



STEPS TO **discipleship**

Produced by
General Conference
Youth Ministries Department



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THE POWER OF ONE

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

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Youth Ministries Department

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Table of Contents

Forward	5
Introduction	7
Helpful Hints	9
Session 1 — Try Him and See	13
Session 2 — You Can Have It Now!	47
Session 3 — It’s All about Surrender	79
Session 4 — God’s Ultimate Temple	111
Session 5 — You Can Do It Too	141
Session 6 — We Are the Body	169
Session 7 — Equipped for Ministry	197
Session 8 — Plans for the Future	227

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Welcome to *Steps to Discipleship*, a seven-week journey of constant seeking, study, and self-discovery that will lead to a closer relationship with God. This is not a guide on how to be a good Christian or a step-by-step booklet to better spirituality. There are no magic formulas. There are no shortcuts. These next seven weeks will be an intensive and strategic process of seeking a deeper and more meaningful Christian experience. It will involve thought, prayer, study, and most importantly, a dedication and desire to know God better.

Every one of us has a hunger within — a hunger for something more than this world has to offer — a hunger to realize our true purpose.

We are made for intimacy with God, as evidenced by His personal involvement in our creation. God came to this earth and made us in His own image. In the Garden of Eden, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve. Their relationship was the essence of closeness and love.

Yet, when sin entered our world, this idyllic co-existence between God and Man was shattered. We became estranged from the Creator and removed from our purpose. Sin consumed us and became our natural inclination.

But, despite it all, the hunger to live a purposeful life remained. And God, in His mercy, never gave up His desire and search for friendship with us, no matter the cost. He proclaims, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3, NIV). And He promises, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, NIV).

So how do we claim this promise? What does it mean to seek God with all our hearts? That's what we're here to discover. But it starts within. We must actively choose to give God a chance.

The journey begins with a commitment. Dedicate thirty to forty-five minutes a day to prayer and Bible study. Try God for seven weeks and watch Him transform your life.

Forward

As Seventh-day Adventists, we define ourselves as “the people of the book.” As such, there is one aspect of engaging with the Scriptures that, in a way, constitutes our main approach to the reading of the Bible; we would commonly refer to it as ‘Bible study,’ or the informational reading of the Word. We turn to the Bible with the purpose of increasing our knowledge of truth, gaining understanding, and bringing intellectual conviction. While this informational approach does provide a reliable way to impart our doctrinal teachings, it does not necessarily bring about transformation in the lives of people. While the importance and centrality of doctrine and the study of Scriptures in the life of the Church is deeply appreciated, it has not always brought about transformation in the lives of its members. It has been observed that our church community is often made up of individuals who are informed and conformed, but not necessarily transformed and reflecting the image of Christ in their lifestyle choices and the nature of their relationships with one another and the wider community.

While we have done well in advocating sanctification and the necessity of transformation and the development of Christian character, we have not always been intentional in teaching how such transformation and development of Christ-likeness can be fostered; we have encouraged our young people to read the Bible and to pray; but not necessarily with the purpose of listening to the voice of God.

The Bible itself refers to a complementary approach that is designed to bring about character transformation and spiritual growth; David refers to this when he says: *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.* (Psalm 1: 1–3)

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Here is the picture of a tree that is offered as a metaphor for someone who delights in the Word of God and has made a sacred habit of continually meditating upon it and is shaped or formed by it. That tree produces the expected fruits at the expected time and its leaves never lose their tenderness.

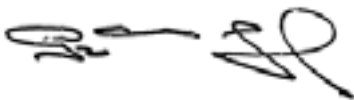
David is describing the life-giving and transforming influence the Word of God has upon our lives as we embrace the spiritual practice of meditation.

Commenting on David's love for the Word, Ellen White writes, "His opportunities of contemplation and meditation served to enrich him with that wisdom and piety that made him beloved of God and angels" (ML 159.4). This is what *Steps to Discipleship* is all about.

We are committed to seeking a deeper relationship with God. We have chosen to embrace the *Steps to Discipleship* strategy. During the next seven weeks we will spend daily quiet time with God and His Word with the purpose of transformation.

It is our prayer that the next seven weeks will be the beginning of a new spiritual journey, one that has no end on this side of eternity.

Yours in authentic discipleship,



Gilbert R. Cangy
World Youth Director



Every one of us has a hunger within — a hunger for something more than this world has to offer — a hunger to realize our true purpose.

introduction



fylvia fowler kline and
john j. andrews

Fylvia Fowler Kline and John J. Andrews are the principal writers of Eloqui, a team of natural wordsmiths. Of the millions of words they've written through the years, the lessons within the pages of *Steps to Discipleship* are some of the most personally meaningful and passionate. They believe Christ fully immersed himself in the human experience, sacrificing all the privilege and security of heaven so that we may see God more clearly. And as such, we ought to immerse ourselves in Him. Through this project they strived to bring clarity and cohesion to the principles of Christianity through honest examination and prayer. You can learn more about their writing at www.eloquigroup.com

Helpful Hints

Here are a few hints to help us make *Steps To Discipleship*:

Sabbath

If *Steps To Discipleship* has been adopted by your youth group, each week one of the seven weeks can begin with the Sabbath morning or Adventist Youth meeting message. They will introduce the theme for the week and lead us into a deeper relationship with God as disciples. The messages are provided as part of the package in your participant's manual. The daily study for that week will reaffirm and expand the sermon topic as well as help us integrate it into our lives. The first section of each week's study is an introduction to that week and a summary of one of the Spiritual Practices which we will use as part of our daily quiet time. We will want to spend a few minutes on Sabbath afternoon reviewing this introductory section and preparing our minds for the week's study.

Time and place

We will gain the greatest benefit from *Step To Discipleship* as we choose a regular time and regular place for our daily devotional time. We need to set aside 30 to 45 minutes each day to spend in prayer, Bible study, and quiet reflection. It is best if we choose a time when we are fresh and relaxed and if we have the same time each day. Time in the early morning is often the best for our time alone with God. Things are often quieter and it helps us start the day with God. We need to choose a place that is calm and quiet where we can be at ease. It is also helpful if we have the same place for each day's study.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Prayer

Prayer is one of our primary tools for discipleship. It is important that we begin and end our time with God each day with prayer. It is a way in which we open our hearts and lives to God and connect with Him. The materials will include a model prayer or suggested prayer topic for beginning and ending each day. We will want to ask God to fulfill His promise that we will find Him when we seek for Him.

Bible Version

We can choose to do our study in whatever version of the Bible is most meaningful and easy to understand for us. However, it will help us if we choose and remain consistent in our chosen Bible version for our daily study throughout our *Steps to Discipleship* study.

Scriptural Focus

Each week there will be one scriptural passage that will represent the essence of the theme and one we should memorize. The material will provide each verse in the the New International Version. Choosing a Bible version which is easiest for us to understand and staying with the same version for all our memorization will help us. We will need to write out the verse and reference on a card or small piece of paper and carry it with us throughout the day. We need to repeat the verse several times throughout the day and reflect on it and its meaning for our lives. Review the memory verse each day. When you begin a new week, keep reviewing the previous week's Scriptural focus.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Spiritual Practice

Throughout the next seven weeks we will explore different spiritual practices. Along with biblical truth, they are tools for discipleship that help us open our lives to the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives. As we practice the different Spiritual Practices, we will discover that we will enjoy some more than others. Some of these spiritual skills will come more easily than others. We may even feel a little awkward using a skill, but with practice these spiritual practices can become powerful friends helping us walk with God. We need to use them as often as possible and reflect on how they are helping us on our journey to know and walk with God.

Study Guide organization

The Study Guide is organized into sections for each day of the week. Sabbath afternoon focuses on an introduction to the week and the Spiritual Practice which we will explore that week. Simply go to the study section for the appropriate day of the week and use that section to study, reflect, and respond to what the Holy Spirit is saying to you in your study and reflection.

Application/Community

Each week's study ends with an Application/Community section. This is a time to reflect on the previous week and look forward to the next week. It will be helpful for you to take a few minutes each week on Friday night and reflect on the points brought out in this section.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Personal Reflection

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what you want to accomplish in your spiritual journey during the next seven weeks. List below at least three personal spiritual goals and ask God to help you reach them:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

...ying the Tongue You
your unbelief; for verily
you, ⁵⁷ "If ye have faith
of mustard seed, ye shall
this mountain, Remove
your place; and it shall
thing shall be in



Do you ever wish that you could
actually see God?

**try him
and see**



matthew gamble

Matthew Gamble was born and raised Catholic, but became an atheist at the age of 14. God led him to a Christian pastor who listened to his story and handed him a Bible. As he began exploring the teachings of Jesus, his life began to be transformed from the inside out. Since that time, he has received a BA in Theology as well as a Masters of Divinity from Andrews University. In 2008, he completed a Doctorate in Ministry with an emphasis in Transformational Leadership. He is presently serving full time with VagaBondservant Int'l, a non-profit ministry that has taken him all over the world speaking about the life and teachings of Jesus. He is living in St. Augustine, FL where he is ecstatically married to the former Susan Mentges, his college sweetheart. On October 2, 2011 they celebrated the birth of their first offspring, Julia Marie.

Try Him and See

Do you ever wish that you could actually see God? I remember when I first started following Him, I used to kneel and pray in my dark basement apartment, begging for God to reveal Himself to me. I would squint and sometimes even push my palms on my eyes just to see the sparkles. I would plead and strain in hopes that I would see Him.

Now, almost two decades later, I've still yet to see Jesus in person. But I do believe that I've seen Him in action. I can look back on my life and see the changes that have been made that I simply cannot take credit for.

Have you ever seen Jesus? Unless you're two-thousand years old, chances are that you haven't. But do you believe in Him? I hope that your answer is yes. But why do you believe?

Or what about those of you who don't know what to think about Jesus? What about those of us who struggle with faith? How are you feeling right now? Wouldn't you agree that if indeed God is alive and well, that He'd reveal Himself to you in a way that you'd know He is real and that He does exist?

The Bible promises that "you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29). Have you personally searched for God with all your heart? Seriously take a moment to think about it and ask yourself, "Have I ever really searched for God?" If you answered no to this question, I would challenge you to consider that if indeed God is real, wouldn't it be worth searching Him out with your entire heart?

After Jesus died and rose from the grave, just before ascending to heaven, He told His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). A disciple is a

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

follower, someone who follows God with all their heart. The good news is that God is always the initiator, inviting us to come and follow Him. He never forces our response, but He does pursue us, revealing Himself to us in hopes that one day we will surrender all and receive His free gift of salvation.

There's a story in Scripture that addresses some of these questions. It's a story of someone who actually searched for Jesus and saw Him. It's the story of blind Bartimaeus found in Mark 10:46–52.

Granted, Bartimaeus was physically blind, and if you're reading this right now, chances are you're not. But have you ever felt spiritually blind?

I believe that there are several insights that we can glean from this passage of Scripture that will be of encouragement to each of us as we're on the road of life with Jesus. There are four major points that we'll explore today from this passage that help us to identify what a true disciple of Jesus will embody.

Let us pray: God, as we open your Word, we ask that You speak to us in and through it. Teach us what it means to be a disciple, a true follower of Christ. May Jesus Himself be lifted up in this place, that in so doing, He'll draw all hearers unto Himself. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

If you have your Bibles, I want to invite you to open with me to the Gospel of Mark, chapter ten.

Mark 10:46: "And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside."

Let's try to wrap our minds around the scene that's unfolding here. Jesus, His disciples, and a large crowd are on the move. They just passed through the city of Jericho. It's hot and dusty. As they pass through the city gates, they pass by a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus. In

SERMON ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Hebrew, “bar” means son, so this blind beggar was literally known as “Son of Timaeus.” He hardly had his own identity.

For most of us, it's hard to imagine being blind, but even harder to imagine begging for food. This poor man was literally at the bottom of the barrel of life. It just doesn't get much worse than this. The good news is that Bartimaeus did have some good things working in his favor. Not the least of these is the simple reality that he could hear.

Let me ask you a question: if you're blind, what do you use to “see”? If you answered, “your ears,” you're correct. As a matter-a-fact, by merely closing our eyes for a moment we realize that our ears become very keen, picking up on noises we may not have noticed when our eyes were open.

Imagine Bartimaeus sitting by the road day in and day out. The word on the street was that the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, was on the move, healing people as He went from town to town. With his super keen ears, Bartimaeus would hear the testimonies of eye witnesses as they passed through the city gates of Jericho. He'd hear stories like:

Could you believe it? That guy with the withered hand walked up to Jesus and asked Him to heal his hand. When Jesus said, “Stretch out your hand!” the guy said, “Jesus, my hands have been withered all my life.” But Jesus simply said, “stretch out your hand.” When the man with the withered hand finally did as Jesus invited him to do, His hand was healed!

Bartimaeus had to be thinking, “If only I could meet Jesus, maybe He could heal me and I could see!” And then the day came when the Great Initiator came walking right by.

Mark 10:47, 48: “And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

In verse 47 Bartimaeus hears a commotion like he hasn't heard before. There's a large crowd of people passing through his town. So he starts asking, "Please, can someone tell me, what's all the commotion about?" A passerby hears the beggar and informs him that Jesus of Nazareth is passing through. At that very moment, Bartimaeus, convicted in his spirit that this may be his shot, cries out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" But unfortunately his voice was not heard by the King of kings. On top of it all, people told him to shut his mouth. Could it be that these people were too proud of Jericho that they didn't want the blind, smelly homeless man to make their town look bad?

Regardless of their motivation, Bartimaeus had a choice. He could either listen to what the people were telling him to do, or he could follow what God was impressing him to do. Opting for the latter, the Bible says that he cried out even louder the second time, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

In this lifetime, when it comes to following the will of God, all too often other people will try to put you down or discourage you from following Him. You will then have to make up your mind as to who you're going to follow. At times, this will mean making the choice between our friends and Jesus. In this case, Bartimaeus makes the right choices and disregards those telling him to be quiet and he cries out even louder!

So the first characteristic of a disciple of Jesus is that they will CRY out to God when they are in need. If you really want to see God, you must be willing to cry out to Him.

Look what happens after Bartimaeus cries out the second time:

Mark 10:49, 50: "And Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.' And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus."

It's after the second time Bartimaeus cries out that Jesus stops and calls him. Sometimes in our journey through faith, we'll find ourselves going to God several times over a particular

S E R M O N O N E : T R Y H I M A N D S E E

issue. Even Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, prayed the same prayer to His Father three times. God is always faithful to us, and sometimes persistence on our part pays off.

Notice as well in verse 49 that Jesus stops and has others call the blind man to Himself. As I imagine this story unfolding, I see Jesus stopping and looking over in the direction of the blind beggar and seeing a group of “cool guys” standing in the way of the beggar. These were the same guys that had just been telling Bartimaeus to be quiet because they didn't want Jesus to see the “ugly” things of Jericho. Now Jesus turns to these guys, looks them in the eye, and has them call Bartimaeus. I Corinthians 1:27 says, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” At some point, the people who try to put you down for following God will be put in their place.

So now these guys, with all eyes on them, turn to the poor beggar and say, “Be of good cheer! He's calling you!” And at once, the Bible says, the homeless man throws off his cloak, jumps up, and comes to Jesus.

Sometimes when we read our Bibles we just fly over statements and don't really stop to think what we just read. Out of all the things Bartimaeus could've done, why in the world did he decide to take off his clothes? Furthermore, why did that detail have to be in the text? Surely we could have gotten the point had that detail been left out.

So why is this seemingly insignificant detail here? Let's think this through. How much do you think this beggar owned? It could be that the literal shirt on his back was the only worldly possession he had. So why did he throw it off before springing up and running to Jesus?

It is evidence of the Spirit of God working in the life of Bartimaeus when he cried out to Jesus, in spite of the ridicule, and it is also evidence of the Spirit of God working in his life when left his worldly possessions behind to come to Jesus. Granted, the blind man didn't have a lot to leave, but this insight has a wealth of implications.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Every disciple of Jesus Christ has to deny themselves. When Jesus called His original twelve disciples, He simply said, "Follow Me." In the case of some of the disciples, it is said that they dropped their nets and followed Jesus. Some of these guys were fishermen who worked for their father. That said, when Jesus called, they not only dropped their livelihood, but they left the comforts of their home life.

Bartimaeus was impressed to leave everything behind to come to Jesus. The Holy Spirit will convict you to do the same. Again, every follower of Jesus must, through the power of the Holy Spirit, deny themselves.

After he takes off his garment, the Bible says that he JUMPS UP! Have you ever been impressed to do something and then, instead of immediately moving into action, you start thinking of all the reasons why not to do whatever it was that you were impressed to do? For instance, sometimes God actually impresses us to read our Bibles. But then, if we're not quick to follow, our brains are filled with thoughts like, "I'll do it later on tonight." What if Bartimaeus had that attitude? It very well could be that he would've missed out on the blessing that God had in store for him.

Even this point follows along with the simple reality that every disciple must deny self. As God convicts, may we be the people who deny self, jump up, and follow wherever He leads.

What are the two action steps of every disciple of Jesus Christ?

- First you CRY!
- Second you DENY!

Let's continue on through this story and see what happens next:

Mark 10:51: And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."

SERMON ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Imagine that you're one of the multitude standing in the crowd that day. You've been following Jesus around for a few days and have seen Him working His miracles. You've witnessed complete strangers running up to Jesus just to touch His robe and immediately they are healed. You've heard stories of Jesus walking on water, calming the storms, turning a minimal amount of food into a storehouse to feed thousands. The experiences are too numerous to count. Jesus clearly is the Messiah, the Savior of the World!

All that said, why in the world would Jesus have the audacity to ask the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" Isn't it obvious? Had I been there that day and had just taken a drink of water, I may have spit it out, astonished that Jesus would even ask such a question.

The reality is that Jesus is asking you and me, "What would you have me do for you?" every moment of every day, of every week, of every month of every year. But why on earth would He ask this blind guy what he wanted?

Before we answer that question, let's consider another question. How does your prayer life look right now? Do you feel that you have solid communication with God? Or is your prayer life a list of requests? For instance, do you pray, "God, thank you for this day. Please forgive me of my sins and save me when you come again. In Jesus' name, Amen"? Is asking God to forgive you of your sins a good thing to do? Absolutely. But is it better to ask for forgiveness over specific sins in your life? The answer is yes.

The Bible says that we can actually ask God for things with the wrong motive. James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." It is interesting to note that in this same chapter in Mark 10:36, Jesus asks James and John the same question He asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" How did James and John respond? "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus didn't grant an answer to their prayer because their motivation was wrong; their hearts were in the wrong place.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

When Jesus asks this question of Bartimaeus, the response was simple, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” What Bartimaeus accomplished here was clarifying for Jesus exactly what he was looking for. Did the Creator of the Universe already know the desires of his heart? Absolutely! But that didn't change the fact that He wanted to hear from Bartimaeus clearly what he was desiring.

