Disciples and Scripture

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).
Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived during one of his country’s most dangerous eras—World War II. The Nazis, under the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler, intentionally murdered millions of innocent men, women, and children. While many of Bonhoeffer’s Christian fellow citizens compromised with the Nazi regime, he did not. He was prepared to die for Christ and stand up for what Scripture taught. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer wrote, “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”* On April 9, 1945, right before the end of the war, Bonhoeffer was hanged by the Nazi government.

Are you ready to die for Christ? I believe Bonheoffer had it right when he said that we cannot be Christians without discipleship. The notion of discipleship is indeed a valued Christian tenet—few would argue with that. However, identifying what discipleship **really is** opens doors for discussion. How are we to identify ourselves with discipleship? When Jesus bids us to disciple, what are we to do? Is there a way for us to easily recognize discipleship and say “Yes! That’s it!”?

Jesus explicitly and unequivocally asks people to follow Him (see Matt. 4:19). Yet as simple as it may sound, following Him can seem like a vague, abstract concept that makes us squint our eyes and think. For starters, we need to get into the Scriptures. Jesus’ ministry was affirmed by Old Testament prophecies. Jesus rebuked scribes, Pharisees, and the devil himself, based on Scripture. And on the Sabbath, He preached from it. The New Testament is clear that Jesus and Scripture are inseparable. So both a head and heart knowledge of the Bible are essential for having a relationship with the Savior. They are also defining characteristics of His disciples.

Discipleship can be complex. But we know for sure that we need to get into God’s Word to understand it. Jesus prayed for God to “‘sanctify them [His disciples] by the truth; your [God’s] word is truth. . . . For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified’ ” (John 17:17–19, NIV). Jesus has sanctified Himself so we, too, can be sanctified. So when it comes to discipleship and reading your Bible, don’t worry. It’s all about Jesus. He will help you.

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Rodrick R. London, Monrovia, Maryland, U.S.A.
Jesus was a radical person. Usually that is not a word you would associate with our loving and kind God. But radical, in this sense, means “very different from the usual or traditional.” Jesus was a young man who challenged the foundations of self-righteous religious zealots. He questioned their interpretation of Scripture and tried to help them understand His teachings. In doing so, He shook the weak pillars of their faith. Yet He knew He had to do it. He knew He would rise again. It was a prophecy to be fulfilled and a victory to be won.

His promises can conquer anything. Getting to know the Word can take us places we never dreamed of.

What Has Always Been (John 10:34–37; 2 Pet. 3:11–13)

Scripture always remains constant. It was revealed to us, translated for us, and made available to us. It is our manual for life, our beacon of hope, our wellspring of unlimited knowledge. It is the story of our past and the promise of our future.

The oldest existing parts of the Bible date back to approximately 250 B.C. to A.D. 65. “The majority of the scrolls were discovered in caves along the western shore of the Dead Sea during 1947 to 1956. The most famous of these are the eleven caves near Qumran, where a community lived which some scholars identify as Essenes, a Jewish sect known to have existed elsewhere in Israel during the Second Temple period, which includes the time of Jesus.” The discovery of these texts can be seen as God’s way of reinforcing the authenticity and credibility of His Word.

What Continues to Be (Isa. 43:1, 2; Luke 4:1–12; Eph. 6:17; 1 Pet. 5:8–11)

Jesus’ disciples sought to live by the Holy Spirit and God’s Word. We are in the same position as they were. He forgives our sins, and we want to be led by the Scriptures in order to be transformed through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus met every temptation He had by relying on Scripture. Because of His constant communion with the Father, He understood what was required of Him. How Jesus dealt with Satan’s temptations is a crucial lesson for us. We cannot handle Satan by ourselves. We must always remember that we have God on our side. With the help of His Holy Spirit, let us “take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is
the word of God” (Eph. 6:17, NIV). When you study the Bible, remember that Jesus is there, encouraging us, directing us, and preparing us for battle. Standing alone, we are defeated; but standing with God, victory is assured.

**What Would Life Be Without the Bible? (John 5:39; Phil. 4:4–19)**

“A man can no more diminish God’s glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, ‘darkness’ on the walls of his cell.”4 That is what life as a disciple would be without the Bible—impossible. Without having the armor of the Word, how can we expect to win souls? More important, do we accept fully what the Word is and what it means for us?

These are questions we need to seriously consider if we want to be Christ’s disciples. God wants us to work for Him and with Him, but how stubborn and selfish we often are. How often we forget the wonderful things that transpired in our lives when we trusted Him. Yet God still wants us. Sometimes we are the only ones standing in the way of serving Him. Our faith is ravaged every time we fail to spend quality time with Him. Sometimes we falter and we might not feel we are good enough. Then guilt overtakes us. However, God’s promises within the Bible can soothe any doubt we might have. His promises can conquer anything. Getting to know the Word can take us places we never dreamed of.

**REACT**

1. If someone were to ask you what the Bible means to you, how would you answer? What does your response say about your current relationship with the Bible’s Author?

2. What verses or stories in the Bible have influenced you the most, and why?

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“In the Word the Saviour is revealed in all His beauty and loveliness. Every soul will find comfort and consolation in the Bible, which is full of promises concerning what God will do for the one who comes into right relation to Him. Especially will the sick be comforted by hearing the Word; for in giving the Scriptures God has given to mankind a leaf from the tree of life, which is for the healing of the nations. How can anyone who reads the Scriptures or who has heard them read, lose his interest in heavenly things, and find pleasure in amusements and enchantments of the world?”

“There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme. It is only in the light of the cross that we can discern the exalted character of the law of God. The soul palsied by sin can be endowed with life only through the work wrought out upon the cross by the Author of our salvation.”

“Many souls are hungering for the bread of life. Their cry is, ‘Give me bread; do not give me a stone. It is bread that I want.’ Feed these perishing, starving souls. Let our ministers bear in mind that the strongest meat is not to be given to babes who know not the first principles of the truth as we believe it. In every age the Lord has had a special message for the people of that time; so we have a message for the people in this age. But while we have many things to say, we may be compelled to withhold some of them for a time, because the people are not prepared to receive them now.”

**REACT**

1. In light of the fact that all Scripture testifies of Jesus, and because we are His disciples, what should be our motivation and goal in searching the Scriptures? Why?

2. Based on the third paragraph above, how should we approach others in sharing the Scriptures? How might we need to change some of our methods, and why is it important to contextualize our approach to Scripture when working with different individuals?

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Amir Davis, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
Raindrops clung to my coat as I settled into the driver’s seat and turned the ignition. The engine roared to life, then settled into a quiet purr. I was about to take my first trip to town in my new car. Life was good. That is until the engine sputtered and died. As I repeatedly turned the key, a choking feeling rose in my throat. Clearly the battery was drained of life. Why had the car died so suddenly? A mechanic discovered that two parts in the alternator were not connecting. The solution was to simply touch the gas pedal after starting the car.

**Jesus Christ is the connection in our spiritual “alternator.”**

What does Matthew 5:17–20 have in common with my car trouble? Imagine that our spiritual experience is like a fine-tuned engine. We start the car and everything seems fine, but the current isn’t flowing. When the battery drains, the engine quits, leaving us in need of a spiritual jumpstart. Thankfully, the Master Mechanic has an answer. It’s the same one He gave the scribes and Pharisees. This text shows us the importance of Scripture and the law. But divorced from the context of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures have no life of their own. They cannot give us eternal life.

Jesus made a point of upholding the Law and Prophets, but He said that our righteousness needs to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. They kept the law so well that no one could out-do them. As far as the righteousness that is in the law, they were blameless. But there is only one kind of righteousness that can “exceed” that of the scribes and Pharisees. That righteousness is the righteousness of Christ.

Imagine these words spoken in love to us today. “ ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (John 5:39, NKJV).

Yes. Jesus Christ is the connection in our spiritual “alternator” that allows His life-giving current to flow from heaven to our hearts. Without this current, our spiritual battery drains. He did not come to remove a single part of the “engine” that is His law. Instead, He came to complete it with His life-giving power.

**REACT**

1. How can the concept of Christ as the power in the Word affect your personal devotions?
2. Think of three ways a relationship with Jesus helps you in understanding the Bible.

Nathan M. Jones, Weimar, California, U.S.A.
If you are like me, you probably know someone who lives to give Bible studies and nurture new Christians. Although you respect and are amazed by this person, you don’t think giving Bible studies is your thing. That’s fine. The body of Christ has many members, each with different talents. As a whole, however, our mission as Jesus’ disciples is to represent God’s character as revealed in Scripture.

Most of us know that the Bereans got bonus points for verifying Paul’s claims about the Messiah with the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 17:11), and Jesus used Scripture to preach and to teach. But how do we, as modern disciples, use the Bible to disciple others? The story of Peter, John, and the lame beggar in Acts 3 tells us.

**Be proactive.** Many Christians are apathetic. They go to church, but that’s about it. Peter and John show us what happens when we take our religion seriously. At the beginning of Acts 3, they are going to the temple to pray. They had personally spent time with Jesus, but they continued to study Scripture and commune with God. Before we can disciple others, we must be proactive disciples ourselves by daily spending time with God in His Word.

**Change lives.** As proactive Christians, we have the opportunity to change lives. When the beggar asked for help, Peter and John didn’t ignore him. Instead, they impacted his life forever. Be alert to people in need. Pray for God to bring people into your life whom you can help. Sometimes it’s as simple as cheering someone up. Other times it involves more work, but your actions can impact those individuals forever. When opportunities arise, make a difference.

**Share Jesus.** When lives are changed, people ask questions. After healing the lame man, Peter and John shared the story of Jesus—who He was and how He fulfilled Scripture. This reflects back to being proactive. If we don’t study the Bible, we can’t share it with others. When people see the difference you make in their lives and the lives of others, they will ask why. You’ve already shared Jesus by your actions. Now share Him as revealed in Scripture.

**REACT**

1. When was the last time you told someone about Jesus?
2. What keeps you from daily studying Scripture?
3. What can you do this week to prepare yourself to share Jesus through Scripture?

Anna Bartlett, Harrison, Tennessee, U.S.A.
It is common for Christians to overlook the deep, everlasting meanings etched into the Scriptures and overwrite them with their own interpretations. In the book of Matthew, Jesus spoke of people who overlooked Scripture and taught the “traditions of men.” Humans have a funny way of adding their own spin to what the Bible says. But Jesus was clear about the purpose of God’s Word. His coming to earth and dying for us fulfilled the Word of God. Ironically, this is what so many of us seem to miss: Jesus and His Scriptures.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus talked about how His mission on earth was not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Despite this verse’s clear and solid meaning, there are still people who believe that Christ’s death abolished the law, and that we are, therefore, no longer bound to it. They rationalize that because of His death, we are now under grace and have no need for His Ten Commandments. There are also people who go to the opposite extreme by believing that the only way to gain salvation is to keep all of the Ten Commandments perfectly. Both of these approaches miss the mark, which is Christ. He pointed to the law and fulfilled it. In the same way that many Christians today misinterpret Scripture, the Pharisees and Sadducees misinterpreted Scripture in much the same way. They, too, overlooked the most pivotal areas of Scripture—the prophecies that pointed to Christ. Thus, when Christ was finally among them, they did not know who He truly was. They missed His divinity because of their blindness. Could we, too, in this day and age possibly suffer from that same blindness?

Jesus lived the Scriptures.

Jesus lived the Scriptures, taught the Scriptures, and fulfilled the Scriptures. The Scriptures point to Jesus, and He preached the Scriptures. In the same way, we are called to live in Jesus and to discover more about Him through the Word God has given us. We should all, through careful study of Scripture about who Christ is, ignore human tradition and set our eyes on what really matters—Jesus. Only then will we truly be able to witness for Him and show others who He really is.

REACT

1. Why is it that so many people can’t see the simplicity that is in Christ, and the truth of Christ rooted in the Scriptures?
2. How can we keep ourselves from falling into the trap of losing sight of Jesus and the Bible?
CONCLUDE

Jesus has called us to be His disciples. True to the meaning of the term *disciples*—learners—our relationship with Jesus is strengthened through prayer and Bible study. We have the responsibility to share the Bible truths that we have learned with others, and also to teach them to think and to study for themselves. Questions about and oppositions to biblical beliefs should not discourage us. Let us discern the genuine questions (like the ones asked by the Bereans) and seek God’s help to meet the trials and difficulties of discipleship.

CONSIDER

- Starting a prayer journal (if you have not already done so). Select one of the Gospels, read the verses prayerfully, and let the Holy Spirit speak to you through specific verses. Write the verses in red and your conversation with God in another color.
- Sharing your concerns on discipleship with a mentor or significant other. Ask her/him to pray with you over these concerns.
- Memorizing selected verses from the Bible. Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, / That I might not sin against You” (NKJV).
- Calculating the best choice: “A penny doubled daily for a month, or $1,000 a day for a month.” Appreciate the Great Commission in the light of your best mathematical choice.
- Drawing an outline of a heart and writing within it the three requirements for discipleship as found in Luke 9:23. Reflect on what these requirements entail for you personally.
- Reading *From Moody to Graham*, http://sermons.logos.com/submissions/84109#content=/submissions/84109, to appreciate the “domino effect” of discipleship through the help of the Holy Spirit.

CONNECT

Discipling Through

Metaphor

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world’ ”

(Matt. 13:34, 35, NIV).
“‘Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men,’ ” Christ said when He invited His disciples to join Him (Matt. 4:19, NKJV). These words paint a picture of how individuals of different ages, cultures, and stages of spiritual growth can be brought together into the body of Christ. We also are required to become salt and light (Matt. 5:13–16), so that we can provide for humanity and lead people to the Greater Light (John 8:12).

**Disciples are to be role models, persons whose words, deeds, and actions show that they follow Christ.**

The story of the prodigal son who left home, squandered his inheritance, but then repented and returned home to his father, is about any sinner who returns to God and is forgiven (Luke 15:11–24). Then there is the blind man leading another blind man and both of them falling into a pit. This depicts the lack of both spiritual and moral vision (Matt. 15:1–14).

Christ is portrayed as the Lamb of God (Isa. 53:7; John 1:29). Jesus would offer Himself to atone for the sins of humankind like the lambs in the sacrificial system of the sanctuary. Although the disciples would not be sacrificed in the same manner as Christ, they would undergo persecution and endure other types of sacrifices as they preached the gospel (Luke 10:3).

So how do we disciple individuals? How do we teach them to follow Christ? Should it not be by modeling the life of Christ in our daily activities and challenges? Disciples are to be role models, persons whose words, deeds, and actions show that they follow Christ. Therefore, it is prudent to study the metaphors Christ used so that we can learn how to disciple others.

The parables of Jesus contain various metaphors to help us understand His kingdom. One of the distinctive features of a metaphor is its ability to put a new spin on an old thought, to enable someone to understand a “new” truth by referencing something familiar. As disciples ourselves, let us learn to use metaphors and parables to draw others to the Savior. In so doing, we, too, shall be the salt of the earth.

*Andre Henry, Raleigh, North Carolina, U.S.A.*
Jesus’ life was influenced by the spiritual turmoil and the political uncertainty of the times in which He lived. His earthly parents traveled to Egypt to secure His safety. Isaiah and other prophets predicted the plots that would attempt to undermine belief in His divinity. When Jesus went about His earthly ministry, He had to sometimes be careful about how He presented His message so that He wouldn’t be arrested.

Jesus’ parables showed that everyone could have access to salvation.

Jesus’ enemies waited for Him to make a mistake. They hung on His every word, hoping to trap Him. That is why He often spoke in parables in order to get the truth to the common people. These presentations were also a fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 78:1–4; Matt. 13:34, 35). It was important for Him to communicate through parables so that His enemies could not obstruct the spreading of the gospel. “The condition of the people’s hearts made it necessary for Christ to use parables. (A parable is a story in which something familiar explains something unfamiliar.) Christ quotes Isa. 6:9–10 to explain why He was using parables: the hearts, ears, and eyes of the people had become dull, hard, and blind. By using parables, He was exciting the curiosity of the concerned. . . . But He was also hiding the truth from the rebellious. . . . The parables did not keep people from learning the truth; rather, the parables excited their interest and encouraged them to learn.”

Jesus’ parables showed that everyone could have access to salvation because people of varying educational attainment could understand the simple truths these parables expressed. Therefore, no one could claim ignorance regarding salvation. Neither will an unwillingness to hear the gospel prevent others from hearing it. Through the use of parables, Jesus demonstrated the importance of being “‘wise as serpents and harmless as doves’” (Matt. 10:16, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. Why would Jesus go to such lengths to teach such simple truths?
2. What can you do to be sure that you are not preventing the proclamation of God’s Word?
3. How do you react when the gospel becomes submerged in political correctness?

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Omar Palmer, Ontario, Canada
The Commission (Matt. 28:18–20)

Christ gave the Great Commission to “teach all nations.” We must reflect His image and use the techniques He demonstrated. The Greek word didaskalos means one “who teaches concerning the things of God, and the duties of man.” The word parable comes from the Greek parabolē, meaning “comparison or analogy.” Jesus taught with parables and stories to illustrate spiritual truths necessary for discipling, salvation, justification, and sanctification. These parables and stories made it easier for His hearers to understand.

If you follow, you must fish!

The Audience (Matt. 13:1–3; John 6:1–14)

Jesus had a mixed multitude whether the crowds followed Him throughout the various provinces and villages, or joined the throngs wanting to hear Him as He taught and healed. His “congregation,” both in the synagogue and on the grassy slopes of the countryside, consisted of lawyers, doctors, tax collectors, scribes, and Pharisees. The crowds also included farmers and fishermen, women and children, rich and poor, believers and nonbelievers. Jesus needed an easily understood method of communication. Parables served that purpose.

Many Stories, One Lesson (Matt. 13:10–17)

In Matthew 13:10–17, Jesus gives the rationale for His use of parables. We should disciple persons by using His methods. The setting of His ministry included agricultural areas and lakeshores. He told stories about a farmer sowing seed (Mark 4:1–9), weeds growing among good grain (Matt. 13:18–30, 36–43), treasure in a field (Matt. 13:44), a mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32), a fishermen sorting fish (Matt. 13:47–50), and a man seeking treasure and pearls (Matt. 13:45, 46). These parables were easily understood. Many of them referred to simple everyday things, such as a woman baking bread (Luke 13:20, 21), a man knocking on his neighbor’s door at night (Luke 11:5–8), and a father giving good gifts (Luke 11:11–13). “Yet they deal with major religious themes, such as the growth of the Kingdom of God, the importance of prayer, and the meaning of love.”

Discipling Others (Mark 4:3–8, 14–22)

In order to disciple individuals, one must understand the message that God is giving and rely on Him for the spreading of that message. “Let it be
observed, that to hear, to understand, and to bring forth fruit, are the three
grand evidences of a genuine believer. He who does not hear the word of
wisdom cannot understand what makes for his peace; and he who does
not understand what the Gospel requires him to be and to perform, can-
not bring forth fruit; and he who is not fruitful, very fruitful, cannot be a
disciple of Christ; and he who is not Christ’s disciple cannot enter into the
kingdom of God.”

It is necessary, urgent, and imperative for us to disciple others (Matt.
28:18–20). We must follow and uplift Christ, help others to know Him by
reflecting His image, then extend the call to others through our commit-
ment, training, and mentoring. We must be willing to serve and to become
imitators of Christ. In order to effectively disciple others, our effective
Christian contact with those whom we disciple must show a lifetime of
spiritual growth. We must always be growing in Him. We must become
friends with others and witness to them (2 Tim. 2:2). We must allow our
lives and teachings to transform others.

The “Aha” Moment (Mark 4:3–20; Luke 16:19–31)

Our teaching must show God’s salvation of the human race as explained
in the following parables—the sower (Mark 4:3–20); the lost sheep (Luke
15:3–7); the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10); and the lost son (Luke 15:11–32). Jus-
tification is epitomized in these parables: the two sons (Matt. 21:28–32) and
the great supper (Luke 14:15–24). Sanctification is demonstrated in the par-

Catch the Fire (Matt. 5:13–16)

Christ’s disciples learned about the gospel from the Master Teacher. He
“employed” them to disseminate the gospel to others by mingling with
them (Mark 9:50; Luke 10:1, 2; Col. 4:6). We must do the same. We are the
salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste it is useless (Matt. 5:13).
In order for it to work, yeast is used in proportion to the dough (Matt.
13:33). Likewise, as we seek to disciple others, we must become active in
their lives. Salt and yeast by themselves are inactive, but once they come
in contact with food, a difference can be tasted and seen. In the same
manner, Christians should influence the lives of unbelievers in significantly
spiritual ways. Learn the doctrine of the gospel. Teach it to others. Be the
light. Live by faith. Spread the word. Disciple others. Ignite the world. If
you follow, you must fish!

   (accessed November 12, 2012).
   12, 2012).
‘Therefore speak I to them in parables’ . . . ‘because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . .’

