends. But Jesus declares, ‘He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.’ ” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 357.

“Jesus sanctioned the binding claims of the fifth commandment and rebuked any attempt to escape the obligations of children toward their parents. . . . Nevertheless, love for one’s parents must never stand in the way of obedience to God in every particular, should the two be in conflict. Love to God and service for Him are to be the supreme rule of life, ‘the first and great commandment’ . . . ; but ‘the second’ table of the Decalogue, which contains the fifth commandment, is ‘like’ the first in nature and importance.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 380.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Do you know of anyone suffering now directly because of their commitment to Jesus? If so, how can you help? What can you as an individual, as a Sabbath School class, or as a church do to bring some relief?
- ❷ Dwell more on the texts for Wednesday’s lesson. What important message is Jesus giving us here? Bring your thoughts to class, and as a class talk about what it means to lose your life for the sake of the gospel. What can you learn from each other’s experiences?
- ❸ This week’s lesson was on discipleship in action. What is going on in your own church in the area of discipleship? What can you as a class do to help the church as a whole take a more active role in this important work? For example, what is being done to help disciple new members?

Wayward Wanderings

by MIKE BROWNHILL

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Cyrus Jacobs hungered after righteousness. The trouble is, like so many others, Cyrus sought it in the wrong places.

Cyrus grew up in Sydney and Brisbane, Australia. This young agnostic thought he had all the answers and loved to debate with Christians. And since most Christians didn’t know the Bible well, he usually won. He experimented with heroin and LSD, which led him to believe he was close to God.

While serving in the Australian army, Cyrus went absent without leave. He was imprisoned and received a dishonorable discharge. Then he met some dubious characters who led him into more trouble, including arson.

In spite of his brushes with the law, God didn’t give up on young Cyrus. The Holy Spirit wooed him throughout the twists and turns of his troubled life. Cyrus decided to embark on a spiritual journey to find himself and God.

He sought enlightenment through Eastern meditation and teachings. But God led him to an old Christian farmer who answered Cyrus’s questions with God’s Word. Cyrus found the Bible miraculously relevant to his life. He gave his heart to Jesus and was baptized in a Protestant church that same day.

While sharing his faith in Jesus one night, a deranged man didn’t like what Cyrus was saying and stabbed him in the stomach, the chest, and the throat. Miraculously, Cyrus survived.

From his personal Bible study, Cyrus became convinced that God valued the Sabbath that He had established in Eden. But he found his fellow church members didn’t share his convictions.

Cyrus experienced God’s hand in his life again and again during several years of adventure and study. While scuba diving in Indonesia, he met his wife, Suminah. They returned to Australia and settled in Queensland.

Here they met Rob and Molly Cock, who were studying the Bible with a local pastor. They invited Cyrus and Suminah to join them. Cyrus responded to a television advertisement and requested a free viewing of The Search video series on biblical truths. In time he was rebaptized as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Suminah soon followed.

God follows searching people relentlessly until they find Him. Our mission offerings support evangelistic outreach around the world.

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