So next time you're praying to God, instead of simply saying, “Forgive me of my sins,” take the time to actually scan your heart and consider specific sins that you've committed. Then when you go to God, clarify to Him exactly what you're asking forgiveness for. Being clear with God is yet another attribute that a disciple of Jesus Christ will embody.

Before we look at our fourth and final insight gleaned from the story of Jesus and Bartimaeus, let's recap the three points we've identified so far as to what a true disciple of Jesus will do:

- First you CRY!
- Second you DENY!
- Third you CLARIFY!

Finally, the fourth and final point is found in the last verse of Mark 10.

Mark 10:52: “And Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.”

Several interesting insights emerge from this verse that highlight yet another miracle by our Lord and Savior Jesus.

So here Bartimaeus has just clarified, “Rabbi, I want to see!” And immediately after Jesus says, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” The Bible says that Bartimaeus is no longer blind because his sight has been fully restored. Question for you: Did Jesus say to the blind beggar, “So here's the deal. I understand that you want to see. I can heal you so long as you sign on the dotted line, promising me that you will go to church every Sabbath,

SERMON ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

donate 10 percent of your money to the church, and serve me all the days of your life"? Was there any contract involved? Was there any negotiation in the matter? NO! Jesus said that the blind man's faith healed him.

In Mark chapter 9 we have a story that gives great courage and hope to those of us who struggle with faith.

Mark 9:14: And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. 15 And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. 16 And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" 17 And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." 19 And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." 23 And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" 25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. 28 And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

"I believe; help my unbelief!" Can you relate to that? Jesus taught that "if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). Every disciple of Jesus Christ will have faith. For some people, faith comes more naturally than for others. For some of us, faith is a struggle at times. God knows your journey and knows that this life is not an easy one. Can you not at least pray, "Jesus, I believe but help my unbelief"? It is powerful that God hears and answers that prayer. Furthermore, it is powerful that with a faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, Jesus promises us that we can move mountains. And the reality is that the mountain represents you and your heart. You see, God will never force you to move, but with faith God replaces your heart of rock with a heart of flesh.

So back to our story of the now seeing Bartimaeus! His mustard seed sized faith healed him. His first sight is that of Jesus. I'm certain that both he and the crowd all rejoiced over the miracle that was just performed in front of their eyes. A blind man now sees! But that's not the end of the story.

This chapter concludes with the statement that Bartimaeus "followed (Jesus) on the way" (52). He was free to do whatever he wanted to, but he chose to follow Jesus. In its most basic form, a disciple is a follower. A disciple of Jesus will follow Jesus. Bartimaeus did just that, he followed Jesus. And every follower of Jesus has a story to tell. Bartimaeus could literally say, "Once I was blind and now I see!" (John 9:25). Spiritually speaking, this ought to be the testimony and experience of every disciple of Jesus. "I used to be in utter darkness, and now I'm walking in the light!"

The point here is that every disciple of Jesus Christ has a testimony. And this isn't just a story that has a beginning and an end; it's an ongoing, ever growing story of how God has worked and is still working in your life. Bartimaeus could've gone back to begging (after all there's plenty of beggars who can see), but instead he made the right choice to follow Jesus and testify of His goodness.

Revelation 12:11 says, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony ..." Who is the "him"? Satan. Your testimony can have the influence in the lives of hearers to help them become an overcomer of Satan and a disciple of Jesus!

SERMON ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Your greatest witness and testimony is that you follow Jesus and not yourself. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ — to follow Him wherever He leads.

So the fourth and final point is simply to TESTIFY!

Let's recap the four points of what a disciple of Jesus Christ will embody:

- First you will CRY!
- Second you will DENY!
- Third you will CLARIFY!
- Finally you will TESTIFY!

Let's close with a word of prayer:

Jesus, thank you for this day and this time in your Word. Continue to guide and direct in our lives. Teach us what it means to be your disciples. May we be committed to seeking you in every detail of our lives, spending time with you daily, and claiming the reality of your presence with us. Guide and direct us, Jesus. May it be less of sinful self and more of you! In your name we pray, Amen.

Sabbath

Begin each day with prayer. For the first few weeks, at the beginning and the end of each day's study will be suggested prayers. Do not feel bound to these prayers. We encourage you to pray your own prayers — from your heart, with the openness and honesty of an intimate relationship. But if you feel a loss for words and would like some guidance with your prayers, use these to help you to learn to pray on your own.

Lord, I am about to begin a momentous journey...one that could change my life. Help me focus on more than just getting through the material. Instill in me a closer intimacy with You. At this moment, I seek You with all of my heart. Inspire in me a thirst that only You can satisfy. Feed me Your Word. Give me Your Living Water. I want my life to be so dramatically changed that people see You living in me. I am crying out at Your feet. Thank you for sending Your Holy Spirit to prepare me as I embark on this path. Amen.

Introduction

God longs to forge a relationship with us. When sin broke the bond between God and humanity, He went to extremes to bridge that gap (John 3:16). Shouldn't we at least meet Him halfway? Not by proving our worth and trying to earn a place at His table, but by taking an active role in our Christianity and forging a real and transformative relationship with God.

Jeremiah 29:11–13 promises that if we seek Him, we will find Him. So today, let us begin our search for God. Let's dive in and begin to understand God's perception of us and the depth of His love.

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Spiritual Practices

As much as these next seven weeks are a spiritual journey, it is important to take the principles we learn and apply them in our lives. Part of that application is developing habits that enable us to grow.

Each week, we'll learn a new spiritual practice. This week's spiritual practice is **relational Bible reading**. It's a spiritual discipline of systematic and purposeful Bible reading in an effort to know God. There is an important distinction between informational reading and formational reading. Informational reading is about learning details and abstract information. Formational reading recognizes Scripture as God's inspired word. It seeks to connect with Him through these words and put them in a personal context.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when practicing relational Bible reading:

- What does this passage tell me about God?

- What does this passage tell me about my relationship with God?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- In what tangible ways can I apply this to my life?

Dear Heavenly Father, as I lift my voice to You and consider Your great and mighty power, I search for You with my inner being. I yearn for intimacy with You. I am dedicated to knowing You in a more personal way. Thank you for providing Your Word to guide me as I journey through this class. Thank you for helping me understand what I read. Show me how to strengthen my relationship with You. Fill the void in my life. During these next seven weeks, I pray that you pull me close. May I walk closely with You and share Your light with others. Amen.

Sunday

Jesus, today is a new day. I eagerly clear my mind and put you at the top of my agenda. I am listening to Your voice. I am seeking You with all my heart. You promised to be here for me. Open the truths in Your Word. Help me as I seek You. Amen.



Today's Objective

We all hunger for a closer relationship with God. That's why we've chosen to take this journey and commit thirty to forty-five minutes every day to seeking Him. Our goal today is to examine the reasons behind our decision and recognize our hunger for God.

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Scriptural Focus

Our weekly focus verses will help guide our study. Review it before and after you begin, and select a version of the Bible that is most meaningful to you.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11–13, NKJV).

Self-Examination

- Why did you choose to take this course?

- What do you hope will change throughout the next seven weeks?

Read and Reflect

Read Psalm 63:1

David is one of the most eloquent and personal Bible authors, especially when writing of his relationship with God. Let's turn to the Psalms and see how he describes his hunger and search for God.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What do you think David means by “a dry and thirsty land where there is no water”?

- How is your desire to know God different from David’s? How is it similar?

- In what ways do you wish to know God better?

Read Psalm 34

In this chapter, David praises God for His righteousness and deliverance and testifies to the benefits of a close relationship with God. Like us, David hungered for something more in life and God satisfied him.

- In what ways can you “taste and see that the Lord is good”? (verse 8)

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Dear Lord, what a blessing is Your Word! My heart dances when I read of David and Jeremiah. I, too, thirst for You. I hunger for Your righteousness. At this moment, I seek You with all of my heart. I want a deeper, more meaningful relationship with You. Please help me to savor Your message. Thank you for the precious time we were able to spend together. Let's continue this intimacy throughout the day. Amen.

Monday

I felt Your presence throughout the day yesterday and I am excited to see what You have in store for me today! I am casting aside any distractions. Use me, inspire me, bind Your Word in my heart. Help me find personal relevancy in the verses I read. I want to solely focus upon Your desire to be with me. I love You. Amen.



Today's Objective

The idea of "seeking" God is abstract. It's kind of like when people talk about "finding themselves." What does it really mean? Where do you look for God? How do you know when you've found Him? Today, we'll explore what the Bible has to say about seeking God.



Self-Examination

- What comes to mind when you think of God?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What do you feel is your purpose in life?



Read and Reflect

Let's begin with our first focus verse for the week.

Read Jeremiah 29:11–13.

Verse 11 tells us that God has a plan for our future.

- What do you think God's plan for you entails?

- How can we allow God to reveal His plans for us?

Verse 12 promises that God will listen to us. But first, we must call upon Him.

- How can you claim this promise on a daily basis?

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Verse 13 says God is there, waiting to be found. All we must do is seek Him with all our heart.

- Why do you think God qualifies seeking?

- What does it mean to seek God “with all our heart”?

Read Proverbs 3:5–8

It is impossible to claim God’s promises without trusting Him implicitly. Our search for God must be sincere if we are to find Him.

- What does it mean to trust God with all your heart?

- Is there a line between trusting God and common sense/logic? For example, if you had a serious illness, would it be wise to not seek medical treatment and trust only in God’s healing power?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Dear God, Do You truly have special plans for me? Sometimes I try to do things on my own. I am beginning to understand the implications of truly seeking You with all of my heart. You have an abundance of love and showers of blessings to give me. You yearn for intimacy with me. I want to seek You moment by moment. Don't give up on me. Remind me of Your outstretched arms. Call my name. Thank you for lighting my path. Amen.

Tuesday

Father, it is exciting to think about You receiving me into Your arms and planning my future! I carried Your promise with me all day. As I study, please bless our time together. Lead me where You want me to go. Open my mind so that I may heed Your message. I want to make meaningful connections. I praise Your holy name. Amen.



Today's Objective

Perhaps the best example of discipleship is the twelve themselves. They were men for whom discipleship wasn't just an aspect of their lives — it was their lives. Their existence, from the time they met Jesus, was dedicated to seeking God. Today we'll look at how we can make our commitment to God the most important thing in our lives.



Self-Examination

- What is the most important part of your life?

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

- What would you like to be the most important part of your life?

- What does discipleship mean to you?



Read and Reflect

Read Luke 5:1–11

This is another account of Jesus' first meeting with His disciples. Take note of verse 11. It tells us, "they forsook all and followed Him." They left their whole lives behind to follow Christ with the firm belief that God would provide for them in abundance.

- If faced with a similar situation, would you forsake all and follow Him? What about Jesus do you think compelled them to make that decision?

- What would keep you from dedicating your life to seeking God?



STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Do you think there is a middle-ground between cursory commitment and full commitment? Why or why not?

Application Questions

- How can you make a conscious effort to make time for God as opposed to trying to fit Him into your schedule?

- How can good things like church or community service distract us from nurturing and developing a relationship with God?

Lord, my heart is heavy with thoughts of discipleship. I want to pick up my cross and follow You. I want my focus in life to be You, but so many other things get in the way. Help me disregard selfish tendencies. Help me to make discipleship a priority and not just something that I try to fit into my life. Thank you for hearing my plea. Amen.

Wednesday

My Father, I am excited to delve into today's lesson. Although Satan tries to separate us, You have promised to answer me. I am seeking You right now. I know You have much in store for me. My heart is open to receive Your blessing. Amen.



Today's Objective

Humanity has a basic desire to be self-sufficient. Satan plays on these emotions to drive a wedge between God and us. Today we will explore the fallacy of self-sufficiency.



Self-Examination

- When have you felt alone or helpless in your life?

- What do you tend to do in those situations?

- Are you more aware of God's presence in times of trouble or times of peace? Why?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

Read Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23

Chapter 3 reminds us of the reality of a world with sin, of which we are all a part. In chapter 6, Paul lays out the consequences of that sin.

- How does the knowledge that we are all sinners make you feel?

- How does guilt affect you?

Read Ephesians 2:4–8

Building on the understanding that the wage of sin is death, Paul reminds us that we are all dead in trespasses, yet can be alive in Christ through His grace.

- Why do you think some people may feel compelled to try and earn their righteousness?

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Read Psalm 34:10

Here, David briefly touches on those too proud to trust in God and who rely instead on their own merits.

- What keeps you from trusting in God and, instead, relying on yourself?

- If we truly believe God keeps His promises, why do we find it difficult to trust Him?

Focus Verse Review

Re-read this week's memory verse (Jeremiah 29:11–13). How has your understanding or perception of this passage changed?

You have called me by name. You have plans for me. You seek me as a friend. You love me so much that You have freely offered Your saving grace. Wash over me with Your love and shower me with Your blessings. I accept Your free gift of salvation. Thank you for calling me Your child. Amen.

Thursday

Dear Heavenly Father, Your Word is filled with promises for me. The more time I spend with You, the more I learn. I am so in awe of You! I wonder what today will be like. I imagine You directing my path, guiding my day moment by moment. I picture Your hand stretched out reaching for me. Help me to seek You in all I do. May Your words fill my soul. Be with me right now. Amen.



Today's Objective

We've spent much of this week trying to understand what it means to seek God, why we seek Him, and how to do so. Today, we'll look to the Bible for examples of what happens when we find Him.



Self-Examination

- What are your expectations of a close relationship with God?

- What do you hope to gain from a more meaningful relationship with God?

- What is more personally rewarding to you, seeking God or finding God?

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE



Read and Reflect

Read Exodus 33:18–23

Here, we read a conversation between Moses and God. Moses asks to see God's glory and He explains the consequences of being in the presence of that glory.

- Moses had been God's prophet and spoken with Him many times. Why do you think he made this request?

- Why did he want to see more?

- What does this say about our hunger to know God more?

Verses 20, 22, and 23 mention physical characteristics of God — His face, hand, and back (NKJV). Does this suggest that God is not merely an abstract idea, but a tangible being?



STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How do you envision God?

- How does this description of God make you feel about being created in His image?

Read Exodus 34:5-8

God descends in a cloud, stands with Moses, and proclaims His goodness. Moses' immediate reaction is to fall to the ground and worship Him.

- What was your first reaction to hearing about God?

- Has that reaction changed over time?

- If God were to reveal Himself to you today, how would you react?

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE

Read Exodus 34:28–35

After seeing God, Moses spent the next forty days and nights on the mountain with Him (Exodus 34:28). When he returned to the people, God's presence was literally reflected on his face. It shone so brightly that he had to cover himself with a veil when he spoke to the children of Israel.

- Do you feel like God's presence in your life is evident to all around you? Why or why not?

- What are some ways your relationship with God permeates your relationships with others?

Dear Lord, You fill me with wonder! You created the universe, the galaxies, all of the complexities of nature. Yet You want to spend time with me! I think about the relationship that You shared with Moses and my heart yearns for the same. I pray the same prayer: Show me Your Spirit. Make my life radiant with Your light so I reflect You to everyone. Amen.

Friday

Father God, this week has been such an amazing experience. You have abundantly blessed me. Each day You have given me glimpses of your love. I am so excited that You want to commune with me. Help me to ponder the things that I learn today and to personalize the message. I want to live for You. Don't let the things of this world allure me. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.



Today's Objective

Committing to make our search for God the most dominant part of our lives can be a daunting task. Thankfully, God has continually promised to do His part in helping us achieve the intimacy we so desire. Today we'll learn about God's role in our search.



Self-Examination

- What are some of the challenges you are expecting from the rest of this study?

- How would you like God to help you get to know Him better?

SESSION ONE: TRY HIM AND SEE



Read and Reflect

God desires to establish a personal relationship with each one of us. Yet, He knows we are a flawed people, easily discouraged and prone to mistakes. Thankfully, He has promised to be with us, to help us on our journey and do His part.

Read Revelation 3:20

Here, Jesus reminds us that our search for God is not one-sided. He wants to be found.

- In what ways has God “knocked” in your life?

- How does the understanding that God wants to be an important part of your life make you feel?

- How do you think God reacts when we ignore His call?

Read Isaiah 41:10

The path of discipleship is not an easy one. A sinful world is one filled with pain and trials. In Isaiah 41:10, God promises to help us through whatever we may



STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

face. This isn't an empty promise or a casual, "Everything is gonna be OK." It is God promising to personally help you, regardless of circumstance.

- Why do you think we often feel we are alone when things get tough?

- Even Jesus had moments of doubt (Mark 14:34–26). He faced these doubts by recognizing where they came from and by seeking strength from His Heavenly Father. What are the thoughts, people, and situations in your life that often aggravate you in difficult situations?



Application/Community Questions

As important as it is to develop an intimate relationship with God, it is not the only aspect of discipleship. Christ commanded us all to go out and make disciples of all nations. Even the apostles dedicated their lives to sharing the truths through more than teaching. They embodied the teachings of Jesus. Throughout the next seven weeks, you'll have opportunities to put into practice the things you've discovered.

Dear Jesus, I picture You knocking on the door to my heart. You are gently calling my name. You want to spend time with me. I am answering Your call right now. Come in. I cast all of my fears, worries, and heavy burdens upon You. Take my hand and lead me today. Amen.



God's solution is necessary,
it's miraculous, it's complete,
and it is a gift!

**you can
have it now!**



johnny murison

Johnny Murison was born in Blairgowrie, Scotland, to a Scottish father and Aboriginal mother but spent most of his youth in Townsville, Queensland. After finishing school, he followed in his father's footsteps, working as a carpenter until he accepted his Heavenly Father's call to ministry. "I became a minister the day I gave my heart to Jesus. God not only called me to minister to Indigenous people, but to everyone." In 1997 he attended Mamarapha, the ATSIM Bible College in Western Australia. During his studies he felt God preparing him for something special. In 2000 he started a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at Avondale College, wanting to do further study and sharpen his ministry skills. He joined the Greater Sydney Conference in January 2005 and was appointed to serve as an intern at Mt Druitt church. Pastor Murison currently serves as pastor of The Way Redfern Seventh-day Adventist Community Church.

You Can Have It Now!

This message will call for us to make a decision — a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. If you have never enjoyed the assurance of salvation in Christ, listen very closely and let God touch your heart. And if He convicts you that this is for you, at the close of the message, step up to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and to rejoice in the assurance of salvation.

Intro:

A friend of mine is an equine nurse. One day she was checking on some horses when she saw one horse acting particularly strange and out of character. This particular horse was displaying signs of colic: pawing the ground and turning his head to watch his stomach. Upon further inspection, she found that the horse had pale gums, its mucous membranes were dry, and its tail was constantly swishing. He also exhibited neurological symptoms. When the equine nurse saw blood on its fetlock, she realized he had been bitten by a snake, most likely a red belly black snake.