“He [Jesus] sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. No more effective method of instruction could He have employed.”

“Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers. Their interest was aroused by figures drawn from the surroundings of their daily life. None who listened to the Saviour could feel that they were neglected or forgotten. The humblest, the most sinful, heard in His teaching a voice that spoke to them in sympathy and tenderness.”

“Christ used “nature and the experiences of life” to give them a new revelation of God’s truth.”

“It was Christ who directed the education of Israel. Concerning the commandments and ordinances of the Lord He said, ‘Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up’ [Deut. 6:7].” So it should be today.

“Christ said to Nicodemus, ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh . . . so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.’ John 3:8. . . . A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.”

**REACT**

1. How can you portray Christ through modern metaphors?
2. Identify metaphors in the Bible and in Christ’s teachings. How can they help you to exemplify Jesus when you meet others?

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2. Ibid., pp. 21, 22.
3. Ibid., p. 22.
4. Ibid., pp. 23, 24.
Both Old and New Testament writers used stories to present spiritual truths. Clearly, our Creator meant for us to learn this way. Through the use of stories, illustrations, parables, and metaphors, God presents timeless lessons (see Isaiah 28; Ezekiel 15; Matt. 7:24–27; 1 Cor. 3:10–16).

Nathan’s parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–9 conveys the sensitivity God uses to help someone understand the enormity of sin. Equally effective are profound truths packaged in metaphoric expressions such as the one found in Acts 10:9–16.

Christ used many parables to fix marvelous truths in the minds of His hearers. He presented spiritual concepts such as justification, righteousness, and sanctification by using symbols and images with which His hearers could identify. As a largely agrarian society, these people could understand the stories of the sower, the wheat and tares, and the mustard seed (Matt. 13:1–32). These parables helped them to appreciate the nature of the kingdom of heaven. They also understood architectural principles (Matt. 7:24–27) and revolutionary conduct (Luke 14:16–23; 20:9–19).

As we participate in the work of discipling, we should explore various avenues for fixing eternal truths in the minds of the hearers. We must ask ourselves, How can we use stories, similes, and metaphors to share the gospel with others? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Become familiar with the stories, parables, and analogies in both the Old and New Testaments.** Once we appreciate and understand the truths they convey, we will be able to share them with the persons to whom we witness and help them uncover spiritual truths embedded in the stories.

2. **Note elements in the stories that apply to your situation and help others to see how the stories apply to them.** Regardless of age or location, biblical stories usually have some universal application.

3. **Use illustrations from the natural world or from everyday life.** Many lessons can be learned from nature—God’s lesson book. We need to become more observant of our natural surroundings. In the rush of our daily activities, we often fail to observe objects in nature that can teach us so much.

4. **Decide what spiritual applications you can make from technology.** Identify some metaphors that are associated with technology. Consider how relevant these metaphors are to young adults.

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**How-to**

**Tell Me a Story**

2 Sam. 12:1–9; Matt. 7:24–27; 13:1–30

Carol Joy Fider, Mandeville, Jamaica
In order to be Christ’s disciple, one must know how He personally embraced His value statement and lived His vision. Christ came to call sinners to repentance. He lived an exemplary life. He called His disciples from every walk of life to follow Him and become fishers of men (Mark 1:16, 17; 3:14–19). His deeds shone above any criticism that was levied at Him. We must let our light shine so that others may see Christ rather than us (Matt. 5:14–16).

The parable of the talents teaches us that, as disciples, we should develop what God has given us to enhance His kingdom. If we do not contribute our time and effort to His work, how can we expect a reward or increase? Investing wisely in human capital will have a far greater yield than can be expected of stocks or bonds when done with the understanding that we need to diversify our portfolio, sowing beside all waters and in all areas (Eccles. 11:6; Pss. 92:13; 107:37; Matt. 13:3–8). Paul stated that he “planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6, NKJV).

When Nathan confronted King David about his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, there was no doubt that David understood the metaphor of the ewe lamb (2 Sam. 12:1–7). This is evidenced by his quick response of condemnation to impose swift judgment and punishment on the perpetrator of the crime. Maybe if David had realized that the prophet was speaking of him, he would not have been so hasty in responding. Human beings are always ready to point a finger at others, forgetting that while one finger points to the person whom we wish to condemn, three fingers are pointing out our sins.

We should prayerfully explore the metaphoric devices of the Scriptures to understand how Christ reached His various audiences through parables. Then we can use similar strategies for the understanding of God’s words as we seek to point other individuals to the Bible’s everlasting truths.

**REACT**

1. How can we become true disciples of Christ?
2. Read such passages as Job 18:5, 6; Mark 2:21, 22; and Luke 14:7–11, and determine the meaning of the metaphors you find there.
CONCLUDE
Jesus spoke in metaphors because Jews and Gentiles found them interesting and easy to understand. When He tied a new truth to a familiar story or comparison, that truth was easier to remember and had more force. A metaphor’s simplicity often enabled Jesus to camouflage unsettling ideas which—if stated openly—might have resulted in His premature capture. A metaphor or parable’s teaching power is proven even today, because amid our wide choice of message-delivery systems, a story is still the best way to interest and convince.

CONSIDER
• Composing church reader board poems about important issues. If your church doesn’t have a reader board, you can post these on your church Web site or on a social media site. These poems should be about four short lines. For example, “My New Year’s / resolution is / to let my heart / be changed by His.” Or “Shoulders Tense / and Nerves A-fray / Welcome, Welcome / Sabbath Day.”
• Creating an audio playlist of the Christian or secular songs which at one point in your life filled your eyes with tears. Write your own song about the power these songs had on you, and let the chorus of the song explain why.
• Walking into your dorm room or the cafeteria and making a list of at least three items that you see—for example, a salt shaker or spoon, or a lamp and a chair. Then finish this sentence, “The kingdom of heaven is like a salt shaker (or other item) . . .” Then write the type of parable Jesus would use. If you’re not at school, choose objects in a room of your apartment, house, or something in your workplace.
• Hosting a Friday evening vesper service, to which those whom you invite bring an object of their choosing—something from nature, a kitchen utensil, a shoe, a scarf, etc. Brainstorm about parables which could arise from these items. Avoid the usual comparisons Jesus made. Try to create brand-new parables that teach spiritual lessons.

CONNECT
Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “parable” (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1979). This article contains a categorized list of Jesus’ parables, with a “principles illustrated” column.
Discipleship and Prayer

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me’ ”

(John 17:20, 21, NKJV).
We often marvel at the incredible display of power when we read how Jesus fed thousands of people from only five loaves of bread and two fish. However, most of the time we tend to miss the lessons on discipleship that we can learn from this account.

We are encouraged to pray for the needs of those around us.

First, Jesus wants us to understand that His power knows no boundaries, and that no matter how desperate our situation may be, He can produce solutions that are way beyond the reach of our imagination. Second, He wants us to reflect on the fact that it was not He who went through the famished crowd giving out food, but rather His disciples. Thus, we learn that after we have spent time with Jesus, we are to share with others what we experience with Him.

Distributing so much food among so many people must have taken quite a long time. As the disciples went around sharing the food, they would run out of it and have to return to Christ for more. Likewise, we must continually return to Jesus for spiritual nourishment in order for us to witness to others. Nothing can ever replace our time spent with Him, studying His Word, praying to Him, and listening to what He has to say to us in return.

In the context of close friendship and partnership with God, we are encouraged to pray for the needs of those around us. It is through prayer that we intercede for our friends and loved ones whom we wish to see in heaven. We must acknowledge the unlimited power of prayer. God's promises for those who claim this power still apply to us today. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7, NIV).

Genuinely caring for the lives of those around us will help us to share with them our most precious treasure—our God-given spiritual food. Prayer, as we will learn this week, is one of God’s intended ways for us to claim our “daily bread”—the wisdom, love, and guidance we need to share Him with the world at large and with those around us.
Pray as Daniel Prayed (Dan. 9:1–19)

Prayer is the only place to begin if we want to understand and accept God’s call to personally be His disciple-making agents. We have the privilege of praying in intercession for those whom God is leading us to. We also have insider access to examples of what such prayers can be like. Daniel 9 contains a powerful example of praying for those whose circumstances in life are the tragic consequences of their poor spiritual choices. As you read this story and prayer, notice these four points:

1. Daniel went into this prayer with Scripture study, fasting, and the wearing of sackcloth and ashes. He was serious!
2. He restated God’s place in the Israelite’s lives by his covenant-keeping and loving-kindness.
3. He confessed all their sins.
4. He pleaded for God’s mercy and grace to fall upon them.

As you begin to intercede for people in your network or community, consider the potential of using Daniel’s prayer as a model for those who are basically unaware of the sin in which they are living.

Pray Like Jesus Prayed (John 17; Eph. 1:15–21)

In John 17, we see Jesus’ deepest wishes for His followers. These wishes are as follows:

1. That they be “kept” in Jesus’ name and remain united.
2. That they be “kept” from the power of Satan.
3. That they experience “sanctification” (holiness, consecration).
4. That they be “with Jesus” wherever He is.

At times, we will come across believers who are not in unity with any local body of Christ. They might feel very alone and be very afraid of Christians because they have been hurt by them in the past. They may be individuals who have realized their unholiness because they struggle with addictions or other temptations. And they may be afraid of losing their eternal life with Jesus. John 17 is an excellent model of how to pray for these types of people.

Prayer Like Paul Prayed

In Ephesians 1:15–21, we read how Paul prayed for his friends in Ephesus. When we have prayed for our own friends, we’ve probably prayed for their health, safety, relief from pain, and resolution to problems. But Paul’s prayer implies that other concerns are more important:
1. He prayed for the Ephesian Christians to have wisdom in the knowledge of God and a spirit of revelation.

2. He prayed that their hearts would be enlightened with spiritual understanding to grasp the following: (a) the hope they can have in God’s calling on their lives, (b) the rich and glorious inheritance that God has in store for them, and (c) the greatness of God’s power that is available to them.

Paul’s content here is thoroughly spiritual. He is concerned with what is going on in the heart of the believers’ relationship with God. Rather than listing how he wants God to act in regard to the external circumstances of his friends’ lives, Paul expresses his hope for their solid spiritual health.

For further study in examples of powerful and specific intercessory prayer, consider three more of Paul’s prayers: Ephesians 3:16–19; Philippians 1:9–11; and Colossians 1:9–14.

**Priority Prayer in Discipleship (Matt. 14:22, 23)**

The work of discipleship will always include interpersonal complexities that cannot be anticipated or handled in our own wisdom and strength. Multiple times in the gospel stories Jesus is described as retreating to solitary prayer before or after a major ministry event. He would put physical distance between Himself and the multitudes, creating space and time to receive wisdom and strength from His Father.

For example, after Jesus fed the 5,000, He sent the disciples across the lake while He went up the mountain to pray alone. John 6:15 adds that Jesus perceived that the people were intending to take Him by force and make Him king. While He wanted to disciple His friends with the truth, He did not want to encourage the misdirected opinions of the “Messiah” that they held. It was a situation ripe for misunderstanding. When they would soon realize He was not going to fulfill certain expectations of theirs (like setting Himself up as an earthly king of Israel), they would be bitterly disappointed. Their faith would falter. Jesus’ first tool in dealing with this situation was prayer.

As we interact with people, there are many possibilities for misunderstanding. Just saying, “I’m a Christian” in today’s world can slam a door shut between you and someone who needs Jesus. Stereotypes, misconceptions, and opportunities for offense abound. But in following Jesus’ example, we have the opportunity of using prayer to negotiate these challenges as we offer ourselves to God as His agents of discipleship.

Other examples of Jesus turning to prayer in the face of overwhelming ministry demands include Mark 1:35–37; Luke 5:15, 16; and 6:12, 13.

**REACT**

1. Experiment with praying for God’s mercy and grace over the sins of people where you live.

2. Do you know a Christian who is relatively alone and tempted right now? How can you pray specifically for him or her?

Glenn G. Poole II, Elbert, Colorado, U.S.A.
Prayer must guide a disciple’s life. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul wrote that we should “pray continually” (5:17, NIV). Doing so is an important element of the Christian life that helps us to develop and nurture our relationship with God.

“While engaged in our daily work, we should lift the soul to heaven in prayer. These silent petitions rise like incense before the throne of grace; and the enemy is baffled. The Christian whose heart is thus stayed upon God cannot be overcome. No evil arts can destroy his peace. All the promises of God’s word, all the power of divine grace, all the resources of Jehovah, are pledged to secure his deliverance.

“Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. . . . Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Wellspring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor.

“It is a wonderful thing that . . . unworthy, erring mortals possess the power of offering their requests to God. What higher power can man desire than this—to be linked with the infinite God? Feeble, sinful man has the privilege of speaking to his Maker. We may utter words that reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. We may speak with Jesus as we walk by the way, and He says, I am at thy right hand.

“We may commune with God in our hearts; we may walk in companionship with Christ. When engaged in our daily labor, we may breathe out our heart’s desire, inaudible to any human ear; but that word cannot die away into silence, nor can it be lost. Nothing can drown the soul’s desire. It rises above the din of the street, above the noise of machinery. It is God to whom we are speaking, and our prayer is heard.”

* Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, pp. 249, 250.

Jimena Silva, Las Condes, Santiago, Chile
“Although busy amid the affairs of state, the prophet [Daniel] did not cease to study the Word of God. Daniel was obviously perplexed as to how to relate what had been revealed to him in the vision of ch. 8 to the events of the immediate future—the return of the Jews at the end of the 70 years (Jer. 29:10.)”

A result of Daniel’s bewilderment was one of the most earnest intercessory prayers in the Bible. He evidently thought that the end of this time period was near, and he perhaps feared that Israel had once again failed to meet the conditions for the fulfillment of this prophecy. Thus, he poured out his soul to God, asking for forgiveness and restoration.

More than 500 years later, Jesus, the greatest Prophet of all, knowing the struggles and hardships His disciples were going to face after His ascension, pled with His Father for guidance, protection, and the unity of His newly born body of believers (John 17). This prayer is also known as Jesus’ farewell speech, because it was uttered only a few hours before He was arrested and crucified. Despite knowing what was going to happen to Him, Jesus’ concern was for His disciples.

Though in different contexts, both Daniel’s prayers and Jesus’ prayer have God’s glory as the ultimate goal of their intercession. It is for His sake, prays Daniel, that Israel is to be delivered (Dan. 9:17, 19). Jesus introduces His prayer stating that His desire is to glorify His Father (John 17:1). Also, both Jesus and Daniel closely identified themselves with the people for whom they prayed. Daniel did not exclude himself when he confessed the sins of Israel (Dan. 9:4–6). Jesus referred to His disciples as “ ‘those whom you [God] gave me out of the world’ ” (John 17:6, NIV).

Moses, Elisha, and Jeremiah are also examples of Bible characters who pled with God for the salvation of their people. And God heard them. But they were only types of Jesus, our only Intercessor. It is He who carries our sorrows in His heart and our burdens on His shoulders. It is He who stands for us when Satan points out our failures.

**REACT**

1. What does it take to pray like Daniel?
2. Are we willing to burn the midnight oil the way Jesus did?
3. How much of our daily prayers do we devote to intercession?

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*SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 848, 849.*

Pablo Quinteros, Managua, Nicaragua
Even though Christ’s disciples are to pray, it can still be a practice that some Christians feel uncomfortable with. Like Jesus’ disciples in Luke 11:1, some may be saying, “‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (NKJV). For Christ’s disciples who truly want to know how to pray, here are several key ideas that are helpful to keep in mind.

**Leave the flowery prayer-prose behind.**

*Prayer must be the first line of attack, not the last resort.* Jesus constantly prayed before He engaged in ministry and when faced with serious challenges. We must do the same! Assume you need the wisdom and understanding to be gained in prayer. If you feel at all destitute when you face the task of discipleship, putting prayer as your first task will undoubtedly bring answers and support from God.

*Remember that prayer is a conversation within a relationship.* Just as we converse with acquaintances or intimate friends, we can express ourselves to Jesus plainly. Leave the flowery prayer-prose behind and share with Him what you think and feel about the discipleship situations you face.

*Mix prayer with thanksgiving.* “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6, NKJV). A crucial part of meaningful prayer is nurturing a spirit of thanksgiving within ourselves no matter what the circumstances.

*Intercede specifically for others.* Jesus modeled this concept beautifully in John 17:20, 21: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me’” (NKJV). Study the examples of intercessory prayer found in Daniel 9; John 17; Ephesians 1:15–21; 3:16–19; Philippians 1:9–11; and Colossians 1:9–12. Also study the prayers of Daniel, Jesus, and the words of Paul regarding prayer to influence the content of your own intercessory prayers.

**REACT**

From the list of intercessory prayers mentioned in the Bible, make a thorough list of just what the intercessors prayed for. Then explore why they may have prayed the way they did.

Lisa Poole, Elbert, Colorado, U.S.A.
Opinion
We Just Don’t Pray Enough!

Prayer is one way of building a solid relationship with our Creator so He can mold our hearts and minds according to His love and righteousness. A close relationship with Him also helps us to be enthusiastic about sharing Him with others. Jesus spent a lot of time praying to His Father. He knew that the stronger the relationship He had with Him, the more strength He would have to reflect the Father’s love and glory and to prepare for the Cross. Discipleship is nothing without prayer.

Discipleship is much more than bringing people to church.

If we consider our churches, we may find that sometimes discipleship is centered around many different things—giving Bible studies and evangelistic meetings, caring for the poor through Adventist Community Services, being a leader in one of the Sabbath School divisions, and so on. However, the unlimited power of prayer should always guide these activities and much more. Prayer is like food. We don’t eat only when we need to perform physical activities, because our bodies need energy for all the other activities we must perform. Likewise, we need constant spiritual food to always be able to communicate God’s truths in ways that allow God to use us as tools guided by His own hands. Prayer, then, builds strong disciples. Once we have built a strong connection with God, we’ll give true meaning to the real power of prayer, and our example will witness to many lost souls even without our noticing.

Discipleship is much more than bringing people to church. It is the privilege of being guided by God to reach people in friendly, personal ways. It is the privilege of witnessing His glory in the transformation of a heart.

Let us reevaluate how important prayer is not only to our lives, but for the salvation of others. What a wonderful gift God has given to us in prayer.

REACT
1. Do you think you pray enough? Do you think your congregation prays enough? What can we do to strengthen our habit of praying?
2. How do you think that praying more would affect your life as well as the lives of those surrounding you?
CONCLUDE

Christians know that the way to get to know God is to read His Word and talk with Him in prayer. These are the foundations of personal Christian spiritual growth. But prayer is not just for our own growth. Intercessory prayer is a way in which we can lift others spiritually and help to disciple them in their relationship with God. The Bible has many amazing examples of intercessory prayer. Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17 right before He went to the cross. In Daniel 9, the prophet intercedes earnestly for the captive people of Israel. We, too, can participate in prayer with other believers and intercede for those around us.

CONSIDER

• Praying through praise music. Music that uplifts the name of God and that is based on the Scriptures, such as “How Great Is Our God” by Chris Tomlin or “Mighty to Save” by Michael W. Smith, can help you connect with Him.
• Starting an intercessory prayer list. Keep a dated list of those for whom you pray. Then record the date when the prayer is answered. It is exciting to look back and see what God has done!
• Praying with an intercessory prayer group or a prayer partner. Pray with and for someone else.
• Journaling your prayers. If you find your mind wandering, write your prayers in a journal. It will help you organize your thoughts, and later you can reread your entries. Use the prayers of David for inspiration.
• Decorating a prayer space in your church or home. Having a place to retreat to that is decorated in such a way that leads your thoughts to God can enhance your prayer life.
• Organizing a prayer walk. Walk with a friend around your neighborhood and pray for each other, people on your prayer list, and those who live in the houses you pass.
• Create a piece of artwork that shows a favorite prayer Scripture.

CONNECT

Discipling

Children

“‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ they asked him. ‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you have called forth praise”? ’”

(Matt. 21:16, NIV).

Image of a child's drawing with drawings of a sun, a smiley face, hearts, flowers, and the words "I love you Jesus!"
We are bombarded with constant newsfeeds about new relationships, breakups, and what’s trending. We’re always ready to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. We ask questions, knowing that the Internet provides the answers. We come from broken homes laden with domestic violence, negligent parents, and only a few expressions of love. Society vies for our young souls, chanting lustful hedonism in our ears. These statements echo the struggles of our youth, but are we being heard? Are we, as a church, reaching out and showing how essential it is to follow Christ?

Today’s youth are facing an ultimate low of moral depravity. In 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance based on priority health-risk behaviors among American high-school students. Nationwide, 38.7 percent had drank alcohol; 32.8 percent had been in a physical fight; and 47.4 percent had engaged in sexual intercourse.* Many resources are devoted to obtaining statistics about the various problems of our youth. We, as a church, have always known that the origin of these problems is sin. Since Adam and Eve broke God’s law, sin has been intertwined in our DNA. It is no respecter of race, gender, or age, and it plagues all of creation.