The nurse administered electrolytes and pain relievers along with lots of water and vitamin C. She did all she could do — and the horse made it!

She sent me a text message, which read, “I just saved my first horse’s life. A horse got bitten by a snake and I saved its life — woot woot!”

I replied, “Well done!! Proud of you horsey nurse. Now Jesus wants to save your life.”

She sent a short text message back with, “Lol” (laughing out loud).

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

I immediately replied, laughing and serious at the same time: “Oh it’s not a laughing matter! It is also life and death. But I am glad you saved that horse from certain death. Jesus wants to save you from certain death too. Will you let Him? I can get Bible studies organized!”

Without Jesus Christ we are heading towards certain death. But God promised that He would send a Saviour who would deliver the entire world from the bondage of sin. The Old Testament repeated this theme that some day the Messiah would come into the world and set us free. Jesus paved the way! God has done it all and our responsibility is to accept that fact.

We are in a well of sin, and we are in need of outside help — help from above. We are born on the wrong side of the tracks, and we all fall short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous, not even one! We need a power outside of the sphere of humanity to be redeemed. This happens through Jesus.

The Bible provides a solution in Romans 3:21–24. Here the apostle Paul presents a very real truth as to where we find ourselves as human beings, facing the reality of our lives:

“But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely, by His grace through redemption that came by Jesus Christ.”

So you see, there is no difference. All of us need salvation. Every one of us has sinned, but there is righteousness from God. This righteousness comes from Jesus Christ through faith. It’s all wrapped up in Jesus. Faith is a key word.

Being justified through faith results in an all encompassing peace (Rom 5:1). On what basis can God allow wicked people to become righteous? Through the death and burial of Jesus Christ — through His doing and His death!

SERMON TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

Romans 5:18, 19 tells us that through one man we are made right with God. You have the choice — you can be in Adam or in Christ. But all in Adam will die and all in Christ will live.

On the basis of Jesus Christ's life we can be counted righteous!

Here are some things to think about:

- The "NEED" for salvation is very real.
- The "NEED" for salvation is for here and now for how we deal with life.
- The "NEED" for salvation is for the pagan.
- The "NEED" for salvation is for the good person.
- The "NEED" for salvation is for the religious person as well.

A religious person can have religion, doctrines, and ceremonies, but you might not have love and obedience. That, my friends, is a very dangerous position to be in.

Do you see yourself that way? As a sinner? The apostle Paul said he was the worst of sinners. I share his sentiments along with those of the Australian poet Henry Lawson who said, "I am the president of the Ancient Order of Sinners."

Henry Lawson may have wanted to review his statement if he had met me. You see, I know the old man; my human sinful nature that I left under the water when I was baptized can rise up any time...especially if I am on the road. I own a 4WD, and sometimes 4WD owners think they have special rights and privileges apart from any other road user. Maybe it's just me. That's why I don't put "I love Jesus" stickers on the back of my truck. When I am on the road (and I am on the road a lot), I wrestle with all of these unchristian feelings and emotions when someone cuts me off, is not courteous, or driving slowly in the fast lane. I have to face the reality that the old sinful man is still here. Once again, I need to die with Jesus Christ. I need the assurance that in spite of my sinful heart, Jesus Christ loves me and wants to forgive me and give me eternal life.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

So you can see I am in great need of a Savior! I need not only to be saved from my sin, but saved from the craziness of myself. Lord help me to love that person the way you love them; help me to see that person in the light of the cross even though they have upset me.

God has planted eternity in each of our hearts. We were not created to exist just for a day; God has made us for eventual immortality. Because this life is not all there is. At most we may live 100 years, but we will spend forever in eternity. We will spend more time on the other side of the resurrection than we will here. We long for forever. That's because God designed us that way; He created us in His image. God wired us up for eternity. Our relationship to God here on earth will determine where we will spend the rest of our eternity.

C.S. Lewis said, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "All right, then have it your way."

Just as the nine months we spent in our mother's womb were not an end to themselves but preparation for life, so this life is preparation for eternity. This world is not our home — we are just passing through!

But this life has been interrupted by sin. And that's why we need a Savior! God's solution is necessary, it's miraculous, it's complete, and it is a gift! Without it we could not see the kingdom (John 3:3, 5). We can't lift ourselves out of a mud puddle by our own bootlaces (Isaiah 64:6).

Extreme Makeover

My friend Garth Bainbridge once said this: "A popular reality TV show invites people to submit to the cosmetic surgeon's knife, in full view of a world-wide audience, to have some of their less attractive features changed. The show is called "Extreme Makeover," but according to Jesus it is not extreme enough. It is not enough just to have a nip and tuck here and there, but we are to be changed to the core — to be born again."

SERMON TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

This is what Jesus told Nicodemus one night. Nicodemus was a good man, a Pharisee. The Pharisees thought they were the best in the land — above everyone else in their spirituality. They literally kept the whole law and did not deviate from the thousands of scribal elaborations. Yet Jesus said that wasn't good enough for heaven — you need to be born again.

Nicodemus was a well-respected man of the community, carefully chosen by the people to be on the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. Yet despite the way people saw him, Jesus saw that he needed to be born again.

He was a great scholar and great teacher, he was "Israel's teacher," yet Jesus said, you don't really know anything if you don't realize that you need an extreme makeover! You need to be born again if you want to see the kingdom of God.

"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." Every birth is a miracle, but there is a greater miracle — rebirth through the Holy Spirit.

You don't have much of a say over your first birth, but you choose to be born again. Just as you didn't bring about your first birth, our rebirth is brought by the powerful action of the third Person of the Godhead. It is only by Him that we can become new people. This is precisely what He assures us He can do:

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36: 26, 27, NIV).

This is core change — this is an extreme makeover! The Holy Spirit renews us at the heart of who we are: how we think, feel, and live. People were heading out to the Judean desert to hear John the Baptist preach, not because he was preaching a nice sermon, but because after 400 years of silence, a prophetic voice was sounding again in Israel. His appeal was clear and simple: "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near." They were moved to action. Confessing their sins, they were baptized in the Jordan River.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Some people have been baptized for family honor without a real heart conversion; some have been baptized because their friends were doing it. But the only baptism that counts is the result of a personal, life changing experience.

The power of the Holy Spirit is simply miraculous: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3: 8).

This spiritual phenomenon cannot be explained. It can only be experienced.

I can't live off your spiritual experience and you can't live off mine. It has to be personal. All I can tell you is that it is good!

What would you say is the best known verse in the Bible? Most likely you would answer John 3:16.

What's the next best verse? John 3:17. This verse tells us that Jesus didn't come condemning, He came saving.

God's law required our condemnation, but His grace saved us without overlooking or reducing the law's demand for justice. So through Jesus, justice was satisfied and mercy could be freely offered!

Everything about Jesus — His coming, His dying, His doing — declared that God's heart desired our salvation above our condemnation. If a sentence had to be carried out against the human race for disobedience, no one in the universe would have raised an objection. But instead of coming as a judge, Jesus came as one of us, living with us and dying for us. He took upon Himself what we deserved so that He could give us what we didn't deserve.

But the sentence of condemnation stands if we turn down what Jesus longs to give us.

S E R M O N T W O : Y O U C A N H A V E I T N O W !

John 3:18 says, "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

In the saga of salvation there are two great facts:

1. The whole of humanity is under the wrath of God and is deserving of condemnation.
2. But His love has provided another option: to believe in Jesus and be saved from condemnation.

There is no other way out of our situation! God's wrath only results if you reject the Son. But if you believe and receive the Son, you have eternal life.

Is that it — just believe in Him and you have eternal life? What difference does it really make if I believe in Jesus Christ and accept His gift? It makes a whole world of difference! Believing and receiving Jesus is what makes the difference between perishing and living forever.

Unfortunately, most people turn this offer down; they are more attracted to their sins than the Savior!

John 3:19 says, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

Some people like to have salvation on their terms; they want the things of earth and heaven too! But it just doesn't work that way. "The wages of sin is death" is not just a pronouncement on the ultimate effect of sin; it means that even now we are "dead in our transgressions and sins." We are unable to lift a finger to release ourselves from the bondage of sin and to change our course from rebellion to righteousness. Sin courses through our veins.

Our only hope is to look to the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

He is the One who absorbed our sin and its devastating impact by dying in our place, but He was able to counteract its toxicity and overcome its power.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

This great exchange, the greatest act of love, should make our consciences sensitive to the terrible nature of sin. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). Mourning over sins is a healthy step in dealing appropriately with them. We will find comfort not by denying our sins, but by facing up to them. When we call them by their right name and expose them to the light of heaven, then they are finally disposed of by God’s gracious forgiveness.

David spoke of the peace that came to him when he owned up to his sins regarding Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. (Read Psalm 32:1–5.) David wronged Bathsheba and Uriah, but ALL sin in its ultimate nature is sin against God. Crushed under the weight and guilt of sin, he says in Psalm 51, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow.”

God doesn’t want us to remember the guilt of sin, but we must remember that we are sinners in need of a Savior. Blessed are we when we mourn over our sins and confess them, for we will walk away with the joy and comfort of forgiveness!

Being safe and secure in the forgiveness and cleansing of Jesus gives us the assurance of eternal life. In believing in God’s solution and accepting His gift of salvation, we pass from death to life. When we take our last breath — whether from some insidious disease or old age — we do not lose the battle, we win! Cancer may destroy our bodies, but it cannot destroy our spirit and it cannot destroy our souls! We will be safe in the arms of Jesus. If we have the promise of eternal life; we have won! There is not the slightest doubt as to our

S E R M O N T W O : Y O U C A N H A V E I T N O W !

destiny! We have an eternal future with Jesus Christ, our Lord and King. We have every right to boast about this because the words of Jesus are true and trustworthy!

The promise is given in the plainest and strongest terms:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

There is no small print or hidden clause; if you hear His word and believe, you have eternal life. You have crossed over from death to life. Even though we may experience death, our life is hidden in Christ. This will happen when Jesus wakes His loved ones up from their resting places. For those who die in Him have their future secure — they have crossed over from death to life!

God’s solution is necessary, it’s miraculous, it’s complete, and it is a gift!

Our part is this: To recognize our need of God and confess our sins. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). To be poor in spirit is to know our need for God. We don’t congratulate ourselves about our own righteousness and look down on everybody else! But rather, we cry “God have mercy on me, a sinner.” This is the first step in possessing the kingdom of heaven.

The song of the poor in spirit is, “Nothing in my hand I bring: simply to the cross I cling.” Acknowledging our spiritual poverty and clinging to the cross is more than a first step; it guarantees us a place in God’s kingdom.

When we believe in God’s solution and accept it, we have life because we have accepted the Son. But don’t be apologetic about saying that Jesus claimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” No other Savior is available. It is only by His coming, His living, His dying, and His rising again that we have salvation. Sometimes Christians are accused of being narrow minded or arrogant because we assert that

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

there is no other way to God. We didn't invent the idea of Jesus being the only way. This is not our claim, it is His. If humans could have reached God any other way, Jesus would not have had to die! His death proves that there is no other way.

Romans 8 begins with the declaration that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the way that God condemned sin in sinful man was "by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering."

Between verses 2–34 of Romans chapter 8 it is characterized by a no defeat assurance! And then it ends with no separation. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. No condemnation! No defeat! No separation!

This is God's reality. All we have to do is trust in God's new reality and claim it, soak in it, and bask in it!

Decisions to Make It "Real"

It is time to hear the voice of prophecy once more, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." We also need to be moved to action, to confess our sins and be baptized.

John the Baptist said, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Don't rely on your SDA heritage for a place in heaven. I want you to know that "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." For some of us "the axe is already at the root of the trees," the hour of God's judgment has come. We need to be shaken out of our lukewarm state and religious formalism to produce the fruit of repentance.

If you're sick of being lukewarm in your Christian walk and you have been sitting on the couch of mediocrity, it's time to get up and get real with God. Confess your sins, repent of them, and mourn over them.

Today, we are not going to turn down what Jesus longs to give us.

SERMON TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

Today, we are going to tell Jesus that we want a new heart and a new spirit to replace the heart of stone with a heart of flesh.

Today, if God has touched your heart and you are convicted that this is for you, then I want you in your own mind to:

1. Confess your sin and accept the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.
2. Accept Jesus as Savior.
3. Accept and believe that eternal life is yours today.

And then rejoice in the assurance of salvation. Walk in the joy and comfort of forgiveness! Today is a new day — let us make the most of it!

Sabbath

Dear Lord, a new week of lessons is about to begin. I have learned so much, but Your beauty knows no end. I plan on spending eternity studying Your words. Continue to shape and form my character to reflect You. I want to commune with You. Come into my heart today. Amen.

Introduction

By now, you've completed your first week of intense study. How's it going? If you aren't able to get through all the material in your allotted thirty to forty-five minutes, don't worry. Seeking God is not a race or a checklist to be completed. It is a constant journey, a lifestyle you have chosen to embrace. The purpose of daily study is simply to spend time with God and allow ourselves to be transformed by His presence in our lives.

Spiritual Practices

Prayer. Prayer is our spiritual practice for this week. Prayer is often a part of our spirituality that becomes minimized—just a footnote to our daily walk. But it is much more than that. Prayer is a powerful tool in our daily lives.

This week, try and focus on making prayer more meaningful in your life. This does not necessarily mean making it a formal event, full of “thee’s” and “thou’s.” Prayer, at its essence, is conversation with our Maker. It is our opportunity to speak with Him openly and honestly, listen to His voice, and share ourselves with Him.

As we'll discuss later in the week, we were created for eternity with God. The Bible speaks of Enoch, who walked with God. It is this kind of constant

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

communion with the Creator that should be the model for our prayer life. Make an effort to integrate prayer into all aspects of your life. Keep a line of communication open with God and share your thoughts with Him throughout the day. No detail is inconsequential to God. He cares about all aspects of our existence, from the minutiae to the life-changing.

Yes Father, I am Your child. You have called me by name. You have plans and a purpose for my life. I am answering Your call; I choose You. As I reflect upon Your Word, fill me with Your message so that I can walk closer with You. Don't let me be distracted with inconsequential things. You are coming again! I want to be ready! I want to share You with others. I pray for Your presence in my life. Amen.

Sunday

Here I am God. I am at Your feet. Humble me. Give me a contrite spirit. Re-shape, cleanse, and renew me. I want my life to represent You. I want to share Your abundant love. You died to save me and I want others to know the Good News. Amen.



Today's Objective

Becoming a disciple of Christ is not a singular experience. It does not begin and end with baptism or a proclamation of loyalty. It is a lifestyle, an ongoing and conscious series of daily choices. Our goal today is to understand the role of salvation in the discipleship experience and how our choice to accept Christ as Savior affects our lives.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Scriptural Focus

Our weekly focus verse will help guide our study. Review it before and after you begin, and be sure to pick a version that is most meaningful to you.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9, NIV).

Self-Examination

- Do you feel an assurance of salvation? Why or why not?

- What is the most important aspect of your faith?

- Do you believe those who live good, Christ-like lives, yet have not accepted Jesus as their Savior will be granted eternal life? Why or why not?

- Can one be a disciple of Christ without accepting Him as Savior? Why or why not?

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!



Read and Reflect

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–19

In this passage, Paul touches on an issue of controversy within the Corinthian church. At the time, there was a faction that denied any possibility of life after death. This group of people was comprised of both Jews and Greeks who held the same belief for different reasons. Paul is explaining what he believes are the ramifications of subscribing to that belief.

- How does the belief in the resurrection affect your faith?

- How does it affect your everyday life?

- In verse 19, Paul says if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are pitiable. Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:29–34

Paul doesn't stop there — he pushes his argument even further. He asserts that Christianity itself hinges on the resurrection and, in turn, the promise of eternity. The Bible says the Christian life is not an easy one (John 15:18, 19). And Paul contends that if this life was all there was, suffering the trials inherent to a life of Christianity would not be worth it.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Verse 32 says, "... if the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" If there was no possibility for eternal life, how would your life change?

Jesus, it is easy to say that I accept You, but does my life reflect You? I know that You are coming again, but am I doing my part? You commissioned your disciples to share the Good News. Am I doing all I can? Search my heart. Make known to me areas of my life that distract from You. Your death on the cross gives life to mankind. Help me to proclaim this message to someone today. I love You with all of my heart. Amen.

Monday

Lord, I cannot help but imagine what heaven is like! What will it be like to behold You? Will I get to sit at Your feet and sing with the angels? Will I touch your nail-pierced hands? I want to be ready for the great day when You return. I want to be Your child. Amen.



Today's Objective

God's plan for humanity was incredible. There would be no pain, no suffering, no death. Our days would be full of joy and beauty, spent in perfect harmony with our God. That idyllic existence — our intended purpose — was interrupted by sin. Today we'll discover all that God meant for us to experience and how we can, one day, return to it.

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!



Self-Examination

- When you hear the word “hope,” what comes to mind?

- What is your idea of the perfect existence between God and humanity?

- How do you imagine heaven?



Read and Reflect

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11

Here, we read that much like we have an innate longing to search for God, He has also “placed eternity in the human heart” (NIV).

- What feelings does the prospect of eternity conjure in you?

Read Philippians 3:19–21

Paul points out the clearest distinction between those with hope in Christ and those without it — the world is focused on the earthly things, while we look forward to what awaits us in heaven.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What does being a “citizen of heaven” mean to you?

- God created this world for us to enjoy. How can we do that without it overshadowing what is to come?

Read John 14:1–3

Though sin has divided us from God, we have the hope of one day being reunited. In this passage, Jesus reminds the disciples that they will soon join Him in heaven.

- While Jesus is preparing a place for you in heaven, how are you preparing yourself?

Dear Lord, I have a song in my heart. I am filled with hope. At this moment, You are designing a mansion for me! Although I cannot be in heaven right now, transform me, shape me, make me Your witness. I am seeking You with all of my heart and eagerly await your coming. Amen.

Tuesday

Father God, I am about to begin another lesson. There is so much to learn. I want to absorb each word. My heart is opened. I invite You in. You are my Savior and I fully rely upon You. Amen.



Today's Objective

We all try to be good people. We attend church, try to obey God's commands, and even share the Good News with others. There is nothing wrong with striving for perfect obedience. It's a natural reaction to the love and gratitude we have for our God. An issue only occurs when the focus on obedience replaces reliance on a Savior. Regardless of how "good" we are, we can never earn our own salvation. Today, we'll explore our absolute need for a Savior.



Self-Examination

- How do you feel when you experience legalism within your church family?

- What do you think is the proper response to legalism with your church family?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How can you strive to obey God's commands without letting it obscure your need for Jesus?



Read and Reflect

Read Romans 3:9–20

There is much to digest in this chapter, and we will return to it later today. Let's begin by looking at verses 9 through 20. Paul reminds us that we are all sinners, all equal in the eyes of God. At the time, he was speaking about the division within the early church between Jews and Gentiles. But the same concept applies today. Prejudice and feelings of superiority can cause tensions throughout Christianity as a whole and within individual churches as well.

- How can you avoid feelings of superiority when dealing with others?

Read Isaiah 64:6

The prophet Isaiah gives us a glimpse into the harsh reality of our innate sinfulness. He reminds us that even "our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

- How does the knowledge that even when we do good we fall short of God's glory make you feel?

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

Read Romans 3:21–31

Reading how we are all impossibly broken sinners, whose attempts at righteousness are filthy rags can be discouraging. Yet, thankfully, God in His grace does not require perfection. He offers redemption freely through His Son.

- When we know that salvation is free, why do you think many of us feel the need to earn or prove our worth?

- Does God's grace excuse deliberate disobedience or complete disregard for the law?

Father, temptations come from every side. I lean on You for strength to make the right choices. Help me as I encounter the things of this world. I am so thankful that You are molding my character. I want to reflect You. Don't let me get bogged down by the sins of others. Help me not to judge but to lead people to You. Amen.

Wednesday

Today, dear Jesus, is a new day. I want to be born again. Wash me. Transform my life and help me fully commit to serving You. Thank you for the time we are able to spend together. Thank you for working in my life. Amen.



Today's Objective

Accepting Christ as Savior and committing to a life of discipleship can be a powerful experience. It can affect such a drastic change in our lives; the New Testament likens it to rebirth. We become new creations in Christ. Today we'll explore the transformative power of grace.



Self-Examination

- How can you be reborn without alienating loved ones who haven't made the same decision?

- What are some of your positive and negative connotations of the term "born again"?

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

- With which biblical examples of rebirth do you most identify?



Read and Reflect

Read John 3

The story of Nicodemus is one of the most famous conversions in Christian history. Jesus breaks down the essence of the gospel in twenty-one verses. It is simple: Accept salvation, be reborn in Christ, and allow Him to cover us in His righteousness.

- Nicodemus was a knowledgeable man. Why do you think he had trouble understanding what Jesus was saying to him?

- How can we prevent our preconceptions from keeping us closed off to what God has to say?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–17

So how do we become reborn? How does it all work? In this passage we read that when Christ died, He died for us all. Just by accepting His sacrifice we become “new creations” in Him.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What are some things that you hope Jesus can change in you?

Focus Verse Review

Re-read this week's memory verse (Ephesians 2:8–9). How has your understanding or perception of this passage changed?

Dear God, I accept Your free gift of salvation. Cover me with Your robe of righteousness. Transform me. You know the areas of my life that need to be changed. The door to my heart is open. Amen.

Thursday

Jesus, I want to fully give myself to You again today. I ask You to come in. I welcome You into my heart. As I begin reading and studying, take my knowledge to the next level. Give me Your wisdom. Allow me to discern Your message. I praise Your holy name. Amen.



Today's Objective

Part of beginning a new life of discipleship is recognizing that we are flawed beings. Our natural inclinations run contrary to God's purpose for our lives. As such, death to self is a necessary precursor to our rebirth. Paul goes as far as to say we must "die daily." Today, we'll learn how we can give ourselves fully to God's will on a daily basis.

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!



Self-Examination

- What part of your old self do you find it hardest to give up?

- How do you think submitting to God's will affects your freedom of choice?

- Why do you think it's important to recommit yourself daily to a life of submission?

- How has God been working in your life so far?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

Read Romans 6:11–23

Beginning our new lives with Christ requires complete devotion. Here, Paul likens this to slavery.

- What does being a “slave to righteousness” mean to you?

- What deliberate steps can you take to become an “instrument of righteousness”?

Read John 12:24–26

Jesus also spoke of total submission. Here, He emphasizes the importance of remaining focused on eternity, as opposed to our earthly existence.

- What do you think Jesus meant by one who “hates his life in this world”?

I want to be alive in You, Jesus. Right now, I pray that You help me recognize that this world is not my permanent home. You have something so much better planned. Thank you for hearing my plea. Thank you for giving me the strength I need. I love You, and I want to follow You. Amen.

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

Friday

Thank you Father for helping me focus on You. I need You each moment of my day. I want to fully rely upon You. Bless me right now as I begin a new lesson. I claim Your promises today. Amen.



Today's Objective

This week we've studied the concept of salvation and how it is an important first step in our discipleship journey. What now? How does this knowledge help us know God? How does it aid us in our everyday lives? Today we'll take a look at how our reliance on a Savior can enrich our lives now.



Self-Examination

- What is your reaction when facing difficulty in life?

- What are some of your favorite biblical promises?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How often are you conscious of the future that awaits you?

- What are your expectations of your relationship with God?

- In what ways should this new relationship increase your level of confidence in how you face the challenges of life?



Read and Reflect

Read Romans 8:31–39

This is an incredibly inspiring and powerful end to a chapter. Paul rallies the church in Rome with some of his most poetic prose. We are all one in Christ and nothing can separate us.

- In what specific and tangible ways does the promise of eternity affect your life?

SESSION TWO: YOU CAN HAVE IT NOW!

- What do you fear could divide you from God?

- Do you fear death? Why or why not?

Verse 32 reminds us that God values us so much that He didn't even spare His own Son.

- How does this make you feel?

- If God loves us this much, what in this life could possibly harm us?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Application/Community

Your submission to God results in obvious outward changes. People around you will notice that something is now different about you. The flip side of your new life is that you may be more acutely aware of the “sins” of those in your circle. How can you prepare for both scenarios? What can you do to ensure that you are a source of encouragement and not judgment?

Dear Heavenly Father, I am filled with awe and wonder. I must pause to take it all in...will I ever comprehend Your love for me? I am inspired. Is there really nothing that can separate us? Thank you for Your promises. I know that the things of this world are but for a short time. You are coming again! Amen.



"No one comes to the Father except through me." —JOHN 14:6

**it's all about
surrender**



timothy gillespie

Two years after completing his academy education at La Sierra Academy, Timothy Gillespie was programming director at Pine Springs Ranch summer camp. Nine years later he joined the Loma Linda Academy staff as chaplain. In the meantime he had completed a bachelor's degree in English and in religious studies at La Sierra University (1995) and a master of divinity degree at Andrews University (1997). His involvement with youth continued as he became youth pastor at La Mesa Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1997, taught at La Sierra University, and then accepted the position of young adult ministries at Loma Linda University Church in 2007. Important to his life and ministry are his wife, Sara Elizabeth and their three children, Hannah, Jacob Owen, and Isaac Seth. Regarding his own ministry, Pastor Gillespie says, "It is a blessing to serve the incarnate God who was willing to die for me."

It's All About Surrender

When I make an argument, I like to have a little wiggle room. I just think that makes sense. I mean, I feel like I'm right, but I want to make sure I have a loophole if I have been proven wrong! For instance, I will never say that I am a very good musician. I like to play music, I've even been paid to play music; in fact, I have even traveled all over the world playing music. But I do not claim to BE a musician. I like to think that I am, but I don't claim it. If someone asks me, I say something like, "some people think so..." or something to that effect. I don't like to make those bold and declarative statements that don't allow me to back out without losing face.

Let's face it — I've been wrong before, I'm sure I will be again. You see, it is one thing to say that I am a musician. It is another thing to say, "I am THE musician." And it is entirely something else to say, "I AM MUSIC!" If you turned to the person next to you right now and said these statements in descending order, they would respond much like this:

"I am a musician."

Awesome. What kind of music do you play?

"I am THE musician."

Wow! (Thinking — this guy is a bit arrogant) I'd love to hear you sometime.
(Thinking — now you must prove it!)

"I AM MUSIC!"

Hmmmmm (Thinking: WOW, I have never heard anything more egotistical and ridiculous in my life! This guy thinks that he is everything that music is! It's just silly what he is claiming.)

And it would be silly if I claimed it. So I don't!

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

But Jesus makes these statements and we have to figure out what to do with them . . . He gives us no wiggle room. He says these things:

1. I am the bread of life.
2. I am the light of the world.
3. I am the gate.
4. I am the good shepherd.
5. I am the resurrection and the life.
6. I am the way, truth, life.
7. I am the vine.
8. I AM.

These all come back to Exodus 3:14, where God authors the phrase, “I am that I am.” In this phrase is the essential essence of simply being. Without God, there is no “being” anything — there is truly no being at all!

And in the end, with these kinds of statements, there is no wiggle room for us. We are either to accept these things as truth, or we have to move on. In war, the ultimate idea of reality is knowing that you are going to lose. There is no thought beyond this, and that is why there is something called surrender. We surrender ourselves, we stop fighting, and we give in to that which is pushing back against us.

In the same way, we are asked to overcome our doubts by believing in the non-negotiable words that Jesus said about Himself. These words, these beautiful and terrifying words that compel us to find faith in Christ, are the same words that convict us to surrender to the torrents of His overwhelming love.

But these are hard words at times. We see this in the story that takes place immediately after Jesus feeds the 5,000.

"I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. **I am the bread of life.** Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down

SERMON THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6: 47–51).

You want to eat? Eat me. . .

Not an easy thing to understand. It was words like this that made people have to decide, have to surrender to what it was that Jesus was saying. This was also the saying that sent many people away; they just couldn't handle what He was proposing about Himself.

"On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" (John 6:60).

But it didn't stop there. Jesus wasn't just food, He was also light.

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no-one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' Having said this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam.' So the man went and washed, and came home seeing" (John 9:1–7).

You want to see? Look at Me . . .

Big statements from a big God. Huge statements from the Man/God Jesus Christ. You can see where this is heading: Jesus wants us to surrender to more than just propositions — He wants us to surrender to the all-inclusive nature of who He is. He is God, and He is giving us no room for discussion. He has already suggested that He is sustenance and He is light, but He is not about to be done with these enormous statements of "being."

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

I am the Gate

(John 10:1–10) "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

You want to be safe? Be safe in Me . . .

Nothing can be more comforting than the idea of an all-consuming God. We are asked to surrender to His safety, His judgment, His will for our lives. It is not a small thing that Jesus asks us for. He wants to be the One who gives us support, comfort, and safety. We are His, and as His, He has the responsibility of taking care of us.

I am the Good Shepherd

(John 10:11–16) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

SERMON THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

You want to be protected? I can protect you. . .

I had a friend who worked as a pizza delivery man. The standard policy of the company was that when they were approached by someone who wanted their money, they were to simply throw it at them and run away — not very brave, but very smart. The company knew that there would be a financial loss each month due to this, but they were okay with that as long as their workers were safe. At one point, there was a new worker who decided to take things into his own hands when approached by a man with a knife. Foolishly, he stood his ground and protected the pizza. However, a few bruises later, the pizza and money gone, he learned that the company policy made sense.

We, on the other hand, are protected by the God of the universe — the undeniable force that allows for us to be able to live life and to live it abundantly. We are blessed to be under His dominion, and as such, we are protected by the King of the universe. Seems like a good place to be if you ask me!

I am the Resurrection and the Life

(John 11:21–25) "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

You want to live? I am Life; live in Me . . .

Who conquers death? Jesus — and Jesus alone. He was able to conquer death by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that same power is available to us. But even more than simple resurrection is the idea that we are allowed to really LIVE life in the kingdom of God today. It is a

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

powerful metaphor, the kingdom of God, and we are ushered into not only the metaphor, but the reality of what LIFE really is!

And beyond life, Jesus stakes claim to being the:

Way, Truth, and Life

(John 14:1-6) "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."

You want to know the way? Follow Me, and You will live . . .

He lights the way and is the way. He speaks the truth and is the truth. He gives life and enhances life. This is some pretty powerful stuff that we are to be overcome by! This is why we talk of the Christian walk as surrender. It is overwhelming in its capacity to save, light the way, and create life, and that life is to be abundant. It is a virtual tidal wave of love and compassion that is poured over us, and we are called to live in that life!

I am the Vine (I am sustenance)

(John 15:1-5) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

SERMON THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

Everything comes through Me; I am the sustenance.

I think you can sense a pattern here. Jesus is encompassing what it means to “BE.” This is the same thing that was done in Exodus. Jesus is claiming supremacy in everything that there is. We see that Paul understood this in the book of Colossians and echoes Jesus’ words in a beautiful monologue of who Jesus is.

The Supremacy of the Son of God

(Colossians 1:15) “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”

What a beautiful statement of surrender to the concept, ethos, and person of Jesus Christ. If only we could live our lives in such beauty and understanding. However, when we come in contact with the power of the “I AM,” our responses are often quite different. Let’s look at two other places where Jesus says “I am.”

John: 8:57–59 Then the Judeans replied, “You are not yet fifty years old!

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham came into existence, I am!" Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out from the temple area."

We, as humans, rarely understand what to do when someone makes claims that don't fit into our worldview. And the claims that Jesus makes simply don't fit unless they are true. We have a tendency to react violently when we don't believe or are confronted with an understanding of what it is to come in contact with the great "I AM."

John 18:4-6 "Then Jesus, because he knew everything that was going to happen to him, came and asked them, "Who are you looking for?" "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground."

"They drew back and fell to the ground." This is powerful; there was a literal, physical response to the realization of who Jesus was. Jesus could have held them down on the ground, but rather, He gave Himself up willingly for those same people who would persecute Him.

When was the last time you were confronted by a truth so real you ended up on your back-side on the ground? Not often, if at all, is my bet. That is the overwhelming nature of who Jesus really is. He is the center and circumference of our faith, not to be left out; for surely our faith is nothing without Him. Without surrender to Jesus, our faith becomes peculiar and awkward — like a bird trying to walk a long distance. Birds were made to fly, and our faith is made for Jesus. This is the central truth of the gospel, the central focus of our worship, the central catalyst for our mission in the church. Without surrendering to this truth, we are surrendering to something less than Jesus. And this has implications for us as believers.

What you surrender to becomes your master. That is always how it has been in war, and the same goes to what we hold as important in our lives. What we surrender to eventually

SERMON THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

masters us, we become integrated into its life, and therefore we have to be careful about what we ultimately want to call our master. But you can't go wrong when your master is the gracious Ruler of the universe.

We have been bought and paid for and asked (not told) to surrender to Jesus Christ. There is no coercion, only desire. There is no compunction, simply invitation. How does this make sense? All is given freely to be received freely. Our surrender is not forced, but requested by a gracious host. We are called, not chained, to this life of faith and grace. We are given the opportunity to change our allegiance and to grow into and in the kingdom of God. We have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven through grace, and we are asked to dwell in the kingdom made by grace. It simply doesn't make sense in our humanness.

And too often we respond violently to this kind of love. It is so far out of our understanding that we would rather not try to understand. We reject it, we will not surrender to it because it is out of line with what we have become accustomed to. Rather than accept and abide, we reject and slide away from a God so willing to love us that we can't understand it.

Perhaps it is time that we give up the fight and surrender to the all-inclusive love of Christ Jesus.

Grace to you all, and peace in Him.

Sabbath

Dear Father, the title of the lesson proclaims surrender. As I open Your word, touch my heart so that I fully surrender to Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction

We often hear the phrase, “My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” But what does this really mean? “Savior” is pretty self-explanatory. But “Lord” sounds antiquated, almost medieval. How do we make Jesus Lord of our lives? This week we’ll learn more about the lordship of Jesus.

Wholly giving ourselves to God and the lordship of Christ is the next logical step in our discipleship journey. Accepting Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Savior is not a divided experience; they are two inextricable concepts. By accepting Jesus as our Savior, we admit that we are powerless to save ourselves. We are surrendering to His grace and His power to make us anew. It is impossible to surrender control of our salvation without also giving Him our entire being. We can’t just buy into the idea of Jesus as Savior. For Him to transform our lives, we must allow Him control of our lives. We must fall so passionately in love with Jesus that He has the room to do whatever He wants in our lives.

Spiritual Practices

Letting go. This week’s spiritual practice is one of the easiest and most joyous of those we’ll adopt during this study. It happens naturally when we make the deliberate decision to accept Jesus as both Savior and Lord. By choosing to trust God and cede control to Him, we experience a beautiful release. No longer must we concern ourselves with the burdens and worries of this life.

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

There is an amazing peace in God's presence. Jesus invites us to bring our burdens to Him and He will give us rest (Matthew 11:28–30).

This week, make a conscious effort to release your burdens to God and enjoy the peace that letting go brings.

Lord of my life, I am passionately in love with You! I want to take this time to bear my inner most thoughts to You. I give You these heavy burdens, my sorrows, worries, and frustrations. I accept You. Take control of my life. There will be times when I want to take over. When these times occur, remind me of Your grace and forgiveness. Help me to fully rely upon You each day. Amen.

Sunday

Dear Father, I am still pondering the importance of fully surrendering my life to You. This process is a moment-by-moment endeavor. And as I read more about surrender, draw me to Your side. Don't let me lose our special relationship. Thank you for this opportunity to grow closer to You. Amen.



Today's Objective

The lordship of Jesus is the foundation of the ideal relationship with God. Choosing to make Christ your Lord means surrendering control to Him. Surrender and submission is the natural reaction to His lordship. With it begins a new life of power and obedience. Today, we'll learn about how Jesus' lordship can change us for the better and help us strike a balance between obedience and liberty.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Scriptural Focus

Our weekly focus verse will help guide our study. Review it before and after you begin, and be sure to pick a version that is most meaningful to you.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him” (Colossians 2:6, NIV).

Self-Examination

- What can you do to consciously submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ in your life?

- Do you have a harder time with obedience or with grace? Why?

Read and Reflect

Read Romans 5:20–6:14

This is a passage we studied last week in the context of becoming “slaves to righteousness.” But let’s take a look at it from another perspective. Let’s focus on the effects of the discipleship journey Paul speaks of, specifically 6:11–14. He talks about the transformative power of grace and beginning a new life in Christ. Dying in Christ is not just a spiritual metaphor, it is spiritual reality.

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

- What do you think Paul means by “you are not under law but under grace”?

Paul underscores the idea that Jesus as Lord and Savior are two interconnected ideas (Romans 5:8). We know, from last week's study, that our old, sinful selves die with Christ when we accept Him as Savior.

- How do we “live with Him”?

Read James 1:22–25

James, unlike Paul, emphasizes the importance of evidencing our faith in the way we live. He argues that knowing the truth is not good enough. We must also apply these truths to our lives.

- How can you apply what you've learned during the first two weeks of this study to your life?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Can one accept Jesus as Savior without committing to His lordship? Why or why not?

Read Proverbs 3:5–8

So how do we come to terms with the views of James and Paul? How can we ensure we live a life of balance without focusing on obedience to the exclusion of God or focusing on our own liberty to the exclusion of His lordship? Solomon, the wisest man to live, contends that the answer is surrender to God.