Satan especially targets the youth. He knows they are service-oriented and bubbling with ingenuity and optimism. Jesus Christ, our Creator, knows this as well. Our youth today are hard-pressed by the glitter of today’s society. The adversary is entering into their minds through every form of media. It’s high time for us as a church to open our eyes and our hearts to our youth. We must never forget the children. They, too, can receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and lead others to Christ. Youth bring renewed hope to evangelism and can represent the church of today. This week, let’s look deeper into ministering to youth so they, too, will be assured of a place in God’s kingdom.

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Jamala D. Swindle, Miami, Florida, U.S.A.
It is common practice for Seventh-day Adventist parents to dedicate their children to the Lord. It was the same during the time of Christ. “They brought little children to Him, that He might touch them” (Mark 10:13, NKJV). The word *touch* comes from the Greek word *haptomai* which, according to *Strong’s* translation, means “to attach oneself to.”¹ The word appears 36 times in the Bible. But in Mark 10:13, there is no evidence of the children needing to be cured. Could it be that those who brought the children to Christ simply wanted them attached to the Messiah?

We, too, must receive the kingdom of God as little children.

As disciples of Christ, our role is to bring children to Christ so that He may “touch” them. Matthew Henry wrote: “It doth not appear that they needed any bodily cure, nor were they capable of being taught: but it seems that they who had the care of them were mostly concerned about their souls, their better part, which ought to be the principal care of all parents for their children. They believed that Christ’s blessing would do their souls good; and therefore to him they brought them, that he might touch them, knowing that he could reach their hearts.”²

The Bible is clear that we, too, must receive the kingdom of God as little children (Mark 10:15). We must be willing to enter the Savior’s arms, be touched by Him, and find solace for our souls, believing that He will do what is best for us.

Most children are flexible and easily led. When we come to Christ in the same way, we are accepting His leading in our lives. When we come to Christ as a little child would, we come to Him vulnerable yet willing to be loved and cared for by Him as a parent who has our best interests at heart.

Have you been touched by Christ? Are you willing to reach out and touch Him?

**REACT**

1. Consider the children within your sphere of influence. How can you bring them to Christ?

2. How does your attachment to Christ influence those around you with particular emphasis on the children you come in contact with?


The Hebrew Child’s Advantage (Deut. 6:6, 7; Jer. 7:31)

After Moses repeated the Ten Commandments to Israel, he instructed parents to keep them in their hearts and teach them to their children. Thus God’s plan was to give Hebrew children a double advantage—they were to be taught by both precept and example. In so doing, God-fearing family units were formed. Through teaching Scripture and being a good role model, today’s parents also may pass on this blessing to their children. Sadly, Israel departed from God, and society decayed to the point where they were even prepared to sacrifice their children to idols! Hence, the blessing God wanted to bestow on society through the discipling of children was lost.

Jesus’ Childhood (Luke 2:40–52)

Though Jesus’ earthly parents were far from perfect, they did not lose sight of Moses’ admonition to live the commandments and teach them to their children. Their devotion to spiritual matters was evidenced by the fact that they attended Passover in Jerusalem every year. Thus, God was able to use them in the formative years of Jesus’ human development. They were responsible, along with the extended community, for teaching Him. He learned how to be a faithful Jew through their example. When Jesus went to Jerusalem in His twelfth year, He stayed behind to talk with the teachers and ask questions. “Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:47, NIV). Clearly, Jesus’ upbringing had equipped Him with a sound spiritual knowledge and experience. It is interesting to note that His spiritual life continued to develop after this event (Luke 2:52). Some people feel disadvantaged because they were raised in a Christian home and have not had a radical “conversion experience.” However, Jesus’ example implies that being raised in a Christian family is God’s ideal for every child.


Jesus was requested a number of times to heal sick children. The fact that He took time to do so indicates that in God’s sight, children are just as worthy and important as adults. A healed child can also give a lifelong testimony about God’s love, goodness, and mercy. Efforts to influence children in spiritual matters are never wasted.
A Fearsome Warning (Matt. 11:25, 26; 18:1–6, 10–14)

Children tend to trust adults and believe what adults say to them. Such literal trust can sometimes help children understand spiritual things more clearly than adults. Often, due to self-interest, adults sometimes make things more complicated than they are. Proverbs says, “Train children in the right way, / and when old, they will not stray” (22:6, NRSV). And Jesus said that we are to “‘be wise as serpents and harmless as doves’” (Matt. 10:16, NKJV). Loving adults should use their position of trust to positively influence children in matters of faith and discipleship. This includes teaching children to question and discern for themselves.

However, severe warnings are given for anyone who would attempt to take advantage of a child’s trust. To this class of people Jesus said, “‘Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea’” (Matt. 18:6, NASB). Thus Jesus declares the inestimable value and worth of children in God’s eyes. Angels who behold God’s face in heaven are sent to guard and protect them.

“Suffer the Little Children” (Mark 10:13–16)

When the disciples saw parents bringing their children to Jesus, they rebuked them. It would seem that the disciples thought Jesus’ time would be better spent talking to adults. However, Jesus was indignant and rebuked the disciples. Parenthood is perhaps one of the greatest examples of long-term human sacrifice commonly observed on this planet. These parents wanted their children to have the best spiritual advantages possible, so they brought them to Jesus to be blessed. Hence, they set an example for us too.

Jesus was brought up in a God-fearing family and personally knew the advantages of spiritual instruction and blessing. His mission was to save humanity from sin. The earlier the discipling of children begins, the better it is for the individual and for society as a whole. The thought of even losing one person is unacceptable to God (Matt. 18:12–14). All people, whether children or adults, are of equal worth in God’s eyes. Hence, Jesus was more than pleased to take the children in His arms and bless them. His example teaches us that children are of inestimable value in the kingdom of heaven. Time spent teaching a child about spiritual matters, via instruction and example, is an investment in eternity.

REACT

1. What role can you play in discipling children within your sphere of influence?
2. What effect do you think popular culture is having on the spiritual development of children?
“Children of eight, ten, or twelve years are old enough to be addressed on the subject of personal religion. Do not teach your children with reference to some future period when they shall be old enough to repent and believe the truth. If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of their state as sinners and of the way of salvation through Christ.”

“In the closing scenes of earth’s history many of these children and youth will astonish people by their witness to the truth, which will be borne in simplicity, yet with spirit and power. They have been taught the fear of the Lord, and their hearts have been softened by a careful and prayerful study of the Bible. In the near future, many children will be endued with the Spirit of God, and will do a work in proclaiming the truth to the world, that at that time cannot well be done by the older members of the church.”

“After faithful labor, if you are satisfied that your children understand the meaning of conversion and baptism, and are truly converted, let them be baptized. But, I repeat, first of all prepare yourselves to act as faithful shepherds in guiding their inexperienced feet in the narrow way of obedience. God must work in the parents that they may give to their children a right example, in love, courtesy, and Christian humility, and in an entire giving up of self to Christ. If you consent to the baptism of your children and then leave them to do as they choose, feeling no special duty to keep their feet in the straight path, you yourselves are responsible if they lose faith and courage and interest in the truth.”

**REACT**

1. How can we disciple children to have them understand and accept that Christ can be real to them?
2. Is there a cost to “prepare yourselves to act as faithful shepherds in guiding their inexperienced feet in the narrow way of obedience”? If so, what is it?

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3. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 94, 95.
The best time to disciple children is when they are young. Discipling a child requires patience, intentionality, and creativity. The following principles must be maintained when teaching children about Christ:

Proper Training. Proverbs 22:6 states, “Train children in the right way, and when they are old, they will not stray” (NRSV). Good training and teaching should be done with the purpose of teaching children where to go and how to get there. God’s Word is like a map or GPS that provides information throughout life about where to go and how to get from one path to another. Ministering to children requires mature adults who are willing to reach children in their present state with the hope of leading them to a better place. Activities such as children’s choirs and Vacation Bible Schools can lay a foundation for them to accept Christ early in their lives.

Modeling. Children respond more to what they see than to what they hear. They are confused by the “do as I say and not as I do” approach to teaching. They are excellent mimics, so if they are going to follow Christ, they must see Him demonstrated in the adults who surround them. It also means that they need to be surrounded by friends in their age group who display a love of Jesus.

Choices. Explain to children about the importance of making good decisions. A child who is told what to do, but not why or how to do it, will struggle to make good decisions later in life. Leading children to make their own decisions gives them ownership of their actions. Teach a child that the Word of God helps them to see that they are valuable in His eyes too. Teach them songs, stories, and activities that will invite them to make Jesus their best Friend and Hero.

**REACT**

1. How does an adult determine the best way to discipline a child?
2. Why should children be taught about God early in their lives?
Have you ever said something in front of a toddler, only to have the child repeat it over and over again? When my cousin was two years old, he would repeat everything he heard. He didn’t know the meaning of the words he was saying, but his brain was like a sponge, soaking up every bit of information as he heard it. All it took was for him to hear the word once. But because the word was said by people he knew, he trusted that the words were OK. It wasn’t until he used some of the words and was scolded for using them that he began to understand that some of the words were bad.

Children learn the fastest during the first three years of their lives. During this time, their learning, although basic, is “critical in shaping their brain architecture.”* God knew how important child development was from the very beginning and so instructed us to “train children in the right way, / and when old, they will not stray” (Prov. 22:6, NRSV).

But how do we train children? God even gave us instructions on this! “’These commands that I give to you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up’ ” (Deut. 6:6, 7, NIV).

Although parents are the primary examples for their children, each one of us is to be a living example to the little ones in our churches. “’Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it’ ” (Mark 10:15, NIV).

**REACT**

1. How can your church better address the needs of its children?
2. Some people believe that disciplining children is harmful. What is your opinion on this? Discuss. (See Prov. 13:24; Heb. 12:6.)

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CONCLUDE

Satan delights in destroying lives. It’s his ultimate act of revenge, born of a heart hardened against the God of love, his own Creator. And nowhere is Satan’s bitterness and depravity more on display than in his all-too-often-successful attempts to corrupt children and young people. Jesus recognized Satan’s efforts to derail innocent children, so they were a priority in His ministry, even when His disciples wanted to focus only on adults. By example, then, He has shown individuals, families, and churches the supreme importance of protecting, nurturing, and ministering to youngsters. They are precious in His sight.

CONSIDER

• Listening to the song “I Am a Promise” from the album Especially for Children by the Bill Gaither Trio, which describes the God-given potential found in each child. YouTube also has several renditions of it.
• Helping to teach a Sabbath School class for young children or offering to tell the children’s story during the church service.
• Writing a prayer that lists characteristics you appreciate in children and asking God for opportunities to minister to them. Consider how these qualities are applicable even for young adults.
• Finding and studying Bible passages about children. How do they speak to the child in your heart?
• Observing or reading about how birds and animals care for their young.
• Asking a pastor, parent, or teacher how he or she ministers to children.

CONNECT

2 Chronicles 34:1–3; Matthew 18:12–14; Hebrews 12:9–11.


Discipling the Sick

“Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel” (Matt. 15:30, 31, NIV).
“Being sick has taught me a lot about God. Now I can confidently say that I have experienced His deliverance. He indeed is a God who listens to our earnest prayers.” That’s what my sister told me after three months of severe migraines and other health problems. She could have praised the doctors and the hospital. Instead, she gave all the glory and honor to the Life-Giver.

What a God we serve! . . . He still restores life today.

When Jesus was on earth, He taught, preached, and healed. The Bible tells us that crowds were brought to Him for healing. Others came on their own, such as the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Once, a ruler called Jesus to His house to heal his dying daughter. On His way there, He healed a woman who had suffered from an illness for 12 years. However, by the time He arrived at the girl’s house, she had died. So He restored her to life. Jesus was also introduced to the crowd that was at this ruler’s house, the neighbors, and the community at large. “Christ did almost as much healing as He did preaching.”*

When Jesus learned that His friend Lazarus was sick, He said, “ ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God’ ” (John 11:4, NKJV). Come on, Jesus! Isn’t this Your friend Lazarus? Even if He’s not sick unto death, he’s still sick. That’s why his sisters called You. Why did You wait to go to his house?

When Jesus finally got to Lazarus’s house, his sister Martha fell weeping at His feet. Jesus then told them, “ ‘Your brother will rise again’ ” (John 11:23, NKJV). Martha thought that He was referring to the resurrection at the last day. However, Jesus was referring to that same day.

They all walked to Lazarus’s tomb. When they arrived, Jesus “cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go’ ” (John 11:43, 44, NKJV).

What a God we serve! When all hope is gone and we feel helpless, He is our hope and our help. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He still restores life today. He restored the life of my sister! He is ready to make us happy, healthy Christians!

So often in His ministry Jesus took the time to heal the suffering people around Him. He healed lepers, paralytics, and the blind. He healed men, women, and children, Jews and Gentiles. Why? “‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I [Jesus] have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’” (Mark 2:17, NIV).

Both the leper and the centurion at the beginning of Matthew 8 believed in Jesus’ power. The leper addressed Him by saying, “‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean’” (verse 2, NIV). In a similar way, the centurion told Jesus “‘to just say the word, and my servant will be healed’” (verse 8, NIV). He had so much faith that he didn’t think Jesus even needed to be in his servant’s presence to heal him. In fact, the centurion believed that he was unworthy to have Jesus in his house.

**Jesus understands the pain that His followers go through, and His love means doing something about it.**

The healing that Jesus offered was more than just the restoration of physical strength. It often included a restoration to godly purity.

**Eagerness to Heal (Mark 5:25–29, 35–42)**

The woman in Mark 5:25–29 did not feel a need to speak with Jesus. She understood that He was healing and restoration personified. She knew that He wanted to heal her, that He wanted to heal everybody. For her it was as simple as “whosoever believeth in Him” (John 3:16). It’s remarkable to imagine the healing power of Jesus constantly pulsating out to the hurting masses around Him. He did not withhold His healing power when He was presented with opportunities to use it. Such power stretched out to reach anyone who needed restoration, anyone who believed and was willing to accept it.

In Mark 5:35–42, Jesus raises a little girl from the dead. In so many other stories of healing, He asks the person being healed for a testimony of faith, yet how could this girl give such a testimony? Those who are dead have no knowledge of anything (Eccles. 9:5). Perhaps this story is not a reflection of the girl’s faith, but a reflection of how badly Jesus wants to restore life.

**Restoring the Body and Spirit (Mark 2:1–12; John 9:1–6)**

Many of us grew up hearing about the paralytic who was lowered through the roof so he could be close enough to Jesus to be healed by
Him. But in reading this passage while preparing to write this lesson, I thought of something that I had not thought of before. Was it possible that Jesus had no intentions of physically healing this man? In Mark 2:5, He turns to the paralytic and tells him that his sins have been forgiven. Scripture doesn't give us any insight into the life of the paralytic before this event. So might it be possible that his friends had brought him to Jesus not to be healed but to be forgiven?

In John 9:1–6, Jesus’ disciples ask if a blind man’s condition was caused by his own sins or by the sins of his parents. I like how The Message paraphrases Jesus’ reply: “‘You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do.’” It must have been difficult for people like the paralytic, believing as many people did back then, that God was angry with them for some past sin.

Jesus was offering this man peace of mind with the knowledge that his sins had been forgiven. He was not seeking retribution. Rather, He was letting the man know that God still loved him. Isn’t it somewhat humorous that the physical healing came only after the educated people were mentally accusing Jesus of blasphemy? Jesus turned to this learned group and asked them which was harder to do—to heal the spirit or to heal the body. Quite frankly, He was able and very willing to do both. But many times we can live at peace with less than perfect physical capabilities if we know that our relationship with God is on solid ground. Perhaps Jesus knew that this man wanted forgiveness more than healing.

**Healing the Mind (Matt. 6:25–34)**

In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus used reason to heal the anxiety that often plagues people’s minds. He directed their thoughts to how He lovingly cares for nature. Then He told them that they were more valuable to God than anything they saw in His creation (verses 26, 30). He also asked them to consider whether they can increase their life span by worrying (verse 27)!


Perhaps the strongest argument that healing is meant to be part of our ministry is the fact that after Jesus returned to heaven, His disciples-turned-apostles also were able to heal people. The rest of the New Testament contains several accounts of the apostles healing the lame, the sick, the blind, and raising the dead. Jesus understands the pain that His followers go through, and His love means doing something about it.

**REACT**

1. What does it mean to disciple the sick today?
2. How does Jesus still minister to the sick today?
3. What is your role in this ministry?
Being physically sick is never enjoyable. Being in a state of illness is not what people usually wish on themselves.

The New Testament is full of accounts of Jesus’ heart going out to those who were sick.

“During His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His word that He came not to destroy but to save. . . .

What if we pray for someone who is sick and this person is not healed?

“The Saviour made each work of healing an occasion for implanting divine principles in the mind and soul. This was the purpose of His work. He imparted earthly blessings, that He might incline the hearts of men to receive the gospel of His grace.”

When sin entered the world, so did illness. That His children should be sick was never part of God’s plan. “In describing His earthly mission, Jesus said, The Lord ‘hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.’ Luke 4:18. This was His work. He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by Satan. There were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house, for He had passed through them and healed all their sick. His work gave evidence of His divine anointing.”

What if we pray for someone who is sick and this person is not healed? “When we have prayed for the recovery of the sick, whatever the outcome of the case, let us not lose faith in God. If we are called upon to meet bereavement, let us accept the bitter cup, remembering that a Father’s hand holds it to our lips. But should health be restored, it should not be forgotten that the recipient of healing mercy is placed under renewed obligation to the Creator.”

**REACT**

How should Adventists handle the hiring of non-Adventist medical staff in our hospitals knowing that Jesus healed the sick not only physically but spiritually too?

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*Glenrae Langford, Gwangju, South Korea*
Healing people was an important part of Christ’s ministry. Throughout the Gospels we see numerous examples of His healing individuals with physical ailments or delivering them from demons that tortured both the body and the mind.

When we compare life in Jesus’ time to life as it is in the twenty-first century, we realize that there are huge differences, especially when it comes to medical procedures. God, however, remains the same. So today He expects His people to help the needy and the sick just as He expected His people during Bible times to do so.

“Christ’s servants are the channel of His working.”

“Christ is the same compassionate physician now that He was during His earthly ministry. In Him there is healing balm for every disease, restoring power for every infirmity. His disciples in this time are to pray for the sick as verily as the disciples of old prayed. And recoveries will follow; for ‘the prayer of faith shall save the sick.’ We have the Holy Spirit’s power, the calm assurance of faith that can claim God’s promises. The Lord’s promise, ‘They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover’ (Mark 16:18), is just as trustworthy now as in the days of the apostles. It presents the privilege of God’s children, and our faith should lay hold of all that it embraces. Christ’s servants are the channel of His working, and through them He desires to exercise His healing power. It is our work to present the sick and suffering to God in the arms of our faith. We should teach them to believe in the Great Healer. The Saviour would have us encourage the sick, the hopeless, the afflicted, to take hold upon His strength.”

First Corinthians 10:31 teaches Christians that whatever we eat, drink, or do should be done in ways that glorify God. These behaviors, along with others such as exercise, help us to remain healthy. When we have the opportunity to do so, we are to help others understand how to live healthy lives. Why? Because “redemption provided in Christ is a complete redemption that applies to the entire man.”

REACT

1. What can you personally do to help people you know who are ill?
2. How can you develop the faith to believe that God can and will help those you bring before Him?

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2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 750.

Josiah Amore, Wolverhampton, England
When we are sick, we are often vulnerable. We also can be filled with doubt. Yet being sick also can draw us closer to God, because His “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV). Thus, there is a tremendous opportunity for discipleship attached to the sick bed.

As we minister to people who are sick, we should bear in mind Christ’s attitude toward the ailing. When He passed through a town, He always had time to heal the sick who lived there. Never was there anyone who was unworthy of His help. Jesus even healed a wound sustained by the high priest’s servant while He was being arrested (Luke 22:49–51).

People today can be content . . . when they are spiritually healthy.

So how can we disciple the sick?

Point people to Jesus, the Master Healer. “He took up our infirmities / and bore our diseases” (Matt. 8:17, NIV), so He knows the best treatment. It is our privilege to help someone who is ill to trust God, regardless of the outcome.

Consider people’s spiritual needs. In Mark 2:1–12, we read of a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus. But before healing the man physically, Jesus forgave his sins. Forgiveness was what he needed more than physical healing.* In the distress caused by illness, there is often a need for reassurance, for forgiveness, for reconciliation with God and with others. As the paralyzed man would have been satisfied if all he had received was forgiveness, so people today can be content with whatever their physical condition is when they are spiritually healthy.

Follow health principles. Though many health principles are primarily intended to prevent sickness, it is logical that we should follow them at all times. Thus, many illnesses can be cured or reduced in severity. While not everyone is a qualified health practitioner, we all can apply the basic principles and teach them to others.

Choose the right thoughts. The Bible has much to say about our thoughts. For example: “A cheerful heart is good medicine” (Prov. 17:22, NIV). “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6, NIV). When we replace worry with trust and turn our thoughts from how we feel to thoughts of praise to God, we will be better equipped to fight illness.

* See Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 268, 270.
In the past 50 years, technology has revolutionized the way we live, eat, and work. So how is it that with all this we are probably the sickest people ever? According to the World Health Organization, cardiovascular disease is the top noncommunicable disease killer of people worldwide. Cancer, diabetes, and chronic lung diseases are not far behind.¹

**There is a work to be done, but it starts with us.**

How can we reverse this trend? First Corinthians 9:25 urges us to be temperate in all things. “The Christian who is governed by love for the Saviour will not allow his appetites and passions to control him, but will in all things accept the counsel God has given for his mental, physical, and spiritual living. The appetites of the body must be subject to the higher power of the mind, which is itself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. . . .

“How can anyone who refuses to abandon lifelong habits of wrong indulgence, whatever form they may take, hope to be blessed by God and receive a welcome in to the kingdom of His glory?”²

If, as Christians, we are living just like the rest of the world and suffering from the same issues that could be controlled with better eating habits and exercise, then how can we expect to be disciples of God and living witnesses to anyone? As 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (NKJV). Christ tells us in Matthew 6 that we have no need to be burdened down with the cares of this life, that if He can feed the birds of the air and clothe the lilies in the field in such splendor, how much more will He take care of us whom He created with His own hands?

There is a work to be done, but it starts with us, living by the health principles as best we can, so that people will see a difference in the way we live and desire to follow suit.

**REACT**

What health habits do you need to change in order to become a more effective disciple for Christ?

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². The SDA Bible Commentary, 2nd ed., vol. 6, p. 736.
CONCLUDE
When sin entered the world, so did illness. Healing people was an important part of Christ’s ministry. He healed lepers, paralytics, and the blind. He healed men, women, and children, Jews and Gentiles. Throughout the Gospels we see numerous examples of His healing individuals with physical ailments or delivering them from demons that tortured both the body and the mind. So today He expects His people to help the needy and the sick just as He expected His people during Bible times to do so. Perhaps the strongest argument that healing is meant to be part of our ministry is the fact that after Jesus returned to heaven, His disciples-turned-apostles were also able to heal people.

CONSIDER
- Interviewing someone in your church who has experienced physical healing and sharing that person’s story with the congregation in a written article or video.
- Making a list of sick people you know and starting a prayer ministry for them.
- Becoming part of a team of ministers to the sick who visit people in hospitals, hospices, or personal residences to bring prayer and encouragement.
- Starting a support group to encourage habits that help people to stay healthy. You could share quality recipes, exercise together, etc.
- Leading a discussion in your Sabbath School class on how to respond when God chooses not to heal or to delay healing. Consider verses like Isaiah 57:1; John 11:1–6; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; and James 4:3.
- Using a concordance to compile verses about emotional healing by looking up words such as anxiety, peace, medicine, trust, fear, and love.

CONNECT

Sonia Huenergardt, Chehalis, Washington, U.S.A.
“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).
Some of them were fishermen. One was a tax collector, and another still was a political zealot. Some of them had bad tempers or doubted easily. As diverse as they were, they at least had something in common: none of these people were highly educated; and none of them had a background in theology. Yet Jesus chose them to be His most trusted disciples.

Wait a minute! Did Jesus really know what He was doing? This was a time when there were synagogues everywhere filled with highly favored Sadducees and Pharisees, great teachers of the law and men of high stature. They were the darlings and celebrities of the Jewish community. They had great followings. Yet Jesus took a stroll along the Sea of Galilee and called ordinary people?

What a humbling and mind-blowing thought indeed! The world may see us in a certain way, put us in boxes, and tell us that we’ll never amount to anything more than what we’ve been labeled; but praise God! He looks at us with different eyes. What the world sees as merely ordinary, God sees as extraordinary, not because of who we are, but because of what we can be through Him!

Fast-forward to after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Every single one of His disciples (barring Judas Iscariot) carried on the good work of spreading the gospel, and all but John eventually ended up paying for it with their lives. Their faithfulness is the reason why you and I get to pick up the Bible today and read the good news of salvation. So before you look in the mirror and tell yourself that you have nothing special to offer the kingdom of God, stop and consider these men.

Jesus never told them to polish their public speaking skills or brush up their knowledge of theology before following Him. All that He asked of them was that they be willing to follow Him daily and learn from Him. He would then do the work of transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. He’s ready to do the same with you. Are you willing to let Him?

Join us this week as we study how there is no “ordinary” in God’s plans. He knows exactly what extraordinary things He wants to do in us and through us.

Brian Peters, Singapore
In Luke 14:25, 26, Jesus told the people that choosing to be His disciple meant having greater love for Him than for family members. The word He uses is *hate*. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Here, *hate* is used as a contrast to the immense depth of love disciples should have toward their Savior. Jesus is not saying that we should literally hate our family, but that the extent of our love for Him should be so deep that, in comparison, the love we feel toward our family members can seem like hate.

This is especially so if the goals and desires of our family go against God’s values and teachings. It’s a difficult position to be in, and in that context, choosing to follow Christ’s ways can give the impression that we hate our families.

In Luke 14:27, Jesus further stressed that discipleship would not be an easy journey by stating that people could not be His disciples unless each carried his own cross. The Roman process of crucifixion involved making the condemned person carry his cross to the place of execution as people lined the streets to mock him. Then he would be tied and nailed to that cross and left to die a slow, agonizing death. So Jesus is saying that there are costs for following Him. There will be times when we will have to suffer greatly in order to stay obedient to His commands.

Yet, while the cost of discipleship is high, remember that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Savior. The Messiah. He can, and He *will* provide all the necessary resources for ordinary people to bear the cost (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Thess. 3:3). Whether it is through the support of fellow Christians, the direct wisdom of His word, or the power of the Holy Spirit, as we walk the path of discipleship, God keeps His promise to never leave us nor forsake us (Deut. 31:6).
He’s One of Us (Lev. 12:8; Mark 6:2–4; Luke 2:21–32)

We see this happening on the field all the time—kids gather and they choose two leaders to pick team members. The strongest, biggest, fastest kids are picked first. One by one the other kids are chosen until the last kid is left—the smallest, weakest, slowest kid. Nobody wants that person to be on their team because nobody wants to lose. If Jesus lived in our day, He would be that kid nobody wants on their team. Jesus grew up poor. The fact that His parents could offer only a pair of turtledoves for His dedication ceremony confirms their poverty (Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:22–24). Furthermore, people were spreading rumors about Him because of His uncertain parentage. Even when He performed miracles and displayed great wisdom in His teaching, His town folks refused to give Him credit (Mark 6:2–4). So if anybody were to understand what it is like to be rejected, misunderstood, and discriminated against, it would be Jesus.

He didn’t even have grapes! But it is not about the resources. It’s about the Transformer.

The Master Transformer (Matt. 15:32–39; John 2:1–11)

Have you seen a glassblowing artist in action? It always fascinates me how a glassblower can use a fairly common looking piece of glass and transform it into an amazing piece of art through the process of heating, melting, blowing, rolling, swinging, and rotating. The finished product looks so different from the raw material it came from that if I didn’t see the process with my own eyes, I would suspect that the artist did a little bait and switch on me. In actuality, however, the glassblower is a transformer; he transforms a common piece of raw glass into an artistic masterpiece.

Jesus was a Master Transformer. One time, while out on a three-day preaching excursion with over 4,000 followers, He realized that they had nothing to eat. All Jesus had to work with was seven loaves of bread and a few fish (Matt. 15:29–39). However, the outcome was not about the material but the Artist. It was not about the ingredients but about the Chef. Jesus multiplied the common lunch into a feast that fed more than 4,000 people.

Another time, Jesus was at a wedding. His mother was there also. Halfway through the festivities, something unthinkable happened. The wine ran out! Mary knew that they didn’t have to worry, because the Master Transformer was in their midst. She went to Jesus and told Him about...
the problem (John 2:1–11). He had nothing to work with except six stone waterpots and water. He didn’t even have grapes! But it is not about the resources. It’s about the Transformer. With just what He had, Jesus transformed that water into the best wine of the entire event.


Imagine if somebody invited you to be a part of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, to play with them at the Vienna State Opera, even though you have never played a musical instrument in your life! I think most of us wouldn’t have to think twice about rejecting the offer. However, what if that person told you that you could have three and half years to prepare? That you would live with one of the top violinists in the world—Joshua Bell, Sarah Chang, or Itzhak Perlman—and that he or she would work with you every day? Furthermore, your only audience for that concert would be your teacher.

Shortly after Jesus began His public ministry, multitudes were pressing about Him. No doubt the crowds included people from all walks of life—the rich, the poor, the influential, the peasants, the old, the young, the educated, the uneducated. Imagine the surprised looks when He picked four ordinary fishermen (Luke 5:1–11). They were not perfect. They were dense, stubborn, and proud. They fought amongst themselves. Unloving and prejudiced, they had little faith in their Master, and they ran at the first sign of trouble. Even though Jesus knew what they were like, He hand-picked them out of the multitude.


Throughout the Bible, we continually see God’s ideal for His people. They share what they have with one another. No one is discriminated against. Neither is there any favoritism. Let us strive, with His help, toward that ideal. If God doesn’t discriminate against us in His kingdom, why should we discriminate against ourselves? We are not worthy to be Christ’s disciples if we base our worthiness on own merits. Instead, we are called to be His disciples based on His merits, which make all of us worthy.

**REACT**

1. What things are preventing you from becoming Jesus’ disciple?
2. Do you feel unworthy to become Jesus’ disciple? Why?
3. What are the steps you need to take to put yourself in the hands of the Master Discipler?

James Tham, Singapore
Ellen White wrote the following words to young men. However, it applies just as well to young women and to older people: “John says: ‘I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.’ O that young men might appreciate the high destiny to which they are called! Ponder well the paths of your feet. Begin your work with high and holy purpose, and be determined that through the power of the grace of God you will not diverge from the path of rectitude. If you begin to go in a wrong direction, every step will be fraught with peril and disaster, and you will go on straying from the path of truth, safety, and success. You need your intellect strengthened, your moral energies quickened, by divine power. The cause of God demands the highest powers of the being, and there is urgent need in many fields for young men of literary qualifications. There is need of men who can be trusted to labor in extensive fields that are now white to the harvest. Young men of ordinary ability who give themselves wholly to God, who are uncorrupted by vice and impurity, will be successful, and will be enabled to do a great work for God.”

“It is discipline of spirit, cleanness of heart and thought that is needed. This is of more value than brilliant talent, tact, or knowledge. An ordinary mind, trained to obey a ‘thus saith the Lord,’ is better qualified for God’s work than are those who have capabilities, but do not employ them rightly.”

2. White, Review and Herald, November 27, 1900.
If a disciple is a follower and one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another person, then a Christian disciple is a person who accepts and assists in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship is a lifelong process and, according to Scripture, being a Christian disciple involves personal growth characterized by the following:

1. **Putting Jesus first in all aspects of life (Mark 8:34–38; Phil. 1:20).** Our priority should be to exalt Christ in all that we do. We must focus on pleasing Him and not ourselves or our peers. We must put off self and put on Christ.

2. **Following biblical teachings (1 Sam. 15:22; John 8:31, 32).** God desires that we obey Him, no matter what the circumstances or consequences. Obedience is a test of faith, and Jesus is the perfect Example of complete obedience to the Father, even to the point of death (Phil. 3:7, 8).

3. **Being fruitful (John 15:5–8).** We are to abide in Christ and allow His Holy Spirit to affect our thoughts, words, and actions. Authentic change comes from the inside out, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. **Loving other disciples (John 13:34, 35).** First Corinthians 13:1–13 and 1 John 3:10 teach us that love is not just an emotion. It is also action, behavior. Love doesn’t magically appear in our hearts. We must be involved in the process. Philippians 2:3, 4 tell us to think more highly of other people than of ourselves and to look out for other people’s needs.

5. **Telling others about Christ (Matt. 28:18–20).** We are to share our faith and reveal the life-giving power of Jesus Christ in our own changed lives. It doesn’t matter what our Christian maturity level is, we will always have something to offer. Too often we allow Satan’s lies to frighten us. We fear that we don’t really know enough or that we haven’t been a Christian long enough to make a difference. But the power of Christ is not necessarily only in those who can recite the most Bible verses from memory, or in those who have been involved in the church the longest. Christ’s power is also in the person who has experienced the love of the living God, and whose choices and words reflect His love and grace, especially when no one is looking.
A friend of mine wrote, “Like flying a kite, most things in life revolve around knowing when to exert a little pull and when to let go. You’ll be surprised—letting go of the string is how you right a wayward kite. It’s counter-intuitive, yet not.” So it is with discipleship. A disciple puts Jesus first, so we must let go of our comfort zones and venture into the great unknown with Him. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Who you are speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you’re saying.”1 We need to put aside self-centeredness and be more Christ-centered.

Disciples obey the teachings of Jesus, so we need to let go of our fear of the unknown and trust that He will provide. This is especially so when it is not lucrative or convenient to obey His Word.

Disciples show the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s influence through their thoughts, words, and actions. This is tricky, because we need to let go of the lie that we can get by as long as we can convincingly pretend that we are close to Him. Let’s not fool ourselves into believing that if enough people buy into the image we project, then by some twisted logic the image we project is real. You know how the saying goes: “You can fool some of the people some of the time and all of the people some of the time, . . . but you can’t fool God.”2

Disciples put others before themselves. However, this does not mean that we should stay in situations that are toxic and codependent. There will be times when we will all need to speak up for what is right and just.

Disciples tell others about Christ. We are responsible to the people with whom we interact. We are to reflect to them an accurate portrayal of Jesus to the best of our abilities. However, we are not responsible for their responses. There will always be some who resist, through no fault of your own. So let go of the pressure to be responsible for the choices other people make.

**REACT**

Which part of the above resonates most with you? Why?

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CONCLUDE

Jesus changes people—but He needs people who are willing to be changed. If we are too focused on our own knowledge, talents, work, or cleverness, we are less likely to hear Jesus’ call to humble discipleship. It is sobering to hear the stories of Jesus’ life and ministry, particularly how He scolded the religious leaders and “righteous” people of His day. But it is equally encouraging that He invested so much of His time and ministry in ordinary people: “God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise” (1 Cor. 1:27, NLT).

CONSIDER

- Working with someone in your community whom you admire. Learn and notice the attitudes they practice and their relation with others.
- Interviewing senior members of your church who were not raised Adventist. Ask about their decision to follow Jesus and to join the church, about what they gave up to follow Jesus, and why they made that choice. Also ask about the blessings they have experienced in their lives. Record or film the interview and edit it to share with others.
- Thinking of someone in your church who serves faithfully but receives little acknowledgement. Write them a letter of thanks.
- Researching the life of a leader who came from humble beginnings—perhaps Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Martin Luther King Jr., or a leader in your nation’s history. What moment brought them to prominence? What aspects of their character or beliefs prepared them for that opportunity or calling?
- Watching the scenes of the calling of the disciples in a filmed version of the Gospels, such as The Visual Bible: Matthew. Imagine how it must have been for these men to be called to follow this “strange” Rabbi. How would you have responded if in their place?

CONNECT


Nathan Brown, Melbourne, Australia
Jesus and the Social Outcasts

“The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’” (John 4:29, 30, NKJV).
The dictionary defines an *outcast* as “a person who is not accepted or has no place in society or in a particular group.” ¹ People who live on the streets don’t seem to have a place in society. In the United States alone, there are more than 600,000 homeless people.² People who have committed crimes don’t seem to have a place in society. There are 2.2 million people in prison in the U.S.A.³

In some societies, particular occupations lead to exclusion. In Japan, the “burakumin,” or village people, are regarded as outcasts because of their traditional roles as butchers, tanners, and waste-handlers.⁴ Some children are bullied by their peers because of the color of their skin or hair.

**What is it like to be an outcast?**

What is it like to be an outcast? One young poet puts it this way: “You don’t know what it’s like / To be like me / To be hurt / To feel lost . . . / To be on the edge of breaking down / And no one’s there to save you / No you don’t know what it’s like / Welcome to my life.”⁵

Of course Jesus does know what it’s like to be an outcast. He was lonely, hungry, betrayed by His disciples, and crucified for His ministry. So it’s not surprising that He offered help and comfort to the outcasts He met while He lived on earth. For Jesus, being an outcast does not mean being worthless. In fact, it was the people who saw themselves as pillars of religious society for whom He reserved His harshest criticisms (Matt. 3:7; 23:13). It seems that people without the distractions of wealth or social status are better able to understand His message and respond to His love. To be Jesus’ disciples, we need to look beyond the surface and see outcasts of all kinds for who they are—children of God.

**REACT**

1. Discuss ways in which people become outcasts.
2. Who are the outcasts in your social or church group?

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As Foretold by the Prophets: Good News for the Poor (Isa. 61:1, 2; Luke 4:17–21; 7:18–27)

We look to world events for signs of prophecy fulfilled in the end times. In earlier times, too, people looked for signs, but the prophecy from Isaiah that Jesus chose to cite at the start of His ministry promised good news for the poor and liberty for the oppressed. When John the Baptist’s disciples asked if He was indeed the Messiah, Jesus answered, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk . . . and the good news is proclaimed to the poor’ ” (Luke 7:22, NIV).

Blessed Are the Poor (Matt. 5:1–12; Luke 6:20–26)

Two Gospel writers give us alternative versions of the Beatitudes. Matthew’s version is the one most often quoted, perhaps because of the blessings promised there. But Luke’s version makes uncomfortable reading for those of us who spend our lives striving for material comfort and security. He clearly focuses on the paradoxical blessings of poverty and the corresponding burden of wealth. Jesus promises blessings to those who are poor, who hunger, who weep, and who are hated. These blessings are then paralleled by equal condemnations of the rich, the well-fed, those “who laugh now” (NIV) and those who are well spoken of.

“I Have Not Come to Call the Righteous, but Sinners’ ” (Mark 2:17, NIV)

Who are the sinners Jesus is calling? In His time, the term sinner referred to a wide category that included not only those who broke the civil law, but also those who broke the religious law. The Pharisees defined lawful practices so narrowly that, in their eyes, many people fell into the category of sinner. Moreover, because they were outside the covenant, Gentiles were not bound by the law and therefore also were regarded as sinners. Apostates (people who had abandoned the distinctive practices prescribed by religious law) were regarded as sinners. In addition to their corrupt practices, tax collectors were regarded as sinners because they were collaborating with the Roman occupiers.
Jesus was referring to “a discipleship which lived through a spirit of thankfulness, a discipleship ready to accept those counted unacceptable by opinion formers, ready to serve rather than look to be served.”

The rich young man had kept the commandments all his life. But Jesus admonished him to go further, to give away all his possessions. Think about Jesus gleaning grain on the Sabbath in defiance of the Pharisees, or healing the man with the shrivelled hand on the Sabbath. Think of Him reaching out to the Samaritan woman at the well. In each of these instances, He is demonstrating that whatever rules we adhere to, all of our actions must be rooted in the first principle on which the law is built. That principle is love. “[Jesus] cuts through the complexities of case-law and precedent, of custom and convention, and illustrates what loving one’s neighbour as oneself means in practice.”

Contrast Jesus’ encounters with those considered to be conventionally righteous and those considered to be sinners. The “sinners” turn out to be the ones most receptive to God and the most generous, while the “righteous” are smug and judgmental.
Just as we see God’s hand in the beauties of nature, we also expect to find His character reflected in His human creations. In Acts 10, Jesus uses Cornelius, a Gentile, to teach Peter that the new covenant is extended to all. In Luke 10, it is not the priest who responds to the stricken man, but a Samaritan.
We, too, have much to learn from those whom we seek to teach—especially those who live on the margins and in the moment. Surely we are called to be “reflective disciples” who will “be sent out into the world to meet with God, to shape the world and be shaped [ourselves] throughout life.”

REACT
1. When we seek to keep the commandments, how might we be in danger of focusing on the letter of the law, and missing its first principle—love?
2. Are you focused only on the promise of the Second Coming and on your personal eternal life, or do you care about the people around you?
3. Do you only tell people about Christ, or do you also show them who He is by how you treat others?

1. James D. G. Dunn, Jesus’ Call to Discipleship (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 91.
2. Ibid.
“It was the outcast, the publican and sinner, the despised of the nations, that Christ called and by His loving-kindness compelled to come unto Him. The one class that He would never countenance was those who stood apart in their self-esteem and looked down upon others.”