- How does God's promise to guide your path make you feel about your discipleship journey?

Jesus, Your love for me is so vast that I cannot completely fathom its depth. You died so that my sins could be forgiven. You have blotted them out. I want to accept Your lordship over my life. I want You to reign in my life. At this moment, I put my trust in You. Thank you for loving me that much. Amen.

Monday

Lord, the Bible is filled with many examples of how You led in people's lives. As I think about Paul today, I am reminded of Your patience. I want a "road to Damascus" experience. I want to tell others that my life was changed because I saw You. Don't give up on me. Continue to call me back. I want to submit to You. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.



Today's Objective

Paul is one of the most well-known Christian authors. His work shaped the early Christian church; without his influence, Christianity might look much different today. However, before Paul the apostle, there was Saul the persecutor. Today, we'll learn how our actions, even with the best of intentions, can be incredibly dangerous when we do not first submit ourselves to the lordship of Jesus.



Self-Examination

- What does the conversion of Paul, a man who actively sought to destroy Christianity, mean to you in terms of forgiveness and our potential for change when we accept Christ as Lord and Savior?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Paul calls himself “chief among sinners.” How does this make you feel about your own spiritual journey?



Read and Reflect

Read Acts 7:54 to 8:3

The account of Stephen’s martyrdom is one of the most tragic deaths recorded in Scripture. But it serves a purpose. As Stephen is stoned, we learn of a man named Saul, who led the charge. His introduction in the context of such a brutal murder is a stark contrast to the man he later became — Paul.

- What do you think led Saul to believe that it was God’s will to have Christianity wiped out?

- Why do you think he felt it was his burden to bear?

- What are you passionate/zealous about in your life?

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

Read Acts 9:1–22

Saul's story is a perfect example of the dangers of trying to go it alone. He was an educated and devout man, but he lacked a personal relationship with Christ. As such, he acted recklessly. Though he intended well, he was in complete opposition to God's will. Thankfully, God, in His mercy, sought him out directly. And when he yielded to the lordship of Jesus, Saul became Paul and went on to do great things in His name.

- When Saul was first blinded and God spoke, he asks, "Who are you, Lord?" Why do you think he addressed this voice as "Lord," when he didn't know who it was?

- What do you remember about your conversion experience?

- Why do you think Paul was so receptive to changing his entire worldview based on this one experience?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- For whom do you think it is harder to admit their errors and accept Jesus as Lord: Christians or non-Christians? Why?

Father, I am inspired when I read about Paul. He put You as Lord of his life and, subsequently, he was able to accomplish great and mighty things for Your mission. I want an incredible personal relationship with You. I know that You have a plan for my life. There are people today waiting to hear Your message. Lead me today. I am fully dependent upon You. Amen.

Tuesday

Dear Jesus, I pray that nothing gets in the way of my relationship with You. If I am holding back something that precludes me from having a personal relationship with You, help me to honestly evaluate my life. I love You with all of my heart, and I desire to follow You. Amen.



Today's Objective

Yesterday we learned that we can cultivate the ideal relationship with God by surrendering to Him and allowing Him to guide all aspects of our lives. Often-times, this simple tenet can be misinterpreted. We can become focused on the things we do for God—volunteering, Bible study, charity, or even things like giving up sugar or television. There is nothing wrong with being diligent and wise in the choices we make. But as we've read before, even our righteous acts are like filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6). It isn't about what we do for God or

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

what we give up; God doesn't require us to sacrifice the good things we enjoy. All He asks is that we let nothing stand between us and Him. It's not what we give up, but what we are holding back. Today we'll look at our lives and find out how we can remember to always put God first and let nothing interfere with that relationship.



Self-Examination

- What are you holding back in your relationship with God?

- Why do you think God asks us to surrender the things most important to us?

- What do you consider the most important thing your life?



Read and Reflect

Read Mark 10:17–31 and John 3:5–7

These are stories of two wealthy men who asked Jesus how one can enter the Kingdom. And to these men, Jesus emphasized two different aspects of discipleship. To Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of rebirth and a new life in grace. To the

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

rich young ruler, He talked about putting God first and removing anything that stands in the way of that relationship.

- How are these two parts of discipleship — becoming new creations in Christ and not letting earthly things separate us from Him — connected?

- What do you think Jesus would say to you if you asked Him how you could enter His Kingdom?

- Why do you think Jesus didn't ask Nicodemus to give up his wealth?

Read Matthew 6:33, 34

This is a very well-known verse. Yet it still holds great power and meaning. Jesus is reminding us that when we make our relationship with Him the most dominant part of our lives, all other areas of existence will flourish.

- How has committing thirty to forty-five minutes to seeking God affected your life?

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

- How has your experience been in comparison to your expectations?

- What do you imagine will change through the next four weeks?

Father, Your words keep resonating through my mind... I want to seek You first before all else. I can't experience rebirth until I give up the things that separate us. What in my life do I need to relinquish? I confess my idols before You. Take them from me. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

Wednesday

It is true, I am fully dependent upon You. Thank you for Your many blessings in my life. I want You to lead in every aspect of my life. Teach me as I read Your Word today. I surrender myself to You. Amen.



Today's Objective

Last week, we learned about our absolute need for a Savior, a role only Jesus could play. What does the Bible say about Jesus as Lord? Today we'll discover how Jesus claims the right to be Lord through His role as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Self-Examination

- To which description of Jesus do you most relate: Creator, Redeemer, or Sanctifier? Why?



Read and Reflect

Read Genesis 1 and John 1:1–5

Both Moses and John do their best to explain, from their limited human perspective, the complexity of God the Creator — that He is the source of everything, has been always in existence, and purposefully created earth and man.

- Do the incomprehensible aspects of creation hinder your faith? Explain.

- What about God's creative power makes you comfortable in surrendering to Him?

Read John 1:12 and 1 Peter 1:18, 19

After reading these two passages, spend some time thinking about what it would be like if you were lucky enough to suddenly inherit all you needed to live comfortably the rest of your life.

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

- What kind of difference would that inheritance make in your life?

- If Jesus' offer of redemption is open to all, what do you think is the barrier to accepting His offer?

- What kinds of feelings do you experience when you think of yourself as God's heir?

Read Hebrews 10:10

When you surrender yourself to God, you allow Him to change you, to make you holy, to turn you into someone more and more in His image.

- Does the idea of being "holy" make you uncomfortable or unworthy? Explain.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How do you reconcile being saved while you continue to be a sinful person?

Focus Verse Review

Re-read this week's memory verse (Colossians 2:6). How has your understanding or perception of this passage changed?

Jesus, I still marvel at Your great love for me. You are my Redeemer, Sanctifier, and Creator. Thank you for laying down Your life for me. I claim You as my Savior. Let me take this message to others. I want them to know You. I want them to experience transformation. I am still a work in progress. Continue to shape my heart. Thank you for being an accessible God. You are always here for me. Amen.

Thursday

Today, Lord, I am holding on to Your hand. Lead and I will follow. Take away my selfish tendencies and make my heart pure. Inspire me as I read Your Word. Amen.



Today's Objective

The idea of submitting our lives to a force greater than ourselves goes against our basic human instincts. We are, by nature, a selfish people. Our society values individuality. Even the Adventist church celebrates our status as the remnant church. These factors can lead to feelings of superiority and make it difficult to fully submit ourselves to God's will. Today, we'll look at ways we can face these problems and overcome them.



Self-Examination

- Why do you think it is especially easy for Christians to develop feelings of pride and superiority over doctrinal differences, even though we know that we are all sinners?

- Why do you think there are so many Christian denominations today?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What obstacles do you foresee standing in the way of your personal surrender to God's will?



Read and Reflect

Read Genesis 3:1–5

Satan has been using the same temptation tactic since the beginning of time. He has used “self” to get us off track: self-interest, self-indulgence, self-promotion. Cashing in on our self-reliant nature, he promises ways to become more or less equal with God.

- How does knowing that Satan intentionally targets our selfish nature help you in your discipleship journey?

Read John 15:1–11

Here, Jesus reminds us that a self-reliant life — a life without Him — can bear no fruit. In verse 5, He explicitly says, “...apart from me you can do nothing.” It is only through our relationship with Christ that we can have purpose beyond this life.

- How has your relationship with Jesus added purpose or meaning to your life?

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

- Do you believe one can live a fulfilling life without knowing Jesus? Why or why not?

Father, my heart is touched by Your words. I am a sinner. Yet I see that You are refining my character. This class has pointed out areas in my life where growth is needed. Please, keep molding and shaping my life. I truly want to bear fruit for You, and I want to abide in You. Make my joy complete today...come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Friday

Each day as I awake, I am refreshed in You, Jesus. My heart and soul yearn to draw closer. Moment by moment I think of You. What plans do You have for me? How can I serve You today? I am committed to listening to Your still, small voice. Guide me as I study this lesson. Amen.



Today's Objective

As we've discovered this week, surrendering to the lordship of Christ is a difficult and ongoing task. Sometimes even the strongest among us can use support and inspiration. Today, we'll examine a biblical example of a healthy relationship with God and learn how we can apply it in our lives.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Self-Examination

- From whom in your life can you learn lessons of submission?

- In what areas of your life do you currently sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

- What steps can you take to give God more room in your life?



Read and Reflect

Read Genesis 6:13–22 and 7:1–5

From chapter 6, verses 13 to 21, God tells Noah He is going to destroy the earth and everyone on it; He tells Noah to build an incredibly large boat, with very specific specifications, to find two of every animal in the world, gather his entire family, go into the boat and bring as much food as possible. How does Noah react to this seemingly crazy command? Verse 22 says, “Noah did everything God commanded him.” Noah’s obedience didn’t stop there. In Chapter 7, God amends His initial instructions, telling Noah to now find seven of every clean animal and bird. He also tells Noah how He plans on destroying the earth. And again, the Bible says, “Noah did everything God commanded him” (Genesis 7:5).

SESSION THREE: IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

- What can we learn from Noah's response to God?

- How would you have reacted to God's request?

- Is there a distinction between great faith and acting thoughtlessly?

Application/Community Questions

- Which aspect of Jesus do you find it easier to explain to others: His role as Savior or as Lord? How can you better express your beliefs?

- What changes in your lifestyle have others noticed as a result of your commitment to discipleship?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How would you describe your relationship to Jesus in terms of His lordship?

Father, I want the faith of Noah. I want to fully surrender to Your leading. You are my Savior, my God, and my Creator. I know that You will faithfully lead in my life. Help me to trust You more. I praise Your name. Thank you for not giving up on me. Amen.



We can only glow if we have been in contact with the light that fuels us.

God's ultimate temple



timothy gillespie

Two years after completing his academy education at La Sierra Academy, Timothy Gillespie was programming director at Pine Springs Ranch summer camp. Nine years later he joined the Loma Linda Academy staff as chaplain. In the meantime he had completed a bachelor's degree in English and in religious studies at La Sierra University (1995) and a master of divinity degree at Andrews University (1997). His involvement with youth continued as he became youth pastor at La Mesa Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1997, taught at La Sierra University, and then accepted the position of young adult ministries at Loma Linda University Church in 2007. Important to his life and ministry are his wife, Sara Elizabeth and their three children, Hannah, Jacob Owen, and Isaac Seth. Regarding his own ministry, Pastor Gillespie says, "It is a blessing to serve the incarnate God who was willing to die for me."

God's Ultimate Temple

Having gone to seminary rather than medical school, I didn't get a lot of schooling in human anatomy. In fact, all that I know about anatomy really comes from Scripture; the most complete anatomy lesson being found in 1 Corinthians 12:14–20.

"Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body."

That's it. That was my gross anatomy class in seminary.

Have you ever thought about what part of the body, if you could be just one part, you would be?

Hands are the easy choice. You get to do a lot.

Eyes, I'm assuming those would be pretty popular.

Brain, that's for you control freaks out there.

Feet, for you runners. Or soccer players.

Knees, perhaps, for those of you who are spiritually inclined.

Elbows, for you divergent thinkers out there.

But do we have anyone interested in being the bowels of the body of Christ? Probably not.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

However, the bowels are no less important than any of the other parts. In fact, they might just be more important.

My family and I found this out this last summer when my niece had brain surgery. Now, I am well aware of the fact that the brain and the bowels are not closely related. Her brain surgery went well, but while she was recovering she somehow contracted a bacterium called *Clostridium difficile*, often called *C. difficile* or *C. diff* (www.mayoclinic.com). I won't get into the details of this, but her G.I. tract essentially shut down. It was a pretty serious thing, and we were concerned that we were going to lose her. By the grace and healing hand of God and some wonderful healthcare providers, she is still with us and has fully recovered! But I got a chance to see firsthand what happens when your bowels aren't working correctly.

So why all this talk of intestines? Well, there is a word in Greek — *Splagnizomai* — that essentially means to be “moved in the guts.” You see, for the Greeks, when you felt something deeply, you didn't feel it deeply in your heart, you felt it in your guts! In fact, this word became the word for compassion. In essence, when you are moved to compassion, you are moved in your guts, your bowels, your insides — and the rest of you follows.

If I want to be part of the body of Christ, I don't mind being the bowels. Because if we tell the truth, whatever creates compassion in us mobilizes all the other parts of the body. And when we begin to work together, we begin to become a functioning body — or community — of Christ. However, we need to ask a follow-up question:

What is true community?

This is a really big question for those of us who seek to be a part of the kingdom of God and the community of Christ. We want to be part of a healthy body, but what does that mean?

Based on his experience with community building workshops, Dr. M. Scott Peck says that community building typically goes through four stages:

SERMON FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

Pseudocommunity: This is a stage where the members pretend to have a bon homie (Exuberant Friendships) with one another and cover up their differences by acting as if the differences do not exist. Pseudocommunity can never directly lead to community, and it is the job of the person guiding the community building process to shorten this period as much as possible.

Chaos: When pseudocommunity fails to work, the members start giving vent to their mutual disagreements and differences. This is a period of chaos. It is a time when the people in the community realize that differences cannot simply be ignored. Chaos looks counter-productive, but it is the first genuine step towards community building.

Emptiness: After chaos comes emptiness. At this stage, the people learn to empty themselves of those ego related factors that are preventing their entry into community. Emptiness is a tough step because it involves the death of a part of the individual. But, Peck argues, this death paves the way for the birth of a new creature: the *community*.¹

True community: Having worked through emptiness, the people in community are in complete empathy with one another. There is a great level of tacit understanding. People are able to relate to each other's feelings. Discussions, even when heated, never get sour, and motives are not questioned.

These things bring about the following values:

Inclusivity, commitment, and consensus: Members accept and embrace each other, celebrating their individuality and transcending their differences. They commit themselves to the effort and the people involved. They make decisions and reconcile their differences through consensus.

1 Peck, M. Scott. *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Realism: Members bring together multiple perspectives to better understand the whole context of the situation. Decisions are more well-rounded and humble, rather than one-sided and arrogant.

Contemplation: Members examine themselves. They are individually and collectively self-aware of the world outside themselves, the world inside themselves, and the relationship between the two.

A safe place: Members allow others to share their vulnerability, heal themselves, and express who they truly are.

A laboratory for personal disarmament: Members experientially discover the rules for peacemaking and embrace its virtues. They feel and express compassion and respect for each other as fellow human beings.

A group that can fight gracefully: Members resolve conflicts with wisdom and grace. They listen and understand, respect each other's gifts, accept each other's limitations, celebrate their differences, bind each other's wounds, and commit to struggle together rather than against each other.

A group of all leaders: Members harness the "flow of leadership" to make decisions and set a course of action. It is the spirit of community itself that leads and not any single individual.

A spirit: The true spirit of community is the spirit of peace, love, wisdom, and power. Members may view the source of this spirit as an outgrowth of the collective self or as the manifestation of a Higher Will.

The Bible speaks of community 119 times. It uses the word company — also meaning community — another fifty-eight times and congregation another twenty-four times. In Scripture, it is made clear that we cannot be a part of the community of Christ on our own. Even Christ is in community in the midst of the Godhead; this is the essence of the Trinity!

SERMON FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

To live in the midst of something is to truly inhabit that thing — to accept its culture and values, even its personality. We are called to be in Christ-present communities where the presence of Christ is seen in the midst of us. Christ is exposed in our actions, our words, our intentions, and even in the spaces between us.

From the stories in Scripture, we understand that Israel was hardly a true community — squabbles and fights, disagreements, and the wrestling that comes from sharing life together. However, in the Book of Acts we are led to an experience of community that was different, that was about fellowship, and that was expressing what it meant to have Christ in the midst of us.

The Fellowship of the Early Believers

Acts 2:42–47: “They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. All who believed were together and held everything in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. **“And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.”**

So, what is your idea of community? Does it look, sound, smell, and taste like this? Does the church you belong feel like this? If it does, you are blessed; if it does not, what can be done?

I ask this question in all seriousness. We live in a hyper-connected world where we are all alone. We have more friends on Facebook than in real life, and we don’t know many of them at all. There is nothing wrong with Facebook, or any other social media, except for the fact that often times it makes us less social.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

And what does it mean to have Christ in the midst of this kind of community?

I can remember taking a walk in downtown San Francisco — a city I have always found fascinating. Its proximity to water makes it beautiful to me, and its tendency for unpredictability creates great memories. One of these memories holds particular meaning for me.

It was a gorgeous day — one of those phenomenal days when it is chilly but not cloudy. The sun was shining, and as I walked past the trolley turn-around, it seemed to shine of its former glory. Rather than portray the run-down remnants of a past era of transportation, the trolleys seemed to glow.

As I continued to walk away from the turn-around, I was suddenly overtaken by fog — fog the likes of which I had never seen before. It turned the burning streets into grey blocks of foreboding. Not to be overly dramatic, but it truly changed the tenor of the city that day. It became dangerous and I became anxious. The once calm streets became nervous with people rushing rather than lollygagging by the sun-drenched buildings.

But as I soaked in the change, and literally became soaked in the mist, the beauty of what was happening began to grow on me and in me. Everything was different, everything changed. Because truly, the mist changes things; it permeates everything you are. You don't see things the same anymore, you understand your insignificance, you feel alien on the ground, and, hopefully, you realize that the mist is a gift!

There is a particular character that comes out of the city when you experience the rolling fog. Just simply the way that it overtakes roads and buildings and cars and people and makes them seem as if they are something other than they were. In the process of becoming "other," you see things that you had perhaps never seen before. The lights of the cars glow wider and brighter than before; the shop windows reveal not just merchandise, but respite and rest from the overwhelming fog. The city seems to take on a life of its own. It has become something else. And once you have experienced this phenomenon you understand that you might be overtaken at any moment. You come to respect it. You

SERMON FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

come to welcome it. You grow to lean into the permeating mist that will cover you. And truly, when it is not there, you miss it.