As Christ was eating with the publicans and sinners, “the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:2). “By this accusation they insinuated that Christ liked to associate with the sinful and vile, and was insensible to their wickedness. The rabbis had been disappointed in Jesus. Why was it that one who claimed so lofty a character did not mingle with them and follow their methods of teaching? Why did He go about so unpretendingly, working among all classes? If He were a true prophet, they said, He would harmonize with them, and would treat the publicans and sinners with the indifference they deserved. It angered these guardians of society that He with whom they were continually in controversy, yet whose purity of life awed and condemned them, should meet, in such apparent sympathy, with social outcasts. They did not approve of His methods. They regarded themselves as educated, refined, and pre-eminently religious; but Christ’s example laid bare their selfishness.”

“It was taught by the Jews that before God’s love is extended to the sinner, he must first repent. In their view, repentance is a work by which men earn the favor of Heaven. And it was this thought that led the Pharisees to exclaim in astonishment and anger, ‘This man receiveth sinners.’ According to their ideas He should permit none to approach Him but those who had repented. But in the parable of the lost sheep, Christ teaches that salvation does not come through our seeking after God but through God’s seeking after us. . . . We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent.”

**REACT**

1. In what ways could being “educated, refined, and pre-eminently religious” be an obstacle to sharing good news with those we term outcasts?
2. Should we welcome outcasts only if they repent of their behavior?

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3. Ibid., p. 189.

Erica Hole, Binfield, England
The New Testament presents us with four separate narratives about Jesus’ ministry on earth. Mark emphasizes Jesus as activist and revolutionary. One of the stories he tells is about a man so ill that he had become violent and was forced to exist in a graveyard. This report about the man tormented by demons is more like an account of a military engagement than a story of compassionate healing. Jesus commands the “unclean spirit” to come out of the man. Permitting the spirits to move from the man to unclean pigs foraging nearby does not provide a good option for the pigs or the spirits. The pigs rush into the sea and are drowned. This is somewhat reminiscent of the destruction of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. Both narratives are about the washing away of evil forces and the liberation of God’s people who are victims of His enemies.

Most Christians accept Mark’s narrative at face value, distasteful though it may appear to modern readers. However, “a reading that emphasizes the factuality of the story without recognizing its more-than-factual meaning misses most of what Mark is saying.”¹ We have to assume that Jesus was fully aware of what He was doing and that in the larger scheme of things, the pigs and their Gentile owners did not matter much at all by comparison with the lesson that Jesus has the power to make all the difference in the world to the lives of anyone who is willing to come to Him or to be found by Him. The story is also a metaphor for how Christianity can reach out to the most damaged and least attractive human beings. “As Jesus brings in God’s kingly rule he smashes Satan’s power, destroys his hegemony, and brings freedom to those oppressed by evil. This is the power of his Gospel.”²

**REACT**

There have been well-documented cases of vulnerable people being exploited by charismatic preachers. How do we avoid such situations when we bring new members into our churches?

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In the parable of the lost sheep, we see Jesus as a Shepherd searching for those who have lost their way. In the parable of the lost coin, the woman represents the church through which the search for lost souls continues.* As part of our discipleship, many of us would like to reach out more to people who need our help, but perhaps we are not sure how to do it. So let's see how Jesus did it.


**Jesus offers each person the type of help he or she needs at any given moment.**

How do I find people who need help? Some people came straight to Jesus with their problems, like the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1–18). Other encounters with Jesus seemed to happen more by chance, as when He met the woman at the well (John 4:5–42). If we’re open to all encounters, we’ll quickly find opportunities to connect with people we may not even have noticed before.

What sort of help should I offer? Sometimes the help Jesus offered was practical (casting out demons—Mark 5:1–18; healing people—John 5:1–9; or giving them food—Matt. 15:29–38). Sometimes He argued for justice on someone’s behalf (John 8:1–11). At other times, He offered spiritual guidance (John 4:14). Jesus offers each person the type of help he or she needs at any given moment.

How can I offer help without sounding patronizing? Although Jesus is the Son of God, He never acted superior to those around Him. As the Servant King, He was, and still is, always ready to listen and to help. If we are genuine about serving others, we won’t be patronizing, either.

What do I say if I’m criticized for mixing with the “wrong” kind of people? The Pharisees often criticized Jesus for doing this. They asked the disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Matt. 9:11, NIV). But Jesus never let such criticism worry Him. To Him, everyone mattered, whatever their place in society. And if we are to be the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13), everyone needs to matter to us as well.

**REACT**

1. What problems might you encounter as you attempt to help people?
2. Why do some people make it difficult for others to help them?
Jesus’ last recorded words to His disciples are about “the Great Commission”: “‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ ” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV). The Seventh-day Adventist Church takes this commission seriously, as we can see from its history of sending missionaries around the world and holding evangelistic campaigns. However, this kind of evangelism can fail to reach those at the edges of society, making them feel that the church is all-powerful while they themselves have little to contribute. When someone “affirms the strength of the giver and the weakness of the receiver,” the traditional evangelistic approach can result in problems on both sides: “‘Pride in the giver and humiliation in the receiver.’ ”

The story of Jesus and the woman at the well shows us a different approach. As a man, a Jew, and the Son of God, Jesus had every reason to assert His authority over this woman, who is also a Samaritan and does not have a proper husband. Yet He does the opposite. When the woman encounters Jesus, He is vulnerable—tired, thirsty, and alone. Instead of commanding her to give Him water, Jesus asks for her help, thus affirming her dignity and commanding her attention. By showing her respect, He makes a personal connection with her, allowing Him to turn the conversation in a natural way from real water to the water of life and the power of the gospel.

After meeting Jesus, the woman becomes an evangelist, urging everyone from her town to come and hear what He has to say. Her reason? “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did” (John 4:29, NIV). Evangelism Jesus-style consists of personal conversations between people about things that matter to them. It’s a two-way street. When the disciples return and offer Jesus food, He replies that He already has food. Something about the encounter with the woman at the well has left Him satisfied too.

**REACT**

Some commentators see the woman at the well as the first female evangelist. What does this story have to say about the role of women in the church?

2. Ibid., p. 205.

*Robert Warren, Reading, England*
CONCLUDE
Jesus knew that the “class” system, which divides people in all cultures, would never disappear until sin is destroyed. Yet He encourages us to reach out to those rejected by society. When you stop to consider all the people who could fall under one of the categories of “outcastness,” it’s easy to feel that anything you’d do to help others would hardly make a dent in the problem. However, Jesus isn’t asking us to fix the world, but to make a difference one person at a time.

“I am only one, / But still I am one. / I cannot do everything, / But still I can do something; / And because I cannot do everything / I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”*

CONSIDER
• Sketching a design symbolizing the plight of modern-day outcasts.
• Making a list of people who would be considered outcasts today. Arrange them in order from those experiencing the greatest rejection to those experiencing the least.
• Researching one category of outcasts (such as the homeless, ex-cons, or the mentally challenged) and think of ways your church could minister to them.
• Visiting a nursing home or assisted-living center and share your musical talents with the residents.
• Volunteering to help out at your church’s Community Services, working in a homeless shelter, or collecting items for a local food pantry.
• Interviewing your Community Services director to find out how the organization meets the needs of the poor.
• Journaling your ideas on how you could encourage people in your own church family who might feel like outcasts. For example: the deaf, singles, widows and widowers, the divorced, the unemployed, the elderly, those struggling with addictions or a learning disability.

CONNECT
Ron Hutchcraft, Called to Greatness; Joseph M. Stowell, Loving Christ, chapters 8 and 10.

* Edward Everett Hale, “Lend a Hand.”
“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10, NKJV).
Darkness. I draw my robe tightly around me as I slide out the door, down some alleys, and through silent streets. I hope no one recognizes me as I duck into the shadows each time someone passes.

And then I’m at the door of a small house. I knock and the door opens. I walk into a lighted room. I am standing in His presence. Jesus. He is exactly as He had been described to me. His eyes pierce my soul. Somehow He is able to read my thoughts, my intentions. We enter into a deep conversation about rebirth. My mind is boggled as He explains that a person must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God.

“Born again?” I question. “How is that possible?”

Jesus patiently explains, “Unless you are born of water and the spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom.”

Confusion shows on my face. “How can this be?” I stutter. “Teacher, I don’t understand!” His eyes fill with love and compassion. He says, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

I pause, stunned. My faith is rattled. I have been so fixated on the things of earth that I have not understood a word He has said. Then my focus shifts. My eyes are drawn to things of heaven, and I see how small and insignificant my life has been. I have been wrapped up in earthly matters without giving a second thought to the things that matter throughout eternity.

That night, I lie in my bed, looking at the ceiling. I, Nicodemus, replay my conversation with Jesus over and over, hanging on each word. There, in the darkness, I decide that I need to make a change. The things of this earth will pass, but the things of God will last forever. And as I drift to sleep, I smile. For the first time in a long time, I feel peace.

Jesus is not impressed by anyone’s power or position. He came to earth to reach out to every person He met. His goal was, and still is, to ultimately bring each person into His kingdom. He wants to give us riches beyond what the world offers. He wants us to have heavenly riches—the only wealth that lasts.

Nathan Zollman, Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A.
Every time I check out at the grocery store, I am overwhelmed by the array of magazines for sale. Celebrity gossip, how to lose weight in a hurry, the latest fashion trends, and the best home décor ideas are popular topics. As a culture, we are obsessed with looking our best, having the best, being the best. And we focus on people who are able to achieve these things. However, if you pick up one of these magazines and flip through the pages, you will see a different story from the one the covers imply. Celebrities who have it all, but are caught in the midst of scandal or heartbreak. People who have lost a lot of weight, but are now fighting eating disorders. Women who have the most trendy clothing, but are deep in debt because of their spending habits. People who own beautiful homes, but are facing foreclosure due to a failing economy. The outside covers look different from what we see inside.

This reminds me of Nebuchadnezzar, a king who had it all. His “cover” looked like everything was perfect, but inside, his heart was corrupt. Just when he was at the peak of his power, he said, “ ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’ ” (Dan. 4:30, NIV; emphasis added). God saw “inside the covers” to Nebuchadnezzar’s self-reliant heart. Because of his pride, he was driven out of his kingdom to live as a wild man. What a far cry from the lofty king he had once been!

When we rely too heavily on ourselves or put too much value on our worldly possessions, we lose sight of God and our heavenly treasures. When we become consumed with earthly treasure, we forget that God has given us everything and that it can all disappear in a moment.

What happened to Nebuchadnezzar? After a time of madness, he was restored. He acknowledged the Lord as sole Provider and Sustainer. He rejoiced, saying, “ ‘Now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble’ ” (Dan. 4:37, NIV).

What’s the story inside your covers?
Paul cautions that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim. 6:10, NIV). Notice that it is not the fact of wealth that Paul warns us about, but one’s attitude toward money. This attitude can extend beyond people who are actually rich and famous to rich and famous “wanna-bes.” The question really is: Who or what will we cling to in our lives? We cannot cling to both Jesus and wealth. One will ultimately rip the other from our grasp.

An example of wealth winning this tug-of-war is found in the story of the rich young ruler. He came to Jesus seeking to find the key to eternal life. Even though he scrupulously kept the commandments, he still felt something was missing. Jesus revealed to him the next step: “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21, NIV). In order for him to claim the real treasure of following Jesus, he had to give up his earthly treasures. The story ends with the young man going away sorrowful “because he had great wealth” (verse 22, NIV).

Zacchaeus is an example of someone choosing Jesus over wealth and power. Zacchaeus’s whole life revolved around wealth. Much of that wealth he obtained through extortion and thievery. When Jesus came to Jericho, stopped under the tree, and called him by name, Zacchaeus had a decision to make. Would he allow Jesus into his home and heart, or would his wealth win out? Matthew records what happened: He came down at once, and “received him joyfully” (Luke 19:6). The pronouns are a little difficult to untangle in this text so that it seems uncertain who received whom “joyfully.” I think both Jesus and Zacchaeus received each other joyfully.

The crowd responded by complaining that Jesus was going to be the guest of a sinner. What they failed to understand was that Zacchaeus was
no longer simply a sinner. He was a saved sinner. He had repented, confessed his sins, promised to restore that which he had stolen, and he had chosen to cling to Jesus.


Jesus was often berated for spending time with the rich and the infamous. Surely spending so much time with these types of people would stain His character. But His mission was to reach out to them, reveal their real need, and invite them to choose Him. His real purpose is shown in these words when He was eating with tax collectors and sinners at Matthew’s house: “He said, ‘Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. . . . For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners’ ” (Matt. 9:12, 13, NLT). Today, Jesus continues to reach out to anyone who will listen. He invites us to cling to Him, not to wealth and fame. It is only in following Him that we can find treasure that will last for eternity.

The poet and songwriter Rhea Miller had a father who was a drunk and wanted nothing to do with religion. Yet eventually he was saved and became a minister. In 1922, she was reflecting on his testimony of how he would rather have Jesus than all the gold and silver in the world, and all the houses and land that money could buy. Thus, these words were born in her mind: “I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold; / I’d rather be His than have riches untold. / I’d rather have Jesus than houses or lands; / I’d rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.”

While some story lines also say that Miller wrote the music to this song, there is another account that maintains that her words were picked up by a mother who was concerned about her son George. She left the words on the piano, hoping he would find them. When he did, he was so struck by them that he sat down at the piano and composed a tune to go with them. That song changed his life. Because of his powerful singing voice, George Beverly Shea had been offered a contract to sing for the National Broadcasting Company in the United States. Instead, he chose to become the singing evangelist for Billy Graham and was thus able to sing this hymn around the world.

**REACT**

1. What do the choices you are making reveal about whom or what is most important to you?
2. If you suddenly came into a large sum of money, how would it change you?
3. What are you holding on to most tightly in your life?

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“The ruler was quick to discern all that Christ’s words involved, and he became sad. . . . He was a member of the honored council of the Jews, and Satan was tempting him with flattering prospects of the future. He wanted the heavenly treasure, but he wanted also the temporal advantages his riches would bring him. He was sorry that such conditions existed; he desired eternal life, but he was not willing to make the sacrifice. The cost of eternal life seemed too great, and he went away sorrowful; ‘for he had great possessions.’

“His claim that he had kept the law of God was a deception. He showed that riches were his idol. He could not keep the commandments of God while the world was first in his affections. He loved the gifts of God more than he loved the Giver. Christ had offered the young man fellowship with Himself. ‘Follow Me,’ He said. But the Saviour was not so much to him as his own name among men or his possessions. To give up his earthly treasure, that was seen, for the heavenly treasure, that was unseen, was too great a risk. He refused the offer of eternal life, and went away, and ever after the world was to receive his worship. Thousands are passing through this ordeal, weighing Christ against the world; and many choose the world. . . .

“Christ’s dealing with the young man is presented as an object lesson. God has given us the rule of conduct which every one of His servants must follow. It is obedience to His law, not merely a legal obedience, but an obedience which enters into the life, and is exemplified in the character. God has set His own standard of character for all who would become subjects of His kingdom. Only those who will become co-workers with Christ, only those who will say, Lord, all I have and all I am is Thine, will be acknowledged as sons and daughters of God. . . . Think of what it means to say ‘No’ to Christ. . . . The Saviour offers to share with us the work God has given us to do. He offers to use the means God has given us, to carry forward His work in the world.”*

There is a saying that goes, “How you spend your money shows where your priorities lie.” The Bible also tells us the same thing: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’” (Matt. 6:21, NIV). If we spend our money only on ourselves and things of this world, we are focusing only on the present. How we use our time and resources reflect how focused we are on God. It is important that we periodically look at our lives and assess where our treasures lie. As you look at your own life, take some time to prayerfully think about the following items:

**Consider the things you value most.** Do you value your home, car, and other material belongings more than you value people? Are you investing your time into getting more “things,” or do you pour yourself into others and strive to lead them closer to Jesus? The rich young man in Matthew 19 was told that if he sold all of his earthly possessions to follow Jesus, he would receive his treasure in heaven. The same is true for us. The things we have today are only here for a time, but the things we do for God are eternal.

**Review your finances.** Are there ways in which you are not being a good steward of what God has given you? If you find that you are not using your funds in ways that please the Lord, then this is a good time to map out a different spending plan.

**Evaluate how you are spending your time.** Time is something we all have, and it is a sizeable resource. We can use our time to draw closer to God and to bring others closer to Him. Or we can focus our time on ourselves. If you find that your time is directed toward “you,” it may be time to consider redirecting that focus.

The rich young man turned away from Jesus when he heard that he had to let go of his earthly possessions. We should each diligently pray that our hearts are open to Jesus’ call in such a way that, were He to ask the same of us, we would eagerly “sell [our] possessions and give to the poor” in order to simply follow the invitation to “come, follow me” (verse 21, NIV).

**REACT**

Why are finances so closely linked to our connection with God?
Have you ever heard the adage “Money makes the world go around”? It seems like money can get you almost anything—almost being the key word. It’s only until you’ve had an experience in which you’ve needed something that money can’t buy that you realize how powerless it really is. For example, talk to people who have had near-death experiences, and I daresay that they will tell you that during that time they wished they had spent more time on things that really mattered, such as having better relationships with the people they loved or doing something meaningful with their lives.

Living in a sinful world, surrounded by worldly things, it is sometimes easy to get our priorities confused. This week we’ve been reading about the rich young ruler who, like many people today, had his priorities backward. Why did he choose his wealth over his Savior? Because he loved the things of the world more than the very One who had given him that wealth.

Where do you think your wealth comes from, anyway? “Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (Deut. 8:18, NIV). It is not by our own efforts that we gain wealth, but by the power of God. He desires our love as well as the devotion and a desire to serve that naturally accompanies a love for Him.

It is good to love the gifts God gives us, but we should never love those gifts more than the Giver. God and His Son give us all things, and one of the greatest of these gifts is abundant life (John 10:10). Such a life is one thing that no amount of money can buy! When we love the gifts, but forget about the Givers, we miss the biggest gift of all—a living relationship with the Source of all power (Matt. 28:18).

REACT

1. Imagine you have a child whose love for you is based on what you give him or her. As this child grows older and moves out of your house, he or she gets in touch with you only when he or she needs something. How would that make you feel? How do you think God feels when we interact with Him like this?
2. When was the last time you stopped to consider all that God has given you and acknowledged His hand in blessing you with each of these things?

Chanel Wood, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
CONCLUDE

Security is an inherent human need. The world offers money, wealth, and power to make one feel secure. Satan, who offered these “gifts” to Jesus while tempting Him in the wilderness, has not forgotten how to use his enticing strategies. Jesus successfully resisted him, reflecting the fact that He trusted in God more than in anything the world offers. Yes, trust is the underlying element. God provides for our needs as we trust in Him and do our part. Instead of being enticed by what the world offers, let us relinquish control of our lives to God, whom we can trust to take care of our needs in this world and in the next.

CONSIDER

• Reading the poem “Love of Money” by Hannah Flagg Gould, http://www.blackcatpoems.com/g/love_of_money.html. Analyze, as mentioned in the poem, the various evils that come with the love of money.
• Writing a journal entry after contemplating the blessings of the survival needs with which God has provided you. React to this verse, “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim. 6:8, NKJV).
• Singing the song, “I’d Rather Have Jesus,” Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 327, which is based on Philippians 3:8. Contemplate the meaning of this heart-warming song.
• Creating a brochure entitled the “Me Tree vs. the He Tree” based on The Root of the Riches by Chuck Bentley. Read the book review at http://www.faithandfinance.org/2011/07/root-of-riches-book-review/ and highlight the valuable points in the brochure.
• Making a list of ways you can use your money or time to serve others in need. Carry out the plans you listed.
• Watching birds in a park or in your backyard. Reflect on the words of Jesus, “‘Not one of them [the sparrows] falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will’” (Matt. 10:29, NKJV).
• Watching the video of the Stanford Marshmallow Experiment at http://www.youtube.com/channel/HC0gJcaYYeZgw. Seek God’s help whenever a situation arises that relates to delayed gratification.

CONNECT

Proverbs 30:8, 9; Philippians 4:6, 7, 10–13; Hebrews 13:5, 6.
Discipling the Powerful

“The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7, NRSV).
Jesus made it clear to His disciples that He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6), and that our belief and commitment to Him result in love and obedience. Committed followers of Jesus will do what He commands. We will not reserve little corners of our lives for ourselves. We will reach out to all types of people as they cross our paths. This week’s lesson, therefore, is about discipling the powerful.

“‘The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed.’”

Have you ever been frightened to witness to important people such as your professors, your health-care providers, and those who govern your city? Have you ever felt that you were not qualified to do so? Even Jesus’ disciples must have felt that way from time to time. From their experience, however, we learn that they “were not endowed with the courage and fortitude of the martyrs until such grace was needed. Then the Saviour’s promise was fulfilled. When Peter and John testified before the Sanhedrin council, men ‘marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.’ Acts 4:13. Of Stephen it is written that ‘all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel’ [Acts 6:15]. Men ‘were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake’ [Acts 6:10]. And Paul, writing of his own trial at the court of the Caesars, says, ‘At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me. . . . But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.’ 2 Tim. 4:16, 17, R.V.”

How wonderful it is to know that when we are in the presence of influential people, God will be by our side as He always is, guiding our actions and our words so that they will see Him in us. Just imagine, through you, His message can be proclaimed to people of great authority.

The Challenge Then and Now (Acts 25:8–12)

What a challenge rose before the early church! A world marinated in slavery, differential justice, and tyranny sprawled before Jesus’ disciples and their friends, waiting to be liberated by the hope God had sent in Jesus. It must have seemed impossible. The entrenched power of the Roman world was not about to be turned upside down by these amateurs. But it was turned upside! God’s power changed the world.

God has called us... He will lead us.

Just as the New Testament church witnessed, the church today must keep on witnessing. The world is craving power, beauty, and love. The trouble is that it has sought these things in many other places. Telling powerful people that real power is to be found in God and His service can quickly become confrontational. The heart of the sin-rebellion is based on the principle of “finding my answers my way.” The more power a person wields, the more likely that person is to resist witness. There is a paradoxical continuum: the poor may hear with gladness, the slightly powerful with some resistance, the powerful with powerful resistance, and the religious with the most resistance of all. What is it about religion that can make people unwilling to hear God? Perhaps the secret resides in the fact that all human religion has great amounts of self and personal opinion in it, and the last thing people want is God interfering with His dazzling goodness.

Do We Really Have To? (John 3:16)

Do we really need to witness to the powerful? Surely their support of and success with earthly power could excuse us for leaving them to their own resources. We are not excused, for several reasons. First, God’s call is to everyone (John 3:16). The powerful, the poor, the rich, and the religious are all courted by His love.

Second, God, being the God of relationship that He is, chooses to act quietly. No one, least of all the infinitely powerful God, can have real love grow in human hearts as the result of crushing force. People cannot love someone who forces them, and God knows this. So He often allows the subtle work of His kingdom to appear as though it were conducted by human power. Again and again, great good has been accomplished as God worked through human agents.
A third reason why we must witness to the powerful is perhaps the most compelling. The powerful are almost always in the greatest need of God’s love. Those with power live in a world of hollow promises and hopeless realities. They need the gospel desperately.

**Strategy (Acts 17)**

If we must take the risk of witnessing to the powerful, how should we do so? First, let us remember that we are supported by enormous power and wisdom. The Father sends the witness. Christ has won the battle. And the Holy Spirit, matchless in wisdom and experience, directs the operation. In Acts 17, we have the description of Paul bringing a sophisticated argument to the Athenians on behalf of Christ. The results appear to have been lackluster. He saw some converts, but largely, the powerful chose to hear only words rather than life-changing ideas. He left for Corinth, where he told the Corinthians: “When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom. . . . For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, 3, NIV). His work among them was more successful.

In Acts 25 and 26, we see Paul witnessing to Agrippa. At the end of his witness, Agrippa exclaims, “ ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’ ” (Acts 26:28, NIV). Here is a powerful man, mightily moved. What was Paul’s plan? He gave a simple personal witness of what God had done for him.

The Spirit put Paul in places where he could witness. God has called us. He has changed us. He has filled us, and He will lead us.

**REACT**

1. Why is personal experience a stronger witness than intellectual sophistication?

2. In what way are powerful people often the most needy of the gospel?
Many powerful people often give little or no thought to Christ, assuming that a life of commitment to Him must be restrictive and dull. They want the freedom that they believe their power and money can give them. And Satan is delighted to comply with their desires.

“The Hebrew worthies were men of like passions with ourselves.”

In his book *Call to Discipleship*, Juan Carlos Ortiz puts this type of thinking into perspective. Suppose that a ship is sinking and the captain knows it. So he tells the passengers that those in second class are free to go up to first class. Those who care to drink may have all the whiskey, vodka, or wine they want. Anyone who wants to play soccer in the dining room may do so. If anything is broken, it’s no problem. The passengers are delighted and think they are completely free. But soon they will all be drowned.¹ How can we witness to such people? Daniel’s life provides us with an answer.

“God brought Daniel and his associates into connection with the great men of Babylon, that in the midst of a nation of idolaters they might represent His character. How did they become fitted for a position of so great trust and honor? It was faithfulness in little things that gave complexion to their whole life. They honored God in the smallest duties, as well as in the larger responsibilities. . . .

“The Hebrew worthies were men of like passions with ourselves; yet, notwithstanding the seductive influences of the court of Babylon, they stood firm, because they depended upon a strength that is infinite. In them a heathen nation beheld an illustration of the goodness and beneficence of God, and of the love of Christ. And in their experience we have an instance of the triumph of principle over temptation, of purity over depravity, of devotion and loyalty over atheism and idolatry. . . .

“The same mighty truths that were revealed through these men, God desires to reveal through the youth and children today. The life of Daniel and his fellows is a demonstration of what He will do for those who yield themselves to Him and with the whole heart seek to accomplish His purpose.”²

**REACT**

Why might you be afraid to witness to people in powerful positions?

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Mark A. Paterniti, Taylor, Michigan, U.S.A.
In the book of Acts, the disciples have become apostles, and the term *disciples* has been given to everyone who believes in Christ. The fact that a “great many of the priests” also became disciples is significant (Acts 6:7, NKJV). None of Christ’s immediate followers were priests and no priest was named among the early converts. In fact, the plain-speaking disciples (apostles) were known to have alienated the priests. But in Acts, we have evidence that the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the apostles attracted a “great many” priests who became disciples.¹

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**The secret of a disciple’s life is devotion to the Savior.**

Dr. Colin Hemer used a 1-Proportion test and compared 165 passages from Acts with archaeological data. He was able to confirm 162 of these items, giving a 99.9 percent confidence rating.² To support this type of correlational research, Dr. Hemer analyzed the Book of Mormon to its supporting archaeological records. To date, he has been unable to find a single archaeological inscription, making it appear that the Book of Mormon is based on the imagination of Joseph Smith.

The evidence, both biblical and archaeological, point to our discipling work. God uses our circumstances to bring us in touch with people in all walks of life, including the powerful. Recent examples have occurred at various disaster sites where people came together to help others. As noble as this is, if I am devoted only to the cause of humanity or impressed by the powerful, I will soon be exhausted and come to the place where my love will falter. However, if I love Christ personally and passionately, I can serve humanity no matter how I’m treated. The secret of a disciple’s life is devotion to the Savior, and the main characteristic of a disciple’s life is its inconspicuousness. It is like a maple seed which twirls to the ground and dies, but presently it will spring up and alter the entire landscape.³

**REACT**

1. What is the difference between “soul saving” and “discipling”?
2. Is it more difficult to disciple the “powerful” than it is to disciple the “poor”? Explain your answer.

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Rose Gamblin, Smithsburg, Maryland, U.S.A.
When Jesus instructs us to make disciples of all nations, the image that comes to mind is the countless unwashed masses. However, we often forget to include people in positions of power or authority. So how does one go about discipling the powerful?

Start with the masses. Begin by witnessing to the man or woman on the street, bus, train, and so on. Assume that anyone you interact with could have great influence now or in the future. Powerful people are not born that way. Your interaction with certain people now and how you share and live the gospel could yield fruit in the future when they come into their positions of authority. Remember, too, that Christians don’t have a monopoly on faith.

The direct-marketing approach. Once you have identified the powerful people you would like to disciple, you have many options for getting their attention. You can follow them on social media sites, Web sites, and blogs. Respond to their posts or post something of your own. Get a conversation started. Often there will be others who share your view, and their comments will help get the attention needed. Don’t forget to show your support for positive decisions made and positions taken. Powerful people need affirmation just like the rest of us.

If inviting someone in a position of power to attend Sabbath service with you seems too forward, then start by inviting them to a church concert or to speak to your youth group. Let your light shine where you live by volunteering with their business or organization. You can also financially support resources such as Liberty magazine, which is sent to many of our nation’s leaders.

Sneak attack. If you feel too awkward about dealing directly with a person, you can always pray for that person. Pray for the owner of the company you work for that God will be a partner in his or her business. Pray for the congressional representative that is about to vote on a bill that will affect the moral compass of your nation. Pray for church leaders honestly wrestling to know God’s will.

REACT
1. How can you be a witness through obeying civil laws?
2. Is it more effective to spend your time discipling the common person or someone in power? Explain your answer.

Kathy Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.
There was a time when Britain ruled most of the world. To sustain this, successive kings and queens ensured that their princes who were in line to the throne were educated in the history and practices of the territories and their governments. The potential monarchs were schooled in the best universities and/or at home by experts. They gained hands-on experience through extensive travel to British overseas territories.

Paul . . . learned to converse easily with the powerful.

Such education still occurs. Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge, potential king and queen of the United Kingdom, having completed their formal university education and after learning much about the ethics and diplomacy of royalty, have traveled to Africa, the West Indies, North America, Australia, the East, and extensively throughout the United Kingdom. This gives them credibility, so that when they are in authority, they’ll be able to use the language and illustrations with which their target population can be comfortable.

Paul was schooled in the best educational institutions of his day and learned to converse easily with the powerful. His Damascus road conversion changed his emphasis from persecuting Christians to dedicating his life to showing the Gentiles that Jesus was their Savior. It also broadened his effectiveness in speaking with the powerful.

Once Paul secured permission from King Agrippa to conduct his own defense (Acts 25:26), he combined an effective mix of his academic excellence, diplomacy, courtesy, history, and understanding of religious differences between groups with his certainty that Jesus was the Savior. Read what he said to King Agrippa in Acts 26:2–7.

The king’s response informs us that despite the unusual setting, Paul used his credentials to make the gospel relevant to this powerful leader: “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’ Paul replied, ‘Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains’ ” (Acts 26:28, 29, NIV).

REACT

The training of both Paul and Prince William equipped them to interact with people from all socioeconomic levels. How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church improve its approach in reaching more of the powerful?
CONCLUDE

At any one point, God’s Word makes it clear that His message is an equal opportunity message. Though He is often best able to transmit that message through the humble (who possess little), His called messengers are never to remain meekly within their own social strata. In fact, the Bible’s most thrilling stories are often those in which its Author called His closest friends to speak truth to people in power. The results were mixed, even during Jesus’ own ministry. But powerful people may need His words even more than the humble.

CONSIDER

• Having friends over for a vesper service and suggesting that they share stories of how someone witnessed powerfully without really meaning to.
• Spending a week’s worth of daily devotional time writing out your “witness story.” Even if you may not have had a dramatic conversion experience, listing reasons why the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit truly make a difference in your life. People who write out their testimonies often recognize opportunities to share their faith.
• Asking around your congregation or another Adventist congregation until you find someone who was converted to our faith from an opposite mind-set, such as atheism, agnosticism, or active rebellion against God. In company with one or two other class members, interview that person and try to discover what it would have been like to walk in their footsteps. Ask the person how effective his or her own post-conversion witnessing has been and why.
• Listing the most powerful people in your life. Describe the power each person holds and make notes about how you might be able to guide each person’s heart toward Jesus. Do you sense any vulnerabilities in these people? Use this project to create a prayer list.
• Studying the lives of Bible people who witnessed to those in power, such as Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Peter, Stephen, and Paul.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, “In the Court of Babylon,” or online at https://egwwritings.org/.
C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity; Norman Geisler, The Big Book of Christian Apologetics; Antony Flew, There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind.

Maylan Schurch, Renton, Washington, U.S.A.
Discipling the Nations

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”

(Isa. 56:7, NKJV).
Their CD album is a bestseller in our country. It has become a favorite of many gospel media houses. I always listen to it because it is filled with inspiring Christian songs that invigorate the mind and heart. The choir is from Rwanda, an African country that was devastated by civil war in the midnineties. The story of genocide in Rwanda spread across the globe. So very many people lost their lives, and much valuable property was destroyed.

The world has become a global village.

The choir is doing a wonderful work. They have traveled across all of East Africa, sharing the good news of Christ and His love for humankind. Based on what happened in their country, it is amazing that these singers have come to understand and believe that God’s love surpasses even the atrocities humans can inflict upon one another.

In many instances, we do not use our full potential when it comes to spreading the gospel. We do limited discipleship, thinking that the light we have received from Christ is for us alone and a few people around us. That is what Jesus referred to when He talked about lighting a lamp and covering it with a basket instead of placing it on a lamp stand (Matt. 5:14–16). Many people have not even heard about God. Our brothers and sisters worldwide are yearning for the gospel. Perhaps we cannot reach them in person. However, we can still do something instead of sitting back and thinking that it’s not our responsibility. The world has become a global village. Electronic messages can reach their destinations in a split second. Let us utilize the latest developments in technology to spread the Word to all the nations in the world.

What the choir from Rwanda is doing in terms of transnational discipleship is amazing. These singers have shown the rest of us that because Christ provides for all of us, we should not hinder the direction of His Word. What does this mean to us? What can we learn from their example? Our lesson this week is about how we, as Christ’s disciples, can share the gospel with nations other than our own. The gospel of Christ is all-encompassing, regardless of color, tribe, or geographical location.

George Otieno, Homa-Bay, Kenya
My country has forty-two tribes. The five major tribes are known as the “Big Five.” In this group, there are tribes who feel they are superior to the others. There also are subtribes who feel they are superior in that particular tribe. In the end, it all comes down to who is superior, more advanced, or wealthier than the others. The major tribes feel they should be at the top, while the minor ones remain at the bottom.

People everywhere create barriers based on worldly expectations and achievements. However, the Bible reminds us that discipleship does not and should not have boundaries. True discipleship embraces the spirit of togetherness and oneness in Christ. In the Bible, the parable of the good Samaritan is a fitting example of discipleship without bounds. Never should we look at what divides us. Instead, we should focus on what unites us as sons and daughters of Christ. The person who showed love to the robbery victim was a Samaritan. The Jews thought the Samaritans were worthless, and two of God’s chosen people, a priest and a Levite, decided not to get involved.

The story of the good Samaritan is an ancient story, but it still has a lot to do with us. In what circumstances do we represent the priest and the Levite? How many times do we ignore deserving cases just because the victim is not of our tribe, race, country, or religion? True discipleship is dressed with the garment of love—love that comes from the heart for the benefit of the other person. We cannot do effective transnational discipleship without genuine love. The prophet Isaiah was filled with such love: “I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ ” (Isa. 6:8, NIV).

We also are meant to spread the good news of salvation around the world. Like the apostles serving people both within and beyond their borders, we also need to identify with our brothers and sisters in difficult situations within and beyond our borders. Our love should be crowned with the spirit of service to the world. Let us take the love, compassion, and the hope that is in Christ to wherever He is needed—for that is true discipleship.

**REACT**

1. Why do you think Satan is always interested in what divides us? How can we avoid falling into this trap?

2. In the spirit of serving globally, what else can you do in addition to spreading the gospel?
The Prophets on Discipleship (Isa. 56:6–8; Jon. 3:7–10)

The prophet Isaiah gives to Israel a clear-cut message about non-nationals. So long as one accepts Christ as Savior and Redeemer, there is no restriction based on one’s tribe or nation. This message cuts across generations to reach our ears. We, too, should witness to everyone. Remember that God sent Jonah to Nineveh to proclaim His message of salvation. Nineveh was a great city, not of the Hebrew nation. The total length of its walls was approximately seven and half miles, and the population within those walls is estimated to have been 160,000.* We are called to follow in the footsteps of prophets like Jonah. We are to reach beyond our borders to spread God’s Word.

How about us? Do we consider ourselves or our church superior to others?


Christ sounded a warning to unrepentant cites. Many of the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had seen Christ perform miracles. However, they did not discern the meaning behind these miracles. Instead, they were mere spectators and did not allow these miracles to lead them to repent and follow Christ. In the same way, Christ will not be pleased if we neglect the message of His agents. In Luke, Christ stressed the universal appeal of His gospel. The stories of the widow’s oil and the healing of Naaman are excellent examples of discipleship without borders. God sent a prophet to perform a miracle for strangers and the enemies of Israel. This displeased the Jews, who considered themselves as God’s uniquely chosen people. Thus, Christ emphasized that the gospel was for everyone who believes. And so today, we are supposed to spread the Word far and wide.

Going Beyond Borders (Luke 10:25–37)

The parable of the good Samaritan is another excellent example of discipleship across the borders. Several important issues arise from this story, including religious prestige. In the Old Testament law (Lev. 21:1–4), a priest who touched a dead body was considered ceremonially impure. Because the robbery victim was half-dead, the priest and the Levite decided not to get involved. Perhaps the audience expected a Jewish layperson to come rescue the injured man. But this never happened. Instead, the one who showed love to the victim was a Samaritan, a minority group
despised in Israel. In this illustration, Christ showed the contrast between mere religious beliefs and true discipleship. As His ambassadors, we are to break the barriers of our time and become involved in true discipleship. Do we sit back and watch as our brothers and sisters elsewhere hunger for the gospel because they are not of our race, tribe, or nation? This is what Christ illustrated by the story of the good Samaritan. The Jews expected Christ to concentrate on them alone. However, He challenged them when He said the gospel was for every nation that accepts Him as Savior. How about us? Do we consider ourselves or our church superior to others? Do we consider other people inferior simply because they are from minority groups in our country or our church?

The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20; John 11:51–53; Acts 1:7, 8)

Christ did not restrict the gospel to one particular group. In His ministry, He became a Trainer of trainers. He wanted the disciples and His church to share with the entire world what they had learned. And they were to do so without any trace of bias. The power of the gospel is to be felt across the globe by all people. The Lord has promised to give us the Holy Spirit to help us fulfill this command.

Christ declared that He would gather all nations together for the purpose of glorifying the Father. How then can we say that we are better than others? Christ’s blood is able to wash away the sins of each of us, regardless of where we come from or our social status. Therefore, everyone has a right to hear this gospel and to see how it plays out in their lives. As the Good Shepherd, Christ is more concerned about the scattered sheep. The good news of salvation He brought to us should be taken to every corner of the globe. For this reason He said, “‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself’” (John 12:32, NIV). This means that salvation is not selective. Christ died for everyone. In our efforts to witness for Him in discipleship, Christ desires that we share the gospel with all people, far and wide.

REACT

1. In what other ways do we do selective discipleship these days? How can we avoid being selective in our delivery of Christ’s message?
2. How can we make the Great Commission more effective in our time?
3. Why do you think the story of the Good Samaritan is included in the Bible?

* The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Nineveh.”

Tony Philip Oreso, Nairobi, Kenya
“Christ’s words on the mountainside were the announcement that His sacrifice in behalf of man was full and complete. The conditions of the atonement had been fulfilled; the work for which He came to this world had been accomplished. He was on His way to the throne of God, to be honored by angels, principalities, and powers. He had entered upon His mediatorial work. Clothed with boundless authority, He gave His commission to the disciples: ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations’ . . . Matt. 28:19, R.V.

“For this work the church was established.”

“The Jewish people had been made the depositaries of sacred truth; but Pharisaism had made them the most exclusive, the most bigoted, of all the human race. Everything about the priests and rulers—their dress, customs, ceremonies, traditions—made them unfit to be the light of the world. They looked upon themselves, the Jewish nation, as the world. But Christ commissioned His disciples to proclaim a faith and worship that would have in it nothing of caste or country, a faith that would be adapted to all peoples, all nations, all classes of men.”

“Thus Christ gave His disciples their commission. He made full provision for the prosecution of the work, and took upon Himself the responsibility for its success. So long as they obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail. Go to all nations, He bade them. Go to the farthest part of habitable globe, but know that My presence will be there. Labor in faith and confidence, for the time will never come when I will forsake you.

“The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel. All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledge to be co-workers with Christ.”

**REACT**

In what ways can you be a coworker with Christ in discipling nations?

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2. Ibid., p. 822.
Many Christians find that it is an uphill task to spread the gospel beyond their own communities. Several factors hinder them, including communication barriers, financial challenges, and the attitudes of the people to be reached. However, the success of discipleship depends primarily on the ability of the messenger to follow Christ. Being His ambassador calls for certain guidelines to be observed in order for the gospel to achieve its intended objective.

**Start small. Dream big.**

The story of Jonah is one example of what can happen when we fail to yield to God’s instructions. God had planned to use Jonah to deliver His message to the people of Nineveh, but Jonah was reluctant to do so. This reluctance caused Jonah many unnecessary problems. When God plans for us to advance His cause, we should be ready to obey. Circumstances may seem daunting, but we have His promise to be with us.

Discipleship is a journey, and who doesn’t love traveling to new places, meeting new people, and making new friends? What if you sense God calling you to witness for Him in a faraway place?

Accept His call. When our hearts become as hard as stone, the gospel cannot thrive in us. Then we only complain and look for excuses. But a yielding heart is fertile ground for the seeds of discipleship to germinate, grow, and prepare us for service.

Start small. Dream big. We can compare discipleship to a mustard seed (Matt. 13:31, 32). Wherever you are, you are well able to do something for the Lord. It’s the travelers who have visited your country, the students from abroad who are in the same college as you, the fellow staff members where you work—the list is long.

Start with yourself. It comes down to what you as an individual can do for someone on a personal level.