It is in the midst of the metaphor of the mist that we may find an image to exegete — a gift of a picture that can clarify what Christ is to us and the presence that we seek. We need something to explain the overwhelming priority of Christ in our theology that goes beyond the stationary and static explanations of Christo-centricity and moves us toward a more dynamic understanding of who Christ continues to be in the world today — the presence of an elemental understanding of the kingdom of God that informs everything that we are. We need an image that can encompass both the metaphors of journey and destination, of kingdom of God and empire of man.

To perhaps coin a phrase, I am seeking to explain the concept of Christopresence — an overwhelming sense of Christ being all and in all and over all. It is a move beyond the metaphor of Christocentricity that brings us to a myopic view of Christ in the world. Christopresence stretches past the static nature of a point in time or geography and moves us toward the dynamic interplay of Christ in the world, in the spaces between us, and in the pauses of our sentences. The awkward silence becomes a God-breathed respite in which to recognize the holiness of Christ in everything.

Christ in the midst of us.

When we recognize that Christ is the center and circumference of our faith, our faith takes on a new meaning. It takes on a new hue; it becomes the catalyst for community in our lives, and that community is an actual expression of our gratitude to Christ and what He has done for us. A community that expresses infinite gratitude — I like the sound of that.

But this is not easily done. Remember the process toward true community? It is, at times, a painful process, but the results are breathtaking. We literally become a healthy part of the body of Christ.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Runners are particularly in tune with their body. I guess that is what happens when you have that much time to think about how you are feeling. Runners know when they are feeling well, when they need to make adjustments, and when they need to slow down or speed up. Runners know because they spend time making sure all their body parts work for a purpose, to propel them forward toward their goal.

We as the body of Christ also have a goal, and that is to keep Christ central in our experience, in our lives, and in our communities. We have been called to function so that the grace of Christ may be expressed in the world. And we can only do that by working together, knowing one another, and above all, acknowledging Christ as being in the midst of us.

Grace to us all, and peace as we find Christ in all that we do.

Sabbath

From this week forward, the prayers will be preceded by suggested elements of a prayer. If you have not yet been praying on your own, use these to create your own prayers.

As you begin to pray, think about the first three weeks of this class. Reflect upon your transformation. God is working in your life. He is molding and shaping you. Thank Him for the intimacy you have grown to share. Thank Him for saving you, and pray for guidance as you begin a new week.

Father, here I am. I have committed myself to you fully over the past three weeks. You have changed my life. I feel Your presence. I find myself talking to You throughout the day. My relationship with others has changed. I look forward to sharing Your message. Thank you for working in my life. Thank you for being my friend. Be with me as I begin a new week. Help me to understand You more fully. Amen.

Introduction

What does it mean to have an intimate relationship with someone? There's a sense of incredible closeness and familiarity associated with the word "intimacy." We often hear it used when describing a marriage. Similarly, it is used to describe our relationship with Jesus. But what makes a relationship intimate? When do we cross the line from being with someone to being one with someone? This week we'll explore the idea of intimacy between God and man. We'll learn how God desires to be one with us and what we can expect from a close relationship with Him.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Spiritual Practices

Practicing the Presence of God. In our heads, we understand that God is with us at all times. However, sometimes we can take this for granted and go about our lives dependent on our own strength and power. This can lead to spiritual isolation while we are actually surrounded by the fullness of God's presence.

Staying aware of the presence of God takes deliberate effort. We must constantly remind ourselves that God is here with us, all the time. This week, try and be conscious of His presence in your life.

When you begin to pray at the close of this lesson, internalize the concept of intimacy with God. How do you keep Him near? Are you aware of His presence? How does His presence help you throughout the day? Thank Him for the blessings He has bestowed upon You. Talk to Him as you would a close friend.

Lord, I cannot believe how close we have become! You have been waiting with Your outstretched arms, calling me to Your bosom. Why did I ignore You for so long? Why was I satisfied with mediocrity? I am so thankful that I opened my heart to You. I feel You guiding and protecting me. You give me words to speak. You lead me. Thank you, Father, for loving me. Help me to continue to grow closer to You. In Jesus' holy name I pray, Amen.

Sunday

Today, when you pray, think about the beginning. Think about how things were before sin. Ponder God's desire for intimacy with mankind. Ask Him to take your relationship with Him to a deeper level.

Jesus, You created this world. It was beautiful and perfect. Adam and Eve walked with You. I imagine laughter and singing. I picture the animals dancing behind. You did it all so that You could have a special relationship with Your creation. Although I cannot see You face to face, I desire the same intimacy. Push me, grasp me. Do whatever it takes to deepen our relationship. Amen.



Today's Objective

Just as we were created with an innate desire to seek God, we were created to experience the joy of an intimate relationship with Him. Today, we'll look back at the creation story and discover the level of intimacy God intended to share with us.



Scriptural Focus

Our weekly focus verse will help guide our study. Review it before and after you begin, and be sure to pick a version that is most meaningful to you.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:14–21, NIV).



Self-Examination

- Why do you believe God created man?

- To whom in your life do you feel closest? What are some aspects of that relationship you appreciate?

- Do you believe you have an intimate relationship with God? Why or why not?

SESSION FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE



Read and Reflect

Read Genesis 1:26, 27

When God created humanity, He did so in His own image, in His own likeness. We were the only creation modeled after God Himself.

- What does being made in God's image mean to you?

- Why do you think God appointed man to "rule over" the rest of creation?

Read Genesis 1:3–25 and Genesis 2:7

The first of these passages describe the first five days of creation. Notice how God simply speaks things into existence (verses 3, 7, 9, 11, 14–15 and 24). Yet, when it came to creating man (2:7), God gets physically involved. He gets down, forms man out of the dust, and breathes life into him.

- What does the way God created us say about the relationship He intended to have with us?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Why didn't God just speak us into existence?

- What comes to mind when you read these passages?

As you prepare to pray, think about Ephesians 3:14–21. Which parts of this passage touch you the most? Deliberate over the sixth day of Creation. Imagine God kneeling down, forming Adam after His image. Invite Him into your heart. *Dear Heavenly Father, I claim Your promise today. I want to be strengthened through Your Spirit. I want to understand Your love. You created mankind so that You could have intimacy with us. You formed me after Your own image. Please, come, dwell in my heart. I want to know You. Amen.*

Monday

Begin your prayer grappling with the plan of salvation. Attempt to understand how you fit into that plan. Pray that God fills your heart with abundance. Pray that you may have intimacy with Him.

You really left Your throne. You descended to earth to offer Yourself as a sacrifice. You really left heaven to die on the cross for me. I cannot begin to fathom such love! Please, dear Jesus, draw near me. I cling to You. I want to feel Your presence. I want to commune with You. Amen.



Today's Objective

God's love and care for humanity was manifested in the personal and exacting way He created us. It was His plan to live amongst us in the Garden of Eden forever. But when Adam and Eve fell, that perfect coexistence was shattered by sin. Today we'll see how, despite the chasm caused by sin, God still reaches out to us, seeking to restore that intimacy.



Self-Examination

- When you have a disagreement with another person, do you find it easier to take the first step toward reconciliation or do you wait for them to initiate it? Why?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Do you believe relationships can be damaged beyond repair? Why or why not?

- Does accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior help in restoring the intimacy between you and God? Why or why not?



Read and Reflect

Read Genesis 3:8–24

This takes place immediately after Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Life. They hear God walking through the garden and they run and hide. And instead of condemning them, God seeks them out and asks for their side of the story.

- How would you have reacted if you were in Adam and Eve's place?

- God knows all things, yet He still asked, "Where are you?" Why do you think that is?

SESSION FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

- Why did God question Adam and Eve about their reasons for eating the fruit?

Read Genesis 3:14

God is now addressing the serpent.

- What do you think God means when He says, "He will crush your head...?"

- Think about your relationship with God. Contemplate how you spoil shared intimacy with Your Heavenly Father. How does He respond?

As I pray, Father, my heart cries out to You. My soul hurts from within. Sometimes I feel like You are far away, but it is me who has turned. I am clinging to a sin. You are patiently awaiting my return. You continue to tug on my heart, and You call my name. Yes, here I am. Bring me back into Your arms. Amen.

Tuesday

Begin your prayer by thinking about how God has worked in your life. Compare His involvement in your life with biblical examples. How does it feel to be restored?

Thank you, Jesus, for answering my prayer. I prayed for You to come into my life and You answered my prayer! I feel Your close presence. You have changed me from within. I continue to turn from You, but You continue to reach out to me. Your Word tells of Your wonders. For thousands of years You have been working and shaping Your children's hearts. Your forgiveness feels like a gentle summer rain. You cleanse me from within. Thank you for loving me. Amen.



Today's Objective

Yesterday we studied how sin destroyed the intimacy God intended to share with us. It is His ultimate desire to dwell amongst His people. It is why He created us. Today, we'll discover how God has sought to bridge the chasm caused by sin and restore that relationship throughout Scripture.



Self-Examination

- How does it make you feel to know that God is actively working to restore our relationship despite His being blameless in its deterioration?

SESSION FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

- What are some things in your life that could prevent you from developing an intimate relationship with God?

- Do you feel you have to be a better person to have a better relationship with God? Or do you feel you will become a better person as a result of a better relationship with God? Explain.



Read and Reflect

Read Exodus 25:8

In the Garden of Eden, God lived among Adam and Eve. This was His idea of the perfect existence — God and man together. Even after the Fall, God desired to be close to us. Here, He tells Moses to build a sanctuary so that He may “dwell among them.” He then goes on in great detail (Chapters 25–27), explaining how exactly the sanctuary should be built. He even describes the clothes the priests should wear (Chapter 28).

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What does all the thought and care God put into the plan for the tabernacle say about His desire to be with us?

- Why do you think God wanted a physical place in order to be near the Israelites?

Read Exodus 29:43–46

After His lengthy series of commands, God finally reveals the purpose for it all.

- Verse 45 says, “I will dwell among the children of Israel.” Why do you think God places such emphasis on “dwelling” amongst us?

As you pray, ask God to reveal His plan for intimacy. Are you holding on to things that blur this intimacy? Invite Him in.

Do you really want to dwell within me? Are You really working to restore our relationship? Show me the things in my life that I need to relinquish. Am I holding on to something that gives me a false sense of hope instead of fully relying upon You? At this moment, I invite You into my life. Help me to fully depend upon You. Amen.

Wednesday

Imagine Jesus as the Light of the World. He came to illuminate the darkness. He came to be a Savior. Ask Him to make you a new person in Him. Claim Him as your Savior.

Jesus, You came to be the Light of the World. You came to bring hope to mankind. You came to heal the brokenhearted. You came to save me! Sometimes, I am cloaked in darkness. Illuminate my life. Make me a new person. I claim You as my Savior! Amen.



Today's Objective

All of God's work restoring the intimacy lost in the Garden of Eden was fulfilled when Jesus came down to live as one of us. It is through Him, and only through Him, that we have access to the Father (John 14:16). Today, we'll learn how intimacy with God can be restored through Christ.



Self-Examination

- Does Jesus' role as Lord make it easier or harder to maintain a personal relationship with Him? Why?

- What practical steps can you take to develop an intimate relationship with God?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

Read John 1:1–18

When John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” he is referring to Jesus. In his own poetic way, John is telling us the gospel story. Jesus, Creator and Lord of all, came down and became one of us so that the intimate relationship between God and humanity could be restored.

- Verse 12 says, “To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” What does being a child of God mean to you?
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Focus Verse Review

Re-read this week’s memory verse (Ephesians 3:14–21). How has your understanding or perception of this passage changed?

As you close this lesson study, pause for a few moments to fully comprehend what it means to be a child of God. Pray for guidance as you evaluate your life. Thank Him for His precious gift.

Dear Jesus, I close my eyes and block out all distractions around me. I pause and listen to Your voice. I picture a Father with outstretched arms. I picture You loving me. I try so hard. Help me to evaluate my life. Show me how I can become even closer to You. Thank you for Your precious gift of salvation. Amen.

Thursday

Before you begin this lesson, invite the Holy Spirit into your heart. Pray that you will be opened to His message. Pray for guidance as you study this lesson.

Holy Spirit, I call upon You. May my heart yield to Your message. Open my eyes that I may see what You want me to see. Guide me as I study this lesson. Amen.



Today's Objective

The Holy Spirit plays a key role in our relationship with God.



Self-Examination

- How do you maintain intimate relationships with those you love?

- How do you imagine the Holy Spirit?

- What do you believe to be the Holy Spirit's purpose?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

Read John 14:16–21

Jesus, through His unique understanding of the human experience, knows that our spiritual journey is difficult. For this reason, He promises to send us help in the form of the Holy Spirit. More than just a conscience, the Spirit is our “advocate,” uniting us with Christ, and through Him, all the fullness of God.

- What does Jesus’ description of the Holy Spirit as “advocate” mean to you?

- When have you felt the Holy Spirit’s influence in your life?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19

Paul calls our body a temple for the Holy Spirit.

- What comparisons can you draw from Paul’s description of our body as a temple for the Holy Spirit and the tabernacle described in Exodus 25–29 that we discussed on Tuesday?

SESSION FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

Take a moment to review what you learned from this lesson. Thank God for this special time. Pray for the Holy Spirit to intercede for you. Pray that He acts as an advocate for your life.

Dear Holy Spirit, I thank you for being in my life. I think about the great examples of the early Christian church. You worked in a mighty way. I want the same to occur in my life. I pray the prayer from Romans 8:26. I want You to speak for me. I want You to intercede for me with groaning too deep for comprehension. Read my heart. Understand my yearnings. Be an advocate for me. Amen.

Friday

When you pray today, take joy in the blessings from the week. Thank God for sending His Holy Spirit. Invite Him in again. Pray for inspiration as you study.

I am so happy! Father, I sing joyfully to You! I feel closer each day. Our walk together has become more intentional. I pause moment by moment to ask for Your advice. I yearn for the Holy Spirit to guide me. Thank you for leading in my life. Come in today. I am about to open Your Word. Grant me inspiration as I open my mind to understand your teachings. Amen.



Today's Objective

God dwelling within us is an integral part of our discipleship journey. His presence in our lives gives us the power to lead a fulfilling and purposeful life. Seeking Him and accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior pave the way for Him to live through us. Today we explore the strength we gain by His indwelling.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Self-Examination

- Can one be an effective disciple without having a close, personal relationship with Jesus? Why or why not?

- What do you hope to gain from allowing God to live within you?

- How do your close relationships affect the way you live your life?



Read and Reflect

Read Ephesians 3:14–21

By now, you should be familiar with our focus verse for the week—Paul’s emotional prayer for the church in Ephesus. The essence of his prayer can be found in verses 16 and 17, where he asks that they be strengthened by the Spirit so that Christ may live in their hearts. Verses 18–21 describe all that there is to be gained by allowing Jesus to dwell within us.

SESSION FOUR: GOD'S ULTIMATE TEMPLE

- Verse 19 mentions being “filled with the fullness of God.” What does this mean to you?

Read Ezekiel 36:26–27

This is another promise God makes concerning the Holy Spirit. He says that with the help of the Spirit we will keep His laws and be given new hearts. This is an important distinction. He doesn't ask that we first change ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit into our lives. He promises that with the Spirit our lives cannot help but be changed.

- How does this verse make you feel, knowing that God is willing to change us from within if we simply allow Him?



Application/Community Questions

- Philippians 4:13 tells us we can do all things through Christ. How can this assurance help you tackle life's difficulties?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

End today's lesson celebrating God's promises for your life. Ask Him to give you a new heart and a new spirit. Pray to experience the fullness of God. Seek ways to show effective discipleship.

Heavenly Father, I claim your promises today! You give me the strength to do all things according to Your will. You have promised to send Your Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide me. I pray that You give me a new heart and a new spirit. I want to experience the fullness of You. Show me how I can share the Good News with others. Bring people into my life, people desperately seeking a Savior. In Your precious, holy name I pray, amen.



If you are going to expect God to transform your spiritual eyesight to 20/20 vision, you must acknowledge and claim the power that only God has.

**you can
do it too**



rajkumar dixit

Rajkumar Dixit (commonly known as "Kumar") has been involved in non-profit leadership and Christian development for more than ten years. In 2003 he began serving at New Hope Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland as an associate pastor and currently oversees administration and community development. Pastor Dixit frequently speaks and lectures on a wide range of topics related to leadership, church administration, worship, and branding. He earned his doctorate from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. with a concentration in leadership, and wrote his dissertation on branding in religious and non-profit communities. Pastor Dixit is married to Rajinie, a speech-language pathologist. He is the proud father of Jaelin, Elijah, and Wilomina. In his spare time he enjoys reading, writing, and traveling with his family. He is the author of the book *Branded Faith*. More info can be found on his website: www.rajkumardixit.com

You Can Do It Too

How many people wear prescription eyeglasses or contacts? Isn't it interesting to see the change of attitude over the years regarding eyeglasses? When I was growing up, wearing glasses was a dreadful experience for most kids in grade school. It was embarrassing, and it provided the opportunity for other students (especially the bullies) to pick on you.

My sister grew up with terrible eyesight. Actually, she is legally blind. She always had to wear uncomfortable, heavy glasses with thick lenses in order to see. Growing up, there weren't many options for her except to wear the frames that would give her the freedom to see. A couple of years ago, she had LASIK eye surgery performed. LASIK is a surgery through which doctors are able to correct your retina through a laser beam to give you perfect 20/20 vision. After an hour of surgery, my sister walked out of the doctor's office with perfect eyesight for the first time in her life.

It's amazing what LASIK can do. For most of us, our eyesight just needs some minor correction. What glasses, contact lenses, and LASIK do is repair the minor problems with our sight in order to give us the ability to see clearer, farther, closer, and better with ease.

Many people, including Christians, are in need of having their spiritual sight cleared up. They may not be completely blind, however, they may need some minor attention to clear up their vision. Today, we are going to take a deeper look into a passage of Scripture that provides biblical principles on how to refine our spiritual vision. You may doubt whether you have it in you to have your spiritual eyesight restored. Listen to what God is saying to you today because *I believe you can do it!*

His name was Bartimaeus. The Bible says he was blind. We are not sure if he was completely blind or just had poor vision. What we do know is that his vision was so poor he was unable to hold a regular job or function as an average citizen in his community.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

It was an ordinary day in Judea. Bartimaeus woke up and found his walking stick and beggar's cloak and made his way to the road that led from Jericho to Jerusalem. Jericho was five or six miles west of the Jordan River; this road was about fifteen miles long — a direct line to Jerusalem.

Jericho was once the capital city of Israel. It was filled with a rich history going back far beyond the time of Joshua. Described in the Old Testament as the *City of Palm Trees*, there were copious springs in and around Jericho, which made it an attractive site for human habitation for thousands of years. There was a national highway that connected Jericho to Jerusalem, and Bartimaeus had sat along this particular stretch of road thousands of times in his life. In fact, he probably recognized many of the regular travelers and greeted them by name. Every morning he would find his regular spot along the road where he could beg for money.

Locate Your Place of Renewal.

Bartimaeus placed himself in a perfect location to receive, assistance, and ultimately have his sight restored. *Where are you spending most of your time in life? Are you intentionally putting yourself in a place where you can receive the proper instructions and assistance to get your spiritual vision corrected?*

The church is a great place to find comfort and help. The home of a Christian family is a perfect place to find spiritual support and mentoring. The important thing to remember is to make sure you are spending quality time with people who will give you the greatest opportunity for growth. It is very easy to be consumed with video games, television shows, surfing cyberspace, or other hobbies that can easily distract us. If you are looking for a way to grow spiritually, remember to always position yourself in a place where you will be in a position to hear God.

Jesus was on His final trip to Jerusalem. He had just come back from a whirlwind tour in Capernaum and other small towns surrounding the Sea of Galilee. Gathered around Him

SERMON FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO

were His disciples, this band of brothers who had followed and supported Christ for the past three and a half years. In addition, there was a huge crowd that was following Jesus as He made His way along the dirt highway.

There seemed to be a sense of urgency in Jesus' steps as He made His way toward Jerusalem. The disciples could sense the anticipation in Jesus' demeanor. These disciples had traveled this Jericho road countless times with Jesus, making their way from Capernaum, to Jericho, and on to Jerusalem. And yet, nobody who traveled on this trip with Christ understood the symbolic journey He was making toward Jerusalem.

The Bible says that as Jesus and His disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging.

"When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'" (Mark 10:47).

Even though Bartimaeus was blind, he could still hear with his ears. During the last three years, he sat along the road every day, listening to the chatter, the conversations, the debates, arguments about that man named Jesus of Nazareth. Word had spread quickly about this man who preached and healed so many. Even though the conversations overheard by Bartimaeus were short and fleeting, he had already formed an opinion in his heart about Jesus — that He was the Messiah.

He had heard about the miracle maker who had turned water into wine at a wedding. He had heard of the carpenter's son from Nazareth who had calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He had heard about the teacher who had gathered a small amount of bread and fish and somehow used it to feed more than 5,000 people. He had heard first-hand accounts from lepers who said they had been healed of their disease. He had heard all of these stories about Jesus. He believed in Jesus. His faith in Jesus had led him to believe that He was indeed the Messiah.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Be Persistent in your search for Jesus. Don't Give up Easily.

If you have the desire to make a change in your life, you have to be resilient. Don't give up. Do whatever it takes to stay on track. The evil one will constantly try to draw you back to your previous distractions, to the longstanding habits that are so difficult to shake. Keep on searching. It is not that Jesus is playing hard to get, but your persistence will say something about the genuineness of your desire. Jesus says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Bartimaeus began calling Jesus: Have mercy on me! Jesus, Jesus, over here! Jesus, Jesus, please, have mercy on me! Mark 10:48 says, "Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet."

Do you have people like that in your life? I call them "consultants." They mean well, but they seem to have an answer for everything that is going on in your life. They believe they know what's best for you. In fact, they are always willing to tell you what you need to do, even when you haven't asked for their opinion.

Some of you may have allowed others to take control of your life. Instead of letting Jesus be in control, they have authority over your life and your decisions. You have given your power over to others.

Today is the day that you will take the responsibility to place your life, your decisions, your future in the hands of the ultimate consultant — that is, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 23:10 says, "And don't let anyone call you 'Teacher,' for you have only one teacher, the Messiah."

Bartimaeus had spent day after day along the highway from Jerusalem to Jericho obeying others. He was passive and polite because he was dependent on others for his survival. But on this particular day, when he discovered that Jesus was walking toward him, he stopped listening to others. He refused to let others dictate his destiny, and he gave Jesus the power and authority to become the leader of his life.

S E R M O N F I V E : Y O U C A N D O I T T O O

If you are going through a difficult time in your life, sitting along the road of despair, hoping things are going to get better isn't going to help you. It is time for you to take some initiative and get your life in order with Jesus. *You can do it!*

Acknowledge God's Power to Transform.

"Be quiet!" many of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:48).

Although the crowd respected Jesus...

Although they were willing to follow Him to Jerusalem...

Although they were caught up with His miracles and signs...

...they only recognized His *Humanity*, rather than His *Divinity*. However, Bartimaeus had heard the stories of Jesus, the debates, the arguments, and controversy, and without having the privilege of seeing the miracles and signs, he recognized the *Divinity of Christ*.

He began to yell, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Here, he recognized the power that Jesus held and called Him by His proper Messianic title. (This is the only instance in the book of Mark where Jesus is given that title.)

If you are going to expect God to transform your spiritual eyesight to 20/20 vision, you must acknowledge and claim the power that only God has. You must believe in the God you are calling on. Many people believe Jesus was a good man who walked on this earth. Some people say that Jesus was a prophet, a teacher, and a philosopher. *If you believe that Jesus can transform your life, you must acknowledge Him as your Savior.*

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Ignite a Spirit of Optimism.

Jesus heard the commotion that was taking place. He heard His name being called out in desperation. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Who was calling Him the Son of David? Who was this person who knew and understood His true identity? As Jesus called for Bartimaeus to meet Him, the crowd said to the blind man, "Cheer up . . . Come on, he's calling you!" (Mark 10:49).

When you are about to have a life-altering encounter with God, you need to "cheer up." This is something to celebrate and rejoice about. When God is about to restore your life, you can't help but be excited. There are too many sad Christians who have an awful outlook on life. They have an attitude of "woe is me."

Get over it! Ignite a spirit of optimism and expect amazing things to happen in your life!

As Jesus looked at Bartimaeus in the eyes, the crowd became silent. Many of the people gathered there that day stood quietly as they overheard the conversation that was taking place. Somebody whispered in a loud tone, "Hey, that's Son of Timaeus." Most everybody recognized Bartimaeus. This was the same blind guy who had been sitting along side of the road for years, begging for money with his beggar's cup.

Jesus gazed into the dark, hollow eyes of Bartimaeus. "How can I help you?" (v.51). Jesus' question wasn't an ignorant question, rather he was giving Bartimaeus the opportunity of a lifetime. It was an open invitation . . . an offer to help.

In this story, we witness the Savior of the world coming face to face and asking an open-ended question.

What do you want me to do for you?

If you were given one chance to look God in the eyes and tell Him exactly what you need, what would it be? What is your greatest perceived need?

SERMON FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO

Some of you today would ask God for a job. Others of you may desire to reconcile a relationship with your parents. Others may ask God to give you the ability to focus on Him solely. Don't forget Psalm 37 and Ephesians 3:

"Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him..." (Psalm 37:5-7a, NIV).

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21, NASB).

Know Your Greatest Desire

Bartimaeus knew his greatest desire was to see clearly. By seeing clearly, he would be able to enter a normal life and be accepted into mainstream society. He was able to articulate his desire with passion and a believing heart.

There's a terrific verse in the New Century Version that says: "The LORD gives sight to the blind. The LORD lifts up people who are in trouble. The LORD loves those who do right" (Psalm 146:8).

Bartimaeus must have been overwhelmed by Jesus' question. This was the first time in his life that somebody was offering help. Somebody was asking to help him, rather than him asking for help. On that warm spring day, Bartimaeus decided to put away his beggar's cup in exchange for a chance to have his sight restored.

He whispered, with all of the vocal energy he could muster, "I want to see!"

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

The Bible says that before he came to Jesus, he threw his cloak aside. Why did he do this? Take a closer look at verse 50: "Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus."

The cloak was a symbol of his status as a beggar. Every beggar had a cloak that they would lay on the ground in front of them. People who passed by along the road could throw their money on to the cloak. As a beggar, he had very few worldly items. He was dependant on the cloak for his business of begging. Take at the fact that he threw his cloak aside proved to be a physical demonstration that he didn't or wouldn't have a need for it anymore. Bartimaeus **believed**, even before he stood face to face with Jesus, that he would become healed. He would *no longer* need to beg for a living.

That is faith! Stepping out in action before it happens.

Some of us have the faith of Bartimaeus; most of us, however, are like the man who said to Jesus, "Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24), or the disciple Thomas who wanted to see the evidence before believing. Regardless, Jesus stands ready to meet us where we are. Do you believe that Jesus can restore your spiritual eyesight?

Are you ready to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus? Are you ready to tell Him your heart's desire? Are you ready to allow Him to heal you of your pain and give your life totally over to Him?

God wants to be your best friend, and He loves you so much. ***You can do it.*** He wants you to.

Sabbath

At the beginning and the end of each day's lessons for the next two weeks, you will only be given suggested things for which to pray. There are no prayers written out for you. But we are confident that your study thus far has made you comfortable enough to talk to God about anything that's on your mind.

As you pray, reflect upon all that you have learned in this class. Share personal triumphs and challenges with God your Savior. Ask Him to continue to show You His purpose for your life. Claim your need for a Savior and ask for a willing heart so that you can share His message with others.

Introduction

Throughout the first half of our study, we've focused on the personal aspects of discipleship. We've explored our hunger to know God, and to realize His purpose in our lives.

We've discovered our absolute need for a Savior and Jesus' rightful role as Lord. We've learned about the intimate relationship God intended to share with us and how He is continually seeking us, as we are Him.

But this is just one aspect of discipleship. As disciples, we have a wonderful and life-changing message. We are privy to the gospel truth. And as such, it is our duty to share it with the world. The sharing of Christ is an extension of our discipleship journey. This week, we'll concentrate on how our relationship with God fuels the efficacy of our witness. We'll look to the Bible and see how God has enabled others to do great things in His name.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Spiritual Practices

Spiritual Journaling. The first four weeks of this course have been full of intense study and honest self-examination. How do you feel? Do you notice any changes in your life? Do others? Our spiritual practice this week will help you chart your growth and reflect on your walk with God.

Spiritual journaling is a simple concept, and if you've been following along with our study, you're probably already doing it. As you spend your daily time with God, just keep a record of your thoughts. These can be your reactions to study, prayers, questions, reflections on God's work in your life—anything, really. Whatever you feel, write it down. Spiritual journaling helps us in two ways:

1. It gives us the opportunity to reflect on how our relationship with God matures over time.
2. It gives us a way to review how God works in our lives.

As with all spiritual practices, the longer you incorporate it into your daily study, the more evident its usefulness. Give spiritual journaling a try and see if it enhances your walk with God.

Use your prayer journal as a guide for your prayer. Start one if you don't already have a journal. Ask God questions you might have. Share interesting innuendoes you learned from this class. Lift up requests to Him. Thank Him for answering.

Sunday

As you pray today, thank God for the time that You are about to spend communing with Him. Think about how you share the Great Commission with others. Do you have concerns? Which areas do you need to study more? Pray for Him to inspire You today.



Today's Objective

The thought of sharing a message as big and powerful as the gospel can seem a daunting task. Thankfully, God knows us well and understands our fears and concerns. When Jesus ascended to heaven and gave us the Great Commission, He promised us help. He promised us the Holy Spirit. Today, we'll learn how we can fulfill our greatest calling through the help of the Spirit.



Scriptural Focus

Our weekly focus verses help guide our study. Review this passage before and after you begin, and be sure to pick a version that is most meaningful to you.

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’”
(Matthew 28:16–20, NIV).

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Self-Examination

- How does your lifestyle represent your beliefs?

- Do you think your faith is evident to those you interact with every day?

- Do you feel you are well-equipped to share your faith?



Read and Reflect

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20

Here Paul is stressing the importance of sharing the gospel with others. He says that when we receive the Good News we become “ambassadors for Christ.”

- How can you fulfill the role of ambassador?

SESSION FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO

- What do you think Paul means by “as though God were pleading through you”?

Read Acts 2:1–4

When we let the Holy Spirit into our lives, amazing things can happen. At Pentecost, the disciples experienced this power firsthand.

- How would you react if you were at Pentecost?

- Do you believe things like this happen today? Why or why not?

Do you remember when you first heard the Good News? Start your prayer by reliving your first experience with the Holy Spirit. Ask God how you can be a better ambassador for Him. Pray that He reconciles your heart so that you can relive falling in love with Jesus.

Monday

Ask God to free your heart from any prejudices that you might be carrying. Ask Him to clear your mind from preconceptions that impair the work of the Great Commission. Praise Him for sending His Holy Spirit as you study.



Today's Objective

As with most things in life, we carry our own biases into our witness. Sometimes, we can triage the sharing of our faith based on preconceptions. This was true even in the times of the early Christian church. Today we'll look at how Peter overcame his own deep-seated prejudice and learned to accept that we are all equal in the eyes of God.



Self-Examination

- What are some preconceptions you have that may prevent you from being an effective witness for Christ?

- Do you find yourself more susceptible to judging Christians or non-Christians? Why do you think that is?

SESSION FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO



Read and Reflect

Read Acts 10

Up until this point, Christianity was almost exclusively a Jewish sect. Even Peter held the belief that the gospel was only for Jews. It wasn't until God sent him a vision and an encounter with a devout Centurion that he was able to see clearly.

- Why do you think Peter had to be shown this vision, even after spending so much time with Jesus?

- What does this say about our human and societal prejudices?

- Why do you think Luke dedicated a whole chapter to this story?

- What modern parallels can you draw from this story?

Thank God for the examples in the Bible. Ask what you can learn from this lesson. Seek ways to apply the Bible's examples to your life. Pray that He will bring to light troublesome areas in your life.

Tuesday

Tell Jesus that you are ready. Share your excitement with Him. Tell Him that you simply cannot wait to share His message with others. Pray for understanding as you explore this lesson.



Today's Objective

The idea of sharing Jesus is great, but how do we get started? What are some practical things we can do to share the love of God? Most of us aren't trained evangelists or great speakers. Some of us might be more introverted than others and talking about deeply personal experiences may make us feel uncomfortable. Today, we'll learn how Jesus makes the first step into evangelism as painless as possible.



Self-Examination

- How would you describe your experiences in sharing the gospel with others thus far?

- What about witnessing causes you the most apprehension/difficulty?

SESSION FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO



Read and Reflect

Read Luke 8:38–39

This passage takes place right after Jesus healed a man of demon possession. The man was so grateful to Jesus, he wanted to follow Him; verse 38 says he “begged Him.” But Jesus had a more important mission in mind. (If you’d like to read the whole story, it begins in Luke 8:26.)

- What has Christ done in your life that you feel is worth sharing?

- What experiences have given you the urge to tell everyone you know?

Read Luke 10:2–3

Thankfully, God doesn’t overwhelm us with responsibility. Here, Jesus gives a directive to a group of missionaries. He says there are many people who need to hear the truth, but not enough people to tell it. He doesn’t say “preach great sermons” or “baptize as many as you can.” All He says is “Go.” We just have to go and make ourselves available. God will take care of the rest.

- What is preventing you from putting yourself in a position to share your faith with more people?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Pray to God right now. Thank Him for your complete joy. Let your enthusiasm bubble over. Tell Him that you are available for His work. Show Him that you are willing to go where He leads. Pray that He brings people to your mind right now who need Him. Ask Him to give you the words to say.

Wednesday

As you pray, think about what God has personally done for you. Are you excited to share this news? Pray that He renews and strengthens your relationship so that you will have mighty and wonderful things to share with others.



Today's Objective

Yesterday, we read about making ourselves available to be witnesses for God. But what do we do when we're actually engaged in a conversation about our faith? What are we supposed to say? Today we'll learn how to glean from our relationship with God and become effective ambassadors for Christ.



Self-Examination

- How would you describe the reason for your faith to someone?

- What experiences can you share with others to show how God is working in your life?

SESSION FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO



Read and Reflect

Read Matthew 4:18–20

Jesus said, “Follow Me” and the disciples immediately followed Him. They didn’t wait for a convincing argument or for Jesus to prove His worth. His presence alone was enough to convince them to dedicate their lives to His service.

- What would it take for you to make a life-changing decision in an instant like the disciples did?

Read John 1:35–50

The disciples didn’t attend evangelistic series or complete an intense study of Scripture. They were simply impressed by the presence of Jesus. When Andrew tells his brother of the Man he has chosen to follow, he doesn’t try to convince him of His merits. He simply says, “Come and see.”

- Do you think your relationship with God is strong enough to convince someone to follow Jesus? Why or why not?

Read Exodus 4:10, 11

When God commanded him to go speak to Pharaoh, Moses hesitated. He was nervous, unsure of what to say. But God made it easy on him. He promised to teach him exactly what to say.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How does this promise make you feel about your potential for witnessing?
-
-

Focus Verse Review

Re-read this week's memory verse (Matthew 28:16–20). How has your understanding or perception of this passage changed?

As you pray, reflect upon how Jesus acquired His disciples. His disciples saw something in Him that they wanted. Claim His promise to fill your life. Tell Him that you want to reflect Him. Praise Him for bringing people into your life who are seeking Him, and ask Him to help you as you lead others to Him.

Thursday

Ask God to remind you of your story. Cherish His blessings and leading in your life. Celebrate your growth, and tell God that you want to experience even more of His amazing power and grace. Pray that you won't ever forget what He has done for you.



Today's Objective

Being an effective witness isn't about theology or doctrines, it's about sharing the story of your relationship with Jesus. For example, throughout his epistles, Paul's greatest tool was his own personal journey with Christ. He constantly points back at his own life to help him reach others. Today, we'll see that when we experience the love of God daily, there is an abundance of stories to share.

SESSION FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO



Self-Examination

- How would you give your testimony if someone asked you for it?

- How has God affected your life most recently?

- Does the absence of personal stories equate to the absence of God in one's life? Why or why not?



Read and Reflect

Read John 14:12

This is a powerful verse. Jesus promises that just by believing in Him, we can accomplish all that He did and even more.

- How can you claim this promise in your life?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Do you think we can interpret this promise literally — raising people from the dead, healing diseases, and casting out demons? Or is it meant metaphorically — that there is no limit to God’s power? Explain.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1–2

When Paul talks about relaying the faith to “faithful men, who will be able to teach others,” he is speaking from experience. Timothy heard the Good News from Paul and, in turn, spread it even further. His story is a testament to the infectious nature of the gospel truth.

- Who are some “faithful men [or women]” in your life with whom you can share your experiences?

God’s power is great and awesome. Pray right now. Ask God to fulfill His promises in your life. Tell Him that you are willing to be His disciple. Tell Him that you are excited to share your experiences with others.

Friday

Pray that the Holy Spirit will wash over you at this moment. Plead with God. Tell Him that you do not want to be judgmental. Cry out to Him...you want to lead others to Christ. You do not want to give Satan any space in your heart. Thank Jesus for hearing your humble prayer.