Do your part. Leave the rest to God. He is always a Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24), even if you are discipling a nation.

**REACT**

1. Why do you think we sometimes fail to heed God’s instructions even after He gives us a sign?
2. How can we prepare ourselves to understand the difference between God’s voice and a hoax from our enemy?
During an encounter with the Jews, Christ stated that the good news regarding our salvation was not restricted to a particular nation, race, or tribe. In many ways, we are like the Jews. Some of us like to brag that our denomination “has the truth.” We think we should be at the top in Bible study, modesty, and diet. However, we take very little time to share the gospel.

“The Jews were envious when Christ talked about the gospel spreading to the Gentiles. He wanted His people to know that the gospel is for everyone. What can we do to rid ourselves of exclusivity? Instead of taking the good news to places it has not reached, we concentrate on praising ourselves and demeaning others. We should realize that in Christ there is hope for everyone, because hope emanates from the unconditional love of God. As one writer observes, “The hope of the Christian faith has several dimensions. It has to do with the individual person, but it also extends to the entire human race. It has to do with the here and now of this world, but also with the future, even beyond the grave. It determines how we view ourselves and the people around us, and how we view the world.”*

Yes! The same way God loves all of us without discrimination is the same way we should spread the good news about Him. If we view other people on the basis of their tribe or nationality, then we need to understand that discipleship requires a boundless approach. All of our colleagues on campus or in the workplace, whether they are from our country or not, deserve a share in the kingdom of heaven. However, we cannot achieve this if the gospel is restricted to one particular group of people or nation. We should strive to take the gospel to places it has not yet reached. Like Isaiah who said, “‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isa. 6:8, NIV), we need to set the example for our generation.

**REACT**

In what ways do we resemble the Jews in thinking that Christ came only for them?

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CONCLUDE

What if people your parents’ age called you and your friends “immature”? What if you referred to anyone without a college education as “uneducated”? How would that make them feel? Might it make some people feel excluded? So why do we refer to people as “non-Adventists”? When we label people like this, we set up barriers between “us” and “them.” The gospel of Jesus, however, is all about including people. After all, He died for every single person—no exceptions. In what we now call the Great Commission, He directs us to “‘go and make disciples of all nations’” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Discipleship is all about widening the circle of believers, not closing it. So, scoot your chair over and let someone into the group!

CONSIDER

• Exploring a culture in which you are particularly interested. Listen to its music, research its art, try some of its food, and learn about its religion. Based on what you discover, how might you witness to the people of this culture?
• Praying for the Holy Spirit to direct you to partner with someone or some place that could use your help. It might be a homeless shelter, a safe house for abused women and their children, a food bank, an orphanage, or the stressed out single parent next door.
• Sponsoring a child or a student from another country. Find an organization like Compassion International, World Vision, Save the Children, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), or REACH International.
• Making friends in your community. Join an activity such as an exercise class or a local choir in order to get to know other people.
• Creating a Venn diagram depicting you and another religious group. In one circle, record unique characteristics of your group; in the other circle, list the other group’s unique characteristics, and where the circles overlap, show what both groups have in common.

CONNECT


Discipling Spiritual Leaders

“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (Luke 6:12, 13, NKJV).
“‘In a little while . . .’” (NIV). Jesus uttered these words when He told His disciples about His arrest, death, resurrection, and the experiences they would face after His ascension. While these words imply promise, they also imply separation. However, Jesus assured them of His continued presence through the Holy Spirit during the challenging times ahead. “‘A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world’” (John 16:32, 33, NIV). These words are not only about separation. They are also about Jesus’ presence in the lives of His disciples.

When Jesus was with His disciples, He tried to prepare them for the time when He would no longer be with them physically. Even though they would be separated from Him and experience hardship, His Holy Spirit would guide them. Thus they could overcome because the Master already overcame. This promise is an encouragement for spiritual leaders of today. “Suffering comes before laughter; the pain of birth precedes the wonder of new life. Honest people stained by sin and tortured by hope for what seems beyond reach, walk through deep valleys. But faith must be developed to sustain enough to outlast the trials.”

Peter, the most vocal disciple, faced a great trial of commitment. He denied his Lord, yet Jesus gave him a merciful look, which gave him a new faith and courage. He was able to continue his journey with the Lord until the time of his own death. Like Peter, “we must avoid the passion of this world and forsake its longings. Only then we will understand our true human nature and be prepared to enter the world that God has prepared for His people.” This week, we will study how Jesus prepared the apostles for the Great Commission, and how we can prepare others for spiritual leadership.

Not everyone is a natural-born leader. Even the Bible attests that “there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord” (1 Cor. 12:4, 5, NIV). Yet in another sense, leaders also are made because they need training and experience to hone their leadership skills.

**The Chosen (Luke 6:12–16)**

Jesus left His disciples to spend one night alone communing with His Father. While Scripture does not expressly state what He prayed for, it is likely that He prayed for guidance in choosing the people who would be with Him during His earthly ministry, for the following day, He chose His twelve disciples. They were Simon (whom He named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:14–16). He knew that He had a limited time to be with them, so He needed to train them so that they in turn could train more disciples. This was the way by which the early church would grow and multiply.

**The Comforter (John 16:7–14)**

As Jesus was nearing the end of His ministry on earth, He told His disciples that He would be separated from them. He foresaw that they would feel the loss caused by this separation, so He told them that He would ask His Father to give them another Counselor who would be with them forever (John 14:16). The disciples would not be left as orphans (verse 18) because the Holy Spirit would dwell in them (verse 17). This Third Person of the Godhead would remind them of what the Son of God had told them (verse 26). It was necessary for Jesus to go away in order for the Holy Spirit to come (John 16:7). The disciples would face persecution and it would be only through the work of the Holy Spirit that they would be able to withstand the tribulations they would face.

**The Instructions (Luke 6:20–49)**

In training the disciples, Jesus did not just speak to them. He also taught them through His example. He knew that actions speak louder than words. He also knew the cost of following Him, that the disciples would experience hunger and shed tears. He knew that they would be
hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected by men because of Him (Luke 6:20–22). But Jesus encouraged His disciples and told them that their sacrifices would not be in vain, for they would have their reward in heaven.

Jesus also encouraged His disciples to love their enemies. They would have many adversaries who would challenge their work. However, He told them to treat their enemies mercifully just as the Father is merciful (verse 36). They were to do good, pray for, and bless those who persecuted them, instead of trying to get even with them. If someone were to strike them on the cheek, they were not to retaliate (verse 29). These instructions may sound difficult because they run contrary to sinful human nature. But by living according to these instructions, the disciples would exemplify Christ’s character and win more souls for Him.

Jesus also reminded His disciples not to pass judgment on others. Instead, they were to forgive (verse 37). To emphasize His point, He asked, “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?” (verse 39, NKJV). Thus, it was essential for the disciples not to be spiritually blind themselves. After all, they would not be able to lead others to Christ if they, too, were lost.

The disciples were likened to two kinds of builders. One builder constructed a foundation on rock. This symbolized those disciples who heard God’s words and put them into practice. The second builder constructed a foundation on sand. This symbolized those disciples who heard God’s words, but ignored them. Thus we learn that our actions should reflect our words in order for us to be effective spiritual leaders.

**The Attributes ( Isa. 57:15; Jer. 50:31; Zeph. 2:3; Matt. 11:29; 1 Cor. 9:19; Phil. 2:3)**

It is also important that Jesus’ disciples have a contrite heart and lowly spirit ( Isa. 57:15). They should not be arrogant (Jer. 50:31), but should instead seek righteousness (Zeph. 2:3). Disciples accept Jesus’ yoke (Matt. 11:29) and are to be a slave to everyone in order to win as many as possible (1 Cor. 9:19). Finally, Jesus’ disciples should esteem others better than themselves (Phil. 2:3).

**The Legacy (Acts 1)**

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He left a legacy—the disciples themselves. Because of them, the proclamation of the gospel continued in His absence and the early church was established, all because the apostles were skillfully trained by Jesus, their spiritual Leader.

**REACT**

1. A spiritual leader looks after the welfare of church members. Who then looks after the spiritual leader?
2. Is it possible for a spiritual leader to develop without someone to emulate? Explain your answer.
3. What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind?
“The Lord Jesus acts through the Holy Spirit; for it is His representative. Through it He infuses spiritual life into the soul, quickening its energies for good, cleansing it from moral defilement, and giving it a fitness for His kingdom. Jesus has large blessings to bestow, rich gifts to distribute among men. He is the wonderful Counselor, infinite in wisdom and strength; and if we will acknowledge the power of His Spirit, and submit to be molded by it, we shall stand complete in Him. What a thought is this! In Christ ‘dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him.’ Never will the human heart know happiness until it is submitted to be molded by the Spirit of God. The Spirit conforms the renewed soul to the model, Jesus Christ. Through the influence of the Spirit, enmity against God is changed into faith and love, and pride into humility. The soul perceives the beauty of truth, and Christ is honored in excellence and perfection of character. As these changes are effected, angels break out in rapturous song, and God and Christ rejoice over souls fashioned after the divine similitude.”

“Those who at Pentecost were endued with power from on high, were not thereby freed from further temptation and trial. As they witnessed for truth and righteousness they were repeatedly assailed by the enemy of all truth, who sought to rob them of their Christian experience. They were compelled to strive with all their God-given powers to reach the measure of the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. Daily they prayed for fresh supplies of grace, that they might reach higher and still higher toward perfection. Under the Holy Spirit’s working even the weakest, by exercising faith in God, learned to improve their entrusted powers and to become sanctified, refined, and ennobled. As in humility they submitted to the molding influence of the Holy Spirit, they received of the fullness of the Godhead and were fashioned in the likeness of the divine.”

“The words spoken to the disciples are spoken also to us. The Comforter is ours as well as theirs. The Spirit furnishes the strength that sustains striving, wrestling souls in every emergency, amidst the hatred of the world, and the realization of their own failures and mistakes.”

1. Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, pp. 55, 56.
3. Ibid., p. 51.
Spiritual leadership is different from leading a troop of young men and women ready to fight for their country. It is also different from leading a nation and understanding its economy. But there are essentials common to all types of leadership.

“Spiritual leadership, simply defined, is God-given spiritual ability and responsibility to lead God’s people.”* One of the outstanding leaders of the Bible was Ezra (Ezra 7:10). Among the three “post-exilic” leaders of the Jewish people, Ezra was considered to be a virtuous spiritual leader. Zerubbabel was remembered for rebuilding the temple. Nehemiah was known for leading the reconstruction of the Jerusalem wall. Ezra was remembered for setting the hearts of the people to divine reformation. So let us look at the characteristics of a good leader as found in Ezra.

We should seek God through prayer with all our hearts.

First, Ezra was a scribe who anchored his faith in God’s Word. Like him, leaders of our generation should allow the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to run through their veins.

Second, Ezra was a man of prayer. He prayed for a safe trip. He prayed for his people (Ezra 9:5–15), for the children, for the protection of their possessions (8:21), and for God’s plans. Do we seek time to pray for ourselves, for the people around us, even for simple things? If not, let us think again, and realize that to be a chosen leader of God, we should seek God through prayer with all our hearts.

Last, Ezra had compassion for God’s people. He was able to motivate several Levites to join him in a caravan on the way to Jerusalem (8:15–20). Sound simple? Not really. Jerusalem was just recovering from a 70-year occupation by Babylon. However, Ezra was able to encourage more than 200 people to leave their riches and follow God’s invitation to return to their homeland.

We need spiritual leaders like Ezra in our present generation—God-chosen leaders who will bring the flock closer to salvation.

**REACT**

1. How can we be spiritual leaders in our own associations?
2. What preparations do you think you should make in order to become a spiritual leader?

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A spiritual servant leader aims to lead others to Christ in part by following His example. A disciple, by definition, is “one who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another.”* However, discipleship also requires a totally committed life that grows in Christ and is equipped by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–14). Jesus’ disciples were just such spiritual leaders. He taught them by setting a good example. It was partly for this reason that He spent the night in prayer before He called them to Him. Many things were going on in His ministry at this time. In spite of division caused by confusion in adhering to the teachings of Christ, their love for Him should be the unifying force among all His children. Leaders are urged to compare their words and deeds with the Word of God. Daily interaction with the Word, through study, prayer, and obedience helps Christian leaders to build a good foundation when instructing others how to walk in God’s way.

A time to pray. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus spent all night in prayer before He chose His twelve disciples. Likewise, in every situation we find ourselves, we need to pray that He will guide us.

A time to evangelize. There was an engineer who planned his life well, only to find out that the best years of his life came when He finally surrendered his life to God. A friend, who had been a faithful companion to him and a dedicated Christian led him to the Savior.

No matter what our maturity level in the Christian life, we have something to offer. Let us not be deceived by Satan when we tend to compare ourselves to Bible scholars. Some of the most enthusiastic representatives of Christ are new believers who have just discovered the awesome love of God. Remember to remain faithful and humble at all times (Phil. 2:3), for we can be spiritual leaders in our own way as we become more obedient to the Lord.

You, too, can be like one of the twelve disciples. Are you ready to heed His call?

Being one of Christ’s disciples is to represent our Master. In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul states that even though he is rightfully free, he makes himself a servant to all in order to win many to the Savior. Being a servant to all means that he labors for people as one who desires their good and that he works for the church without receiving gifts or rewards in return (2 Thess. 3:8, 9).

A true follower of Christ reflects His character.

Paul could have been dependent on the church for his daily sustenance while proclaiming the gospel, but he chose not to be a burden by working and providing for himself. This is the example he set. Although the gospel was entrusted to him, he never put it under his control. He was determined not to compromise God’s principles. Instead, he surrendered himself to Christ’s leading so that the greatest number of people possible would accept salvation from sin. This concept of Paul’s is connected to the essence of discipleship that Jesus Himself taught: “Who, being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6–8, NIV).

A true follower of Christ reflects His character. The determination to humble ourselves before the world without compromising our faith, to be ministers and servants subject to our God is the real essence of discipleship.

**REACT**

1. Why did Jesus teach His believers that to be great means to be a servant?
2. How do you view the concept of servanthood as presented both by Paul and Jesus?
3. What would be the effect on the church members if Paul had not worked to sustain himself during his ministry?
CONCLUDE

The most important call of your life won’t come by phone. It’s the call of the Great Commission, which Jesus extends to each of His followers. “ ‘Go and make disciples of all nations,’ ” He urges us (Matt. 28:19, NIV). He also tells us to baptize and teach others (verses 19, 20). You are God’s chosen method of reaching the world—first to share through word and action how God works in your life, and then to help train other people to reach still others. It’s a domino effect: the power of personal testimonies and our service for others spreading God’s light through a dark world. The Holy Spirit strengthens our witness and prepares the hearts of those around us to accept their Savior.

CONSIDER

• Writing a short story or poem about what God has done and is doing in your life. Think about ways you can share this testimony.
• Volunteering to help with an evangelistic meeting or finding an ongoing service project that suits your talents and interests.
• Listening to the song “I’m Gonna Sing” from the album Everything Good by the Gaither Vocal Band, which speaks about the power of our witness. Or view the many options for this song on YouTube.
• Serving food at a soup kitchen for homeless or jobless people for at least a month.
• Researching and listing characteristics of an effective spiritual leader. Ask God to show you which ones you might develop.
• Asking God to show you ways you can share His love with others this week.

CONNECT


The Harvest and the Harvesters

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8, NKJV).
The owner of the vineyard was optimistic that he would have a good harvest. He had planted the vines on a hill that had good soil and had carefully cultivated them. But to his surprise, the vines yielded only bad fruit. So the owner wondered, “What more could I have done?” (Isa. 5:4).

We, too, must ask this same question when it comes to discipleship. We believe we are able people because God has given us what we need to make good disciples for Him. He has given each of us gifts and talents with which we are to win souls for Christ. True discipleship requires that we walk in Christ’s footsteps to bring in a good harvest.

As harvesters, we are charged with the responsibility of recruiting and teaching new disciples how to follow Him.

Our main goal is to disciple people as Christ did. The constant changes of modern life and the relentless challenges we face should not override our goal to help others accept Jesus and become His disciples. As harvesters, we are charged with the responsibility of recruiting and teaching new disciples how to follow Him. This charge calls for us to live by the four pillars of true disciple-making and evangelism: (1) recognition of our sinful state, (2) genuine heartfelt humility, (3) unreserved spiritual surrender, and (4) the irrepressible urge to share the message of Christ.

When we observe how Christ ministered to others, we will learn how He helped people to be His disciples. When we observe how He worked together with ordinary men and women, we will learn how to do so as well. The world, and especially where we live, is the vineyard. Christ has done His part to reconcile us to God. Now we need to accept God’s love for us as found in the Savior, and share with others the good news of salvation. Christ has promised to give us the Holy Spirit to help us. It’s now up to us to cultivate a culture of humility and soul searching in order to realize the fruits of our labor for His cause.
We are charged with the responsibility to invite, show, and tell others how to grow and develop as Christ’s disciples. To this end, each of us is called to participate in effective discipleship. A pastor engaged in church administration must realize that a main pastoral duty is to win souls for Christ. A choir member striving to sing his or her part also needs to know that such talent is a worthwhile ministry. However, all of us must realize that how we live will either draw people to Christ or keep them from Him. This is what makes evangelism and discipleship go together. Winning converts to a set of doctrines, but failing to show people how to live as Christ lived, is like being a lamp without oil or a lightbulb. Likewise, showing disciples deeper spiritual matters without teaching them how to be witnesses separates evangelism from discipleship.

**What will your neighbors see in you that will attract them to Christ?**

True evangelism and discipleship involve calling people to live a radical new life in Christ. This means walking with Him and inviting others to walk with Him. That is the responsibility Christ gives His disciples throughout every generation. Our lives as disciples speak volumes about the new life in Christ we claim to have. What will your neighbors see in you that will attract them to Christ? How could you be a better example? These questions should be on our minds every day. The answers are the essence of discipleship. Discipleship is both a spiritual process and a lived process. We witness how both processes operate when we observe how Christ lived with and taught the first disciples. Furthermore, both processes are fully under the ministration of the Holy Spirit.

This means that discipleship should start from where we are and proceed to the farthest end of the world. The field of discipleship is vast and calls for us to undertake our duties in such a way that we will have a Spirit-filled relationship with those we meet. This was Christ’s style. He maintained a deep relationship with and mutual understanding of the people He discipled.

**REACT**

1. What factors hinder effective discipleship in society today?
2. How would you explain the connection between evangelism and discipleship?
God and Humans in Discipleship (John 1:40–46; 4:1–30)

Previously unknown to the majority of the inhabitants in the area, Christ went out of His way to call and to teach the first disciples. In the beginning, the task must have been daunting. The fact that Christ came from Nazareth compounded the whole issue as people asked whether anything good could come out of that city (John 1:46). What can we learn from the gathering of these first disciples? Even though He was the Son of God, Christ desired to work hand in hand with humans for the sake of salvation.

God’s people are to harvest the world’s vast fields.
We must work together to accomplish this task.

In another instance, Christ talked with a Samaritan woman who, because of her ethnic and moral standing, no self-respecting person would have paid attention to her. However, His simple words, phrases, and questions with profound implications, made a disciple out of the promiscuous woman. We also are called upon to reach out to people whom society casts aside. If Christ could win the hearts of humble fishermen and an adulteress, we should not neglect to disciple the lowly people where we live.

Patience in Witnessing (Acts 1:6–8)

Disciple-making is a progressive exercise which ends with the Second Coming. During the process, there are numerous twists and turns, mountains and valleys. Because of these hardships, many people drop out along the way. Others grow impatient, wondering when the journey will finally come to an end. Scripture advises us that it’s not our duty to know “‘the times or dates the Father has set’” (Acts 1:7, NIV). Instead, we are to exercise patience as we perform the work Christ has given us. We are to remain patient to the end while the Holy Spirit guides us as to what we should do.

The Seal of the Son (Matt. 28:18–20)

In the Great Commission, Christ instructed His disciples to “‘go and make disciples of all nations’” (verse 19, NIV) and to teach them to obey everything that He commanded them. Thus Christ placed His seal of
approval on the work of harvesting disciples. As followers today, we also are to take the good news of salvation to all places—the good news that the illegitimate kingdom of Satan has been defeated and that Christ has established His everlasting kingdom. Christ placed His seal on discipleship when He promised to be with us every step of the way.

*Harvesting Workforce (Matt. 9:36–38)*

Christ sees the world as a vast field, ripe with souls to be harvested for His kingdom. The Word of God has not yet penetrated the utmost corners of the world. Countless numbers of people still hunger for spiritual food. Sick people, homeless people, rich and poor people, people from all walks of life, need to hear the gospel. Thus God’s people are to harvest the world’s vast fields. We must work together to accomplish this task. With the help of the Holy Spirit, one person passes the torch of discipleship to another until we enlighten the whole world with the gospel. We are all in this together as sons and daughters of God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, each of us will find his or her way to participate in harvesting. Let us pray for the number of harvesters to increase. Let us encourage one another to go forth. We are called to be laborers with Christ in blanketing the world with the good news. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are able to show others how to live transformed lives in Christ.

*Limitless Love (Luke 15)*

Christ used parables to teach great truths. Parables are short stories that illustrate a truth or lesson. Luke 15 contains three parables about lost things that were found: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. These stories teach us wonderful things about discipleship. First of all, we have a duty to look for people who are lost so we can show them the way back to God’s loving arms. They also point to the limitless love of God. He is ready to forgive all who turn to Him. Finally, the parables articulate God’s forgiveness and justification, which comes with discipleship. As harvesters, we are called to spread the love which finds its root in the nature of Christ.

**REACT**

1. If Christ was on earth today, which questions would you ask Him, and why?
2. How can we wait patiently for Christ to return while living in a world that poses many challenges to us?
3. While on earth, Christ cooperated with humans in the making of disciples. How can we improve cooperation amongst ourselves so that the process of making discipleship will continue?
4. How can we benefit from Christ’s words on discipleship in Matthew 28:18–20?
“When Jesus sat down to rest at Jacob’s well, He had come from Judea, where His ministry had produced little fruit. He had been rejected by the priests and rabbis, and even the people who professed to be His disciples had failed of perceiving His divine character. He was faint and weary; yet He did not neglect the opportunity of speaking to one woman, though she was a stranger, an alien from Israel, and living in open sin.

“This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ.”

“The Savior did not wait for congregations to assemble. Often He began His lessons with only a few gathered about Him, but one by one the passers-by paused to listen until a multitude heard with wonder and awe the words of God through the heaven-sent Teacher. The worker for Christ should not feel that he cannot speak with the same earnestness to a few hearers as to a larger company. There may be only one to hear the message; but who can tell how far-reaching will be its influence? It seemed a small matter, even to His disciples, for the Savior to spend His time upon a woman of Samaria. But He reasoned more earnestly and eloquently with her than with kings, councilors, or high priests. The lessons He gave to that woman have been repeated to the earth’s remotest bounds. “As soon as she had found the Savior the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised, a whole cityful were brought to hear the Savior. She carried the light at once to her countrymen.

“This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink the water of life.”*

My father is a farmer, so I am conversant with harvesting matters. Harvesting is the peak activity in any farming process that leads to the actual collection of produce. Without it, the efforts of the farmer are in vain. Likewise, the entire world is a field of souls ready to be harvested for Christ. Winning souls for Him requires the harmonious participation of His people under the influence of the Holy Spirit. While on earth, Christ saw multitudes yearning for good news. So He instructed the disciples to be harvesters, to make more disciples (Matt. 9:37, 38), who would also be able to make even more disciples.

The harvest is everywhere, starting with where we are.

This is also our task. The harvest is everywhere, starting with where we are. We do not have to be an influential or wealthy people. Instead, we need to surrender ourselves to Christ. Look at the field around you. The following are some of the areas ripe for harvest:

1. **Your neighborhood.** Start with the people who are closest to you in proximity. Since they see you often, and since some of them know you personally, you can be a living example of the life found in Christ. This example is achieved by what you say and how you say it, your lifestyle, and the strength of your commitment to share the gospel.

2. **Learning institutions.** Students are searching for knowledge, for truth. Centers of learning can yield a great harvest for Christ. Which of your classmates might be waiting to hear about Him?

3. **Health institutions.** Extend a hand of compassion and kindness to the sick. Taking care of their emotional and spiritual needs can help them to heal physically and spiritually. Learn how you can volunteer in your city’s hospitals and assisted living centers for senior citizens and people who are unable to live alone.

**REACT**

1. Where else can you go to reap the harvest?
2. How can you best deal with those who reject you and the message of Christ?
A Swahili proverb goes like this: *Haraka haraka haina baraka*. Translation? “Haste, haste has no blessing.” This proverb can well be applied to evangelism and discipleship. Many people, both in and outside the church, have become restless. They are impatient to know when Christ will return. They concentrate so much on this that they ignore the plight of others. However, just as Christ demonstrated concern for people, so should we. Discipleship is not about ourselves. It is about helping others to experience a new life in Christ.

Christ wants us to have patience while we wait for His return. He has promised us power as we seek to share Christ with others (Acts 1:6–8). But because of sin, we will meet challenges along the way. So how can we avoid complaining? How can we keep from being restless? First, we should learn to wait on the Lord, regardless of circumstances, because God’s timing is the best. When we try to make things happen when we think they should happen, we are not trusting Him. Furthermore, we should realize that Christ is patient, loving, and long-suffering because He does not want anyone to be left out of His kingdom.

The responsibility rests with us, as Christ’s followers, to make disciples for Him. Then those disciples will help to make more disciples. We should concentrate on our part, accomplish our goal, with the Holy Spirit’s help, and leave the rest to our Father in heaven. Whining, complaining, and asking many questions will not do us any good. Our duty is to witness.

**REACT**

1. Why do you think Christ has not returned yet? Support your answer with biblical evidence.

2. Is knowing the date of Christ’s return important? Why or why not?
CONCLUDE

When Jesus returned to heaven, angels reminded His disciples of His promise to return. But between His first coming and His second coming, He had something for them to do. “Go!” He said. Go and make more disciples. Jesus wants everyone in the world to know about His love and sacrifice for them. According to Him, a disciple is someone who is baptized (converted) and who is learning to observe all He commanded. In order to make more disciples, Jesus asked His followers to do three things: go, baptize, and teach. Every believer can be part of this Great Commission.

CONSIDER

• Writing out your own concise, personal testimony so you have an idea of what to share when you want to tell someone about Christ. Focus on how you came to know Him personally and/or what He has done in your life.
• Starting a small Bible study in your home for friends who want to know more about Christ.
• Journaling each day about people who come across your path with whom you can share something about Christ.
• Writing a poem or song about what knowing Christ has meant to you and being ready to share it with anyone interested in hearing it.
• Leading a Sabbath School class discussion on the four pillars of true disciple-making: (1) recognition of our sinful state, (2) genuine heartfelt humility, (3) unreserved spiritual surrender, and (4) the irrepressible urge to share the message of Christ.
• Inviting friends to your home to watch The Case for Christ or Scripture Mysteries: The Most Incredible Prophecy. Prepare some discussion questions ahead of time so you can talk about the video afterwards.

CONNECT

Revelation 7:9, 10.
Scripture Mysteries (DVDs by Anchor Point Films).
The Cost of Discipleship

“Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort”

(2 Cor. 1:7, ESV).
It wasn’t an easy decision to pursue this career. Not an easy decision at all. You can remember your parents’ late-night talks when you were oh so young. Seven or eight? Even then you were considered old to begin the regime that would become your life.

“Don’t you want her to have a normal childhood?” family, friends, and even strangers asked your parents.

You wanted to quit so many times.

“We explained everything to her, and this is what she chose,” was their steady reply. You didn’t really understand then how much you would have to sacrifice. Days were long. You got up early to do “the essentials.” No pigging out for you. Healthy eating was the way to go. Afternoons were booked with lessons, weight training, and stretches. You missed your friends’ birthday parties and major school events.

When you were in your teens, your parents moved to provide you with a more experienced coach who could lead you to your dreams. You left your friends, teachers, and home for even more difficult work. “Anything in life worth having is worth working for,” you heard again and again and again through the sore muscles, the missed events, the injuries, the sleeplessness, and the pain. You wanted to quit so many times.

But oh, you gained so much as well! You traveled to many countries. You met numerous people outside of your family’s circle of friends. You talked to dignitaries, politicians, and famous people. Being in front of the crowds, the lights, the people were no longer a problem. If all of life was a stage, you were comfortable on it. And, truth be told, you loved what you did. You had always loved it.

So you come back to the question, Had it really been worth it? Your country’s anthem blares proudly over the speaker system. Your hand rests over your heart as your flag is raised above the other two. The weight of the gold medal around your neck is heavier than you expected. You’re on that podium. The one every athlete—and nonathlete for that matter—dreams about. Were the sacrifices worth it? Striving for what everyone said was impossible? Living for the dream through the work to get to that dream?

Yes.

And there is no need for any other explanation.

This week, think about how you will count the cost of discipleship. Or if you will bother to count it at all.

Kristi Rich, Bozeman, Montana, U.S.A.

England needed money. Don’t we all? The country was trying to figure out how to pay its debts and defend its new territories. So it was that on March 22, in 1765, England enacted the Stamp Act. This would tax all printed materials, from newspapers to playing cards. However, it resulted in a lot of complaining by the American colonists, who organized themselves to oppose not only this tax but also several other taxes they saw as unfair. England soon realized that the cost of enforcing the Stamp Act was more expensive than the tax itself. So they abolished it a year later. But the wheels had been set in motion that would lead to the American Revolution. Was it worth the cost for England to tax the colonies?

As Christians, we need to take a careful examination as well. What cost are we willing to pay to follow Christ? The colonists were not willing to pay the price. So they chose not to be under English control. England counted the cost and said they did need the tax, but they lost the American colonies.

Speaking to the multitudes, Christ said, “‘None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions’” (Luke 14:33, NRSV). Yes, Christ calls for a full commitment. He wants us to love Him with all our hearts, souls, and minds. Wearing a Jesus T-shirt and calling yourself a Christian just isn’t going to cut it anymore. Why is He calling for something more? Once we are fully committed, He wants us to witness for Him.

It was this week in history in 1775 that Patrick Henry spoke his famous words, “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, Give me liberty or give me death.”** At what cost are we willing to follow Christ? Patrick Henry was willing to give up his life for liberty. Christ is merely saying, “Are you willing to give up your life to be My disciple?” Patrick Henry and the other revolutionaries lost their homes, and some even their lives, for freedom. It resounds of Joshua’s challenge to the Israelites: “‘Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve’” (Josh. 24:15, NKJV). We need to make a choice; we cannot be indecisive.

Get on the field. You have been armchair Christians too long.
Preparation (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Phil. 1:6)

Once we have the commitment, the training begins. A race called the Tough Mudder has become quite popular. Though it is a short race, it is physically grueling. Its format is based on a military boot camp. Pushing through the pain, scratches, and blood makes it worthwhile because you can say, “I have completed a Tough Mudder!”

As Christians, we are called to prepare for a spiritual “Tough Mudder.” If you are serious about your commitment to be one of Christ’s disciples, your training will include studying the Bible, praying, and sharing your faith in a variety of ways. Many Christians complain that they can’t overcome temptation. They whine about not having any spiritual power, but they are not willing to put in the time to spiritually train for battle. Commitment means nothing unless you prepare for the race.

There is a joke that says, “There are two kinds of people in the world today. Those who watch football and those who play it.” The Christian parallel is: Get on the field. You have been armchair Christians too long. It’s so much easier to gossip about or criticize someone else playing on the field than to personally go out and play the game yourself.


Getting into the game calls for commitment and preparation, but the test on whether you have prepared enough is how you play the game. You ultimately have to “go.” You will face persecution, pain, and tears. People you trusted will reject you. Loved ones may turn their backs on you. But remember that you are playing for Christ.

You might worry about what to say. God will give you the words. That is also when your preparation kicks in. As a firefighter-EMT, I constantly participate in drills so I can perform certain skills perfectly under stressful situations. God will bring back your spiritual training when you are in stressful situations. But if you haven’t prepared, are you really committed?

Focus! Don’t get distracted by side topics or good intentions. The enemy wants nothing more than to get us to do anything other than getting onto the field and playing the game. That distraction may be even good stuff, but it’s not the best stuff. What is the best stuff? What did Christ tell His disciples just before He left earth? He told them to share, teach, and baptize. Should we do any less?

REACT

1. What kind of spiritual training routine are you currently doing to prepare for the game? If you’re serious about it, what would it look like?

2. What distractions do you need to put away in order to play the game more effectively?


Jonathan Geraci, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada
“God has need of workers who, as they labor with him, will comprehend the sacredness of the work, and the conflicts they must meet in order to carry it forward successfully,—workers who will not grow despondent as they see the arduous task before them. The Lord does not try to conceal from his people the stern conflicts they will meet in these last days. Instead, he shows the plan of battle; he points out the hazardous work to be done; he lifts his voice in warning, bidding men count the cost of their discipleship: but he encourages all to take up the weapons of their warfare; for the heavenly host will stand with them in the defense of truth and righteousness.

“On every side God’s people will meet the specious [hollow] temptations of Satan. The enemy knows how desirable a place heaven is to every human being. He has a keen sense of what he has lost; and when he was cast out of heaven, he determined to use all the knowledge and power he possessed in warring against God, and taking from him the beings he had created. He knows that the work which Christ has purposed will be accomplished; he knows that the Scriptures will be fulfilled, and that a host that no man can number will encircle the throne where he so often stood as chorister, to sing songs of praise and adoration to God and the Lamb. And in accordance with his purpose, he is working to make of no effect the labors of Christ’s followers.”

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“This is the religion of Christ. Anything short of it is a deception. No mere theory of truth or profession of discipleship will save any soul. We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly. It is by halfheartedness in the Christian life that men become feeble in purpose and changeable in desire. The effort to serve both self and Christ makes one a stony-ground hearer, and he will not endure when the test comes upon him.”

**REACT**

1. What cost should we as Christians be willing to pay to save others?
2. How should we prepare ourselves to fight for lost souls?

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*Bethany Geraci, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*
In this century, it is conjectured that a Christian is martyred every five minutes. A martyr every five minutes—in our day? This makes me think about the last part of the “faith” chapter, Hebrews 11, and how Paul encouraged the Hebrews to think of these people as witnesses to the faith (Heb. 12:1). I also thought about Christ’s words in Luke 12:49–53 about when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Josephus described the scene: “While the Temple was ablaze, the attackers plundered it. . . . Children and old men, laymen and priests, alike were butchered . . . whether they cried out for mercy or offered resistance.”

“‘The story of the Huguenots reads like a continuation of Hebrews chapter 11. These devout Protestants combined faith and works in heroic proportions. . . . In the severe persecutions to which they were subjected, some abandoned their religion to save their lives and property. But thousands of others died or rotted in dungeons or galleys.’”

More recent additions to the “cloud of witnesses” include Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1945), a Lutheran pastor and member of the German Resistance, and Ri Hyon Ok, executed in June 2009, in North Korea for distributing Bibles. Nickolai Panchuk, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor living in communist Russia, was sentenced to Siberian exile for refusing to cooperate with the KGB.

At an international interfaith conference in 2011, a study revealed that 105,000 Christians are being martyred each year. Is it worth it? One “witness,” Jim Elliot, who was martyred in 1956, said it best: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

**REACT**

What members of your family, church, school, or acquaintances are the “cloud of witnesses” that have affected your life?

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When we make crucial or difficult decisions, it is always wise to examine the benefits and the costs that come with those decisions. Being a disciple of Christ is one of the most important decisions we can make, as well as one of the most difficult. The benefits are unbelievable, but we must remember the cost. Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything we have. Jesus did not call us to count the costs only to have us refuse to follow. He exhorts us to follow Him, step by step, all the way to the Cross. The Cross is where He gave everything He had. The Cross is where we must do the same.

What does this mean for you and me? Paul gives us the answer in Romans 12:1, 2.

We must become a sacrifice. When a sacrifice was offered to God, it was brought unto the Lord (Lev. 1:2). He who offered it presented it entirely to the Lord and released all claim to it. When we become a sacrifice, we are devoting ourselves completely to God. We belong to Him and no longer lay any claim to ourselves.

We must be a living sacrifice. This means that we are energetic in devoting our life to serving Christ. This is where following Him becomes practical. We begin to live as He lived—seeking to serve, remembering to do good, and sharing with others (Heb. 13:16). This is the transformation and renewing that Paul speaks of (Rom. 12:2).

We must be a holy sacrifice. The sacrifices established by God in Old Testament times were to be without defect (Lev. 1:3). These sacrifices pointed to the ultimate Sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who was also without defect (1 Pet. 1:19). As His disciples, we are set apart to be a holy sacrifice. Our character is to be transformed to be like that of Jesus. His character is love, and as His followers, we, too, are called to love (Matt. 5:43–48; 1 John 4:8, 12).

As a living and holy Sacrifice, Jesus was pleasing to God (Matt. 17:5). As we follow Christ, we are led to a place where we will come to know firsthand the costs involved in being His disciples. We are led to the Cross where we will become a living and holy sacrifice, also pleasing to God.

“Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44). It’s easy to tell others to do that. It’s easy to preach about it. But have you noticed that it’s much harder to actually do it?

Consider the life of Christ, how time after time He was confronted with unbelief and ridicule. Despite the fact that He healed people and treated everyone kindly, the Pharisees derided Him, and His own people sought to execute Him. Even His own disciples doubted Him, denied that they knew Him, and one betrayed Him to His murderers. Yet all the while His love for them never failed.

It’s not difficult for me to be kind to people who are kind to me. The struggle comes when someone does not appreciate the good that I’ve done or is downright mean to me. Then I think of Luke 6:35 and realize I might be a lot like the disciples or even like the Pharisees. I feel like Paul did when he wrote, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15, NRSV). I want to be like Christ, but I often seem to do the very opposite.

Christ’s mission on earth was to seek and to save the lost. First John 4:19 says that “we love because he first loved us” (NRSV). He loved us as we were and still are! Maybe it’s our perspective that causes us not to love others the way we should. If we view those who don’t fit our idea of what it means to be a Christian, then we can’t understand that they need Christ too. And if we don’t witness to them about Christ, are we not judging them as being unworthy of salvation?

The Bible tells us not to judge others. If we claim to be followers of Christ, we need to emulate Him. He loves people we might look down upon. We can follow His example if we remain connected to God through prayer and the study of His Word, just as He did.

**REACT**

1. What are some verses you can think of that can help us to see others the way Christ does?
2. What role does prayer play in aligning our view of others with Christ’s view?
3. How do we love those who cause us the most grief?
CONCLUDE

Jesus didn’t promise His disciples wealth or ease. He did not offer them prestige or protection from troubles. Yet they followed Him, as have countless others—despite the sometimes almost unbearable cost. We may wonder at this devotion, but then we should turn our eyes to Jesus and see Him for whom He really is. He is why so many people have sacrificed so much to follow Him. He is worth the cost.

CONSIDER

• Doing something physical, such as running or bicycling. Set a goal you know you will have to work hard at to achieve. Push yourself within reason to reach that goal. Then think about what it cost you to achieve even such a small goal.
• Diagraming how you spend different amounts of time in a usual day. A circle graph might include a quarter to a third for sleep and other proportions of the day for eating, working, or studying. Recognize that God claims all of your time, not just the small portion of your time for daily personal worship. Consider how each portion of your time can be better lived as a disciple.
• Giving up a favorite activity during the week to serve others. Ask God to use your small sacrifice to help someone else.
• Finding details on a Web site such as Amnesty International (http://www.amnesty.org) of someone who is in prison or suffering persecution for what they believe. Write to that person to encourage them, or write to their persecutors calling for that person to be released from suffering for their beliefs.
• Using the Web site above, research a country in which Christians currently are being persecuted. Get a group of friends together to pray for this nation.
• Drawing a cross on your hand. Every time you notice it during the day, pause to think about what Jesus did for you and your call to follow Him.

CONNECT


Nathan Brown, Melbourne, Australia
If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for second quarter 2014, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

**Lesson 1 Laws in Christ’s Day**


**Memory Text:** “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves” (Rom. 2:14, NASB).

**Key Thought:** This week’s lesson investigates the various laws that functioned in the community during the time of Christ and the early church. We will study these laws in the context of setting a foundation for the study of the law that will be the major focus of this quarter—God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments.

Laws can make our lives better, or they can make our lives miserable. How much better it is to have God change your heart so you are living the law from the inside rather than following a stone plaque on the wall without giving the laws on that plaque a second thought.

**Lesson 2 Christ and the Law of Moses**

**Logos:** Exod. 13:2, 12; Lev. 12:1–8; 20:10; Deut. 6:5, 6; Matt. 5:17–20; Luke 2:21–24; John 5:42–46; 8:1–11.

**Memory Text:** “‘If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me’ ” (John 5:46, NRSV).

**Key Thought:** The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry show that He was a faithful Jew. Raised in a home with loyal Jewish parents, He fully appreciated His rich earthly heritage, which was rooted in Divine providence. He knew that God Himself had inspired Moses to pen these laws, with the purpose of creating a society that reflected His will and that served as a beacon to other nations. He adhered faithfully to the law. From circumcision to His visit to the temple to the feasts and His attitude about taxes, Jesus remained faithful to a system that He knew would over time
be fulfilled through His death and ministry in heaven. This week we’ll look at more of the laws that Jesus Himself kept.

The link between our loving God and keeping of His commandments is stronger than we realize. We can love God because we live in a universe where love can exist, and it can exist because the universe is moral. That morality is based, at least for us as created beings, on God’s moral law.