Today's Objective

The closer we come to God, the more aware we become of the inherent sinfulness in this world. This awareness can unintentionally lead to a judgmental attitude, and that can be counter productive in our mission to share the gospel. No one wants to be a part of a group of judgmental people. Today, we'll learn how to minister to others with love, not condescension.



Self-Examination

- How do you react when someone tries to force their beliefs on you?

- Are there times when it is inappropriate to share your faith? Why or why not? How can you tell the difference?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How can you share your beliefs without being judgmental?



Read and Reflect

Read Matthew 7:1–5 and John 8:7

Here are two verses in which Jesus cautions us not to judge others without first examining ourselves. However, we learned earlier in our study that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Thus, we are never in a position to judge.

- What are your responsibilities as a Christian when you see someone acting in opposition to your church’s beliefs?

- How can you tell someone they are not following biblical principles without seeming judgmental?

SESSION FIVE: YOU CAN DO IT TOO

Read Matthew 5:13–16

This passage reminds us that oftentimes one's first glimpse of God is through another human being. A disciple's life is a window through which the world sees the love and grace of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

- How can you keep from "losing your flavor"?

- Do you feel like your life reflects Christ in you?

- How can you glorify God in your everyday actions?

- Do you believe witnessing has to be an intentional act, or can your lifestyle evidence your faith? Explain.



Application/Community Questions

We can find an example of God's ideal church in Acts 2:42–47. They were a congregation of believers that did more than worship together. Take a moment to read this passage, not just cursorily, but really pay attention to the description of this group of people; practice your relational Bible reading. It is a beautiful description of the power of community.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What's the result of such a vibrant and dedicated people? Notice the last sentence: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

- Identify the areas that are lacking in your church community. What are the things that get in the way of your church being more like the early Apostolic church? What steps can you and your peers take to change things? Who in your congregation can you identify as people who will support such changes?

Pray with boldness right now. Confess your sins before God. Recognize that you are a sinner. Ask God for forgiveness. Seek Him. Cast aside selfish ambitions and sinful desires. Pray that you can do the work that God has called you to do. Praise His name for the miracle that He has worked in your life. Tell Him, "Here I am, send me."



We are called to be in Christ-present communities where the presence of Christ is seen in the midst of us.

**we are
the body**



timothy gillespie

Two years after completing his academy education at La Sierra Academy, Timothy Gillespie was programming director at Pine Springs Ranch summer camp. Nine years later he joined the Loma Linda Academy staff as chaplain. In the meantime he had completed a bachelor's degree in English and in religious studies at La Sierra University (1995) and a master of divinity degree at Andrews University (1997). His involvement with youth continued as he became youth pastor at La Mesa Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1997, taught at La Sierra University, and then accepted the position of young adult ministries at Loma Linda University Church in 2007. Important to his life and ministry are his wife, Sara Elizabeth and their three children, Hannah, Jacob Owen, and Isaac Seth. Regarding his own ministry, Pastor Gillespie says, "It is a blessing to serve the incarnate God who was willing to die for me."

Do They Glow in the Dark?

Have you ever hung out at a coffee shop for a long time? I mean, for a really long time — long enough that the staff begins to look at you funny. I recently did this in Chattanooga, Tennessee, waiting for an airplane and getting free Wi-Fi. At one point, they finally asked me if I was planning on being there all day. I guess I should have ordered more baked goods or something to appease them. But their point was well taken; I had set up shop — “pitched a tent” — as it were, and I dwelt with them for a while.

This idea of dwelling with someone, also termed “abiding,” is the first and probably most important step in the discipleship process. For discipleship to happen, there has to be a presence of the one discipling with the one being disciplined. This just makes sense, doesn’t it? Hopefully this is not an oversimplification, but rather a simple principle. To be present, you have to be present. This statement reminds me of the advice my wise father once gave me: “nothing is successful like success.” At first, I thought that was a silly statement, but the more that I have reflected upon it the more I have realized that these kinds of truisms are just that — true. But we rarely live our lives like this.

With the birth of the Internet and social media, we can now be present without being “present.” We can be “close” while on a different continent entirely. This reality has its positives and its negatives, but in some ways it has changed the idea of proximity. Proximity means how close you are to someone physically. And proximity is sometimes confused with intimacy.

Closeness is proximity; nearness is intimacy. Are you with me on the distinction? We are called to intimacy with the one who disciplines us. This intimacy takes the shape of God “in” us. John 17:20–21 states, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

And this “in” that is spoken of, we can call this dwelling — or abiding. To dwell with someone is to be in both proximity and intimacy. We will often times take proximity because it is tangible, and intimacy is a bit more intangible. However, you know it when you have it! This intangible thing becomes tangible because of the nearness we feel to the one whom we follow. To be discipled by one is to be in an intimate relationship, to acknowledge it and to follow.

Isn't it horribly annoying when you ask a married person how they “knew” the person they are with was the right one? They always answer with some sort of statement that sounds like, “you'll know when you know, you'll just know.” NOT VERY HELPFUL, but unfortunately, very true. The same can be said about a relationship of Jesus “in” us.

If you are interested in the big theological word for what I'm talking about, the word is “perichoresis.” This word literally means “mutual indwelling.” In other words, it is me in you and you in me. And in the case of God and Jesus, it is Him in Him and Him in Him and us in Them. The fact that we have been asked to be part of this relationship shows the very nature of God's grace toward us — unmitigated, unfiltered, and unabashed love.

This being “in” one another leads us to discipleship. Discipleship is a tricky word. There were disciples, we all know that, but what does it mean to be in a discipling relationship with Christ? The word disciple literally means to be a learner — someone who is constantly hearing the words of the teacher. When we are called to follow, when we are called to abide, all of this has a teacher/learner connotation.

But the reason that this word “discipleship” has become so tricky is that we have tried to standardize a process of discipleship based on the context in which we find ourselves. We look for a process that will simply move people through some sort of prescribed curriculum, and we expect there to be a marketable product at the end of the process. There is only one problem with this kind of thinking: PEOPLE ARE NOT PRODUCTS! Regardless of the process, people are people, and relationships make people! Discipleship is primarily a relationship with the catalyst for any type of growth or development we hope to see in our spiritual lives.

S E R M O N S I X : W E A R E T H E B O D Y

Back in the time of Christ, it was not unusual for a rabbi to have a group who would travel with him, follow him, and listen to his words. As they heard the words, their lives began to reflect the teaching; and this, by and large, happened through a relationship of following, learning, and reflecting. All of these things need to happen in order for us to be truly “in” Christ. Learning without abiding is just like book learning without any life application; following without listening is just blindly walking in some predetermined direction; but in bringing all of these things together, something beautiful happens.

To think that we can learn (which is the primary function of a disciple) without following (the secondary function of a disciple) is to miss one of the main ideas behind what it means to learn, follow, and ultimately grow “in” Jesus.

Once we have moved past a proximal relationship in our spiritual lives (in other words, once the story of Jesus is beyond a story we hear and it becomes our own story), the church becomes community rather than consumption, and the grace of God is expressed in our relationships both inside and outside of the church. As we are ushered into the Body of Christ we find our place by discovering our spiritual gifts and by becoming active in our local community of Christ.

But perhaps I am moving too fast. Perhaps we need to make a case that God has always wanted to be close to us. From the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden, God spent time with us in “the cool of the evening.” When we broke relationship with Him by simply not trusting Him, we became separated from God, and He has been trying to get back together with us ever since.

Look at the picture in Genesis 3:8–9. This is after Adam and Eve’s sin. Verse 7 tells us: “Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Even though God must have known about the break, there was still a deep desire to commune with His people. His first grace was coming back down to the garden after they distrusted Him enough to disobey Him. The second grace we see is when God then graciously asks them, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).

He certainly didn’t have to do this — He is God; He knew where they were hiding. But because of the sin, they were now ashamed to be seen naked. The only thing that changed was their attitude. And when God comes down to the garden He gives them multiple chances to make right what they had done wrong. We are constantly like Adam and Eve, hiding from a God who has seen our nakedness — who, in fact, created our nakedness! There is nothing we have to hide from God. When we decide that we want Him to abide in us, we become acutely aware of our nakedness. Scripture says that they were naked and “afraid.” Another way of saying it is that they were ashamed when they hadn’t been before.

As Christ begins to inhabit our lives, we become more and more aware of the shame that we carry with us on a daily basis, and we become uncomfortable with it, and for good reason. The shame we carry always separates us. However, the sacrifice that Christ made on the Cross gives us a reason to move past the shame and into the joy of becoming a disciple of Christ.

This shame, it becomes like paper burned away in a fire — it simply flies away as we become more and more engaged in the learning and following of Jesus in our lives. As we become more “in” Him, we become students of Scripture, perhaps the most clear revelation of Jesus Christ left to us. We become passionate about becoming the tangible hands of Christ in the world as we see His compassion for us, and we begin to understand that the best way for us to tell the world about Jesus is not simply by “not sinning,” but by becoming agents for the tangible kingdom of heaven. We move from lives that had too little time for others to lives that are consumed with the desire to love passionately, to show the world who Jesus is by the things we do for them. We are called to love with reckless abandon and to be too busy with the work of Christ in the world to be easily offended by those who don’t believe as we

S E R M O N S I X : W E A R E T H E B O D Y

do. We love them first because Christ loved us first and gave us His grace first, not after we knew we needed it.

To engage in a life of discipleship is to first hear the call of Christ. Just the same as He made the call in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17, He calls us to “follow Him.” As we hear and respond to the call, we are immediately taken into a life of discipleship with Him. We become those who leave everything they know to go where He leads us. And this is a scary thing. It’s not easy, nor is it comfortable. Jesus speaks of the cost of discipleship as being a very rough road.

In fact, whenever you see someone wanting to follow Jesus, you see Jesus giving them a pretty significant dose of reality. Recall the statement, “Birds have nests and foxes have holes. . .” (Matthew 8:20). The road of followership is not the easy road that leads to popularity, celebrity, or wealth. Rather, the first thing we have to do after following Jesus is understand that we are now, like Him, aliens in a foreign land — homeless, penniless, and waiting on the will of the one whom we follow.

Very rarely does one aspire to homelessness. Very rarely will someone decide that their lives are going to be so different as to be completely misunderstood by the majority of society.

In all my years of working with the homeless through the ministry of our thrift stores in Southern California, never have I heard one of those who are displaced say, “I’m so glad that God brought me to this place of homelessness.” We equate homelessness with something going terribly wrong. And that is correct in the context of today’s world.

But perhaps the deepest idea of followership is knowing that this world has no boundaries or walls for you anymore. You go where the gospel calls, whether that is to another continent or right around the corner from where you reside. It can even be within your own home or across cyberspace. The world becomes a veritable garden in which to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and life “in” Him. We are called and prepared for that specific calling that Christ has for us. He never calls without preparing the one whom He calls; that is

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

GOOD NEWS for us! We are continually being called and prepared. We are never left alone to do His bidding without Him; for He is “in” us and we are “in” Him.

Let’s take a moment and look at how Jesus is in us:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them” (John 14:16–21, NIV).

So there is this advocate, called the Holy Spirit, who will come to us. It was good for Jesus to leave; while we would have loved Him to stay, His particularity would have precluded most of us from talking to Him personally. What does that mean? It’s like this: Jesus came at a particular time, to a particular place, to a particular culture, a particular religion, a particular ethnicity, a particular faith, and even to a particular gender. He was specific at that point. He did not come because any of those particulars were better than another, but it was a perfect time to do what He needed to do for us in the world. But because He chose when and where He did, He needed to leave in order for His presence to become universal, rather than specific and particular. His life gave us an understanding of what love is with skin on it! But by His leaving, He allowed all of us access into the relationship with and “in” Him. It was a specific act of grace to leave us with an advocate, a counselor who would help us realize the presence of Christ in our lives every day!

The Holy Spirit is a huge part of any discipleship that happens. It is with His prodding, His guidance, and His catalyst that we are even inclined to be involved in an intentional relationship with Jesus Christ. The function of the Holy Spirit is to continually point to Jesus Christ:

SERMON SIX: WE ARE THE BODY

"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. . . When the Counselor comes, . . . he will bear witness to me . . . And when he comes, he will (convict) the world concerning sin. . . because they do not believe in me . . . When the Spirit of truth comes . . . he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak. . . He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8f; 13f).

This is the continual function of the Holy Spirit. The spirit is most present where Jesus is most central. So therefore, as Jesus becomes the focus of our discipleship, the Holy Spirit is present there as well. The Holy Spirit does not mind being neglected as long as Jesus is not. Our "progress" in our discipleship is in direct connection to our focus on Jesus. This focus on being in Him will clear our guilt, clean our shame, correct our thoughts, and energize our service. It is a catalyst for the life in Christ that we have always dreamt of.

I don't know if you have noticed, but little kids have a fascination with things that glow in the dark. I am constantly being pulled into our darkest room to see my kid's newest "glow in the dark" toy. From vampire teeth, to casts for their broken bones, they love things that glow in the dark. The key to all of these glow-in-the-dark toys is that they have to be refueled by being held up to the light. The longer they are in the presence of the light, the longer they glow when they are in the dark. It's a great toy, and maybe a good metaphor.

What I have never seen is a glow-in-the-dark toy that outshines the light from which it is fueled. And it seems that sometimes this is what Christians are trying to do with their process and progress in discipleship. They want to outshine the light, not while they are in the dark, but when they are in the light itself. This is when we have taken discipleship to be the end and not the means. The end is Jesus Christ, and we are looking for intimacy, not proximity to Him. Sometimes discipleship becomes the quest to outshine the light, when really it is only the process of seeking the light more and more in order to glow in the dark.

But we must remember that even the greatest glow in the dark toy can never really light the way. We must always give way to the light, to the sun and to the Son. We can be glow-in-

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

the-dark Christians, but only in the quality of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We can only glow if we have been in contact with the light that fuels us. We follow that light. We CHASE that light. For it is the light that we reflect.

We have been given an invitation to live in Christ and to be intimate with Him. This is the wonderful call to “follow” and to go where He bids us go. Our discipleship is to follow, to learn, and to grow within Jesus Christ. And He gives us the gifts, the tools, and the Counselor by which to do that. If we think that discipleship is the lonely pursuit of becoming “like” Jesus Christ, we have missed it. Discipleship is the wonderful process of seeking, following, and learning about Christ, in Christ, through and in the community of Christ. It is never lonely, it is never unwieldy, it is never a burden — any more that it is a burden to carry a diamond. And I have never heard someone say, “Wow, this diamond is just too big for me to carry. I’d like to put it down.” No, we have arms strong enough to hold what is precious to us, and the good part is that He has arms to hold what is precious to Him. Somehow, we are the diamonds that Jesus carries with Him and in Him.

What a gracious God we serve!

Sabbath

Tell your Heavenly Father that you want to be His servant. Sing your praise to Him. Submit yourself to be used by Him. Pray that this lesson strengthens you and empowers you to do His work. Thank Him for uniting your work with the work of other believers.

Introduction

The church is often referred to as the “body of Christ.” We usually take that to mean that we are His hands and feet, tools to carry out His mission. True, we are His instruments. But being part of the body of Christ is much more than that. It’s about being a group of people, united in our common faith, coming together to celebrate our new lives in Christ. It’s about following Jesus, together as a church community. This week, we’ll explore the role of a corporate church body in our discipleship journey and how it can strengthen and support us.

Spiritual Practices

Meditation. This is a common term today. Yet, what we will be practicing is not an emptying of our minds and a focus on “nothingness.” Instead, we will concentrate on biblical meditation—filling our minds with God and His Word.

Biblical meditation is closely related to the first spiritual practice we learned: relational Bible reading. It’s about focusing our thoughts on what God is saying to us at that very moment.

A good guiding verse for this practice is 1 Kings 19:11–13 where Elijah heard God, not in the great fire or earthquake or wind, but in a still, small voice. Don’t get caught up in the obvious. Try and distill the essence of what God is

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

communicating through His Word. Put yourself in the midst of what you're reading. How would you feel in that situation? How would you react? What is God trying to tell you?

Here are some steps you may want to take to guide your meditation this week:

- Begin with prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your experience.
- Read about the historical context of the passage you are about to study.
- Give yourself adequate time.
- Reflect on your meditation and ask yourself questions:
 - What new insights did you gain?
 - What feelings did you experience?
 - What can you apply to your life?

Remember, your experience will be unique. There is no wrong way to experience Scripture. What is important is getting in touch with His Word so that it becomes real to you.

Meditate upon His Word. Think about the stories you read from this lesson. Open your mind and heart so that you can hear His message for you. Tell Him that your heart is willing. Invite Him in.

Sunday

Tell Jesus that you want to be part of the family of God. Ask Him to reveal His plan for your life. How can you work with others to accomplish His work? Thank Him for leading in your life.



Today's Objective

Christianity wasn't meant to be an isolationist experience. When Jesus was on earth, He surrounded Himself with friends and made it a point to meet with others in the synagogue on a regular basis (Luke 4:16). Being part of a church means belonging to something bigger than ourselves. We may make the personal choice to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior as individuals, but when we are born again, we become part of His body. Today, we'll see how being part of a community of like-believers can help strengthen our walk with Christ.



Scriptural Focus

Our weekly focus verse will help guide our study. Review it before and after you begin, and be sure to pick a version that is most meaningful to you.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it"
(1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV).



Self-Examination

- What about your church do you most appreciate?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What about your church most frustrates you?

- Do you believe one can live a fulfilling life of discipleship without being part of a church? Why or why not?



Read and Reflect

Read **Thessalonians 5:11–22**

We've learned over the past few weeks that living a life dedicated to Christ can be difficult. In times of loneliness and despair, it can be an extraordinary blessing to have the support of a church family. This verse reminds us of this.

- When has your church family helped you through a difficult time?

SESSION SIX: WE ARE THE BODY

- How do you lend your support to a church member in need?

Read Colossians 3:16

Part of our duty as members of a church community is to help one another grow in Christ. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul reminds the congregation to both teach and admonish one another.

- How does your church challenge you to grow in your faith?

- Does being part of a church make you more aware of your actions? Explain.

As you pray, think about your church family. Are there people hurting and suffering? Tell God that you are willing and ready to share encouragement and comfort with others. Tell Him that you have thankfulness in your heart. Ask Him how you should begin.

Monday

Prepare your heart to commune with God. Share successes, concerns, and questions from your prayer journal. Meditate upon His Word. Tell Him you want to know more about showing allegiance to the Body of Christ.



Today's Objective

When we claim to be Christians, loyal to Christ, we also claim allegiance to the body of Christ. Today we'll learn how our identity as Christians is inextricably linked to our identity as part of the body of Christ.



Self-Examination

- When you think of the church as the body of Christ, do you imagine all Christians worldwide, your denomination, or just your local church? Why?

- How does being part of a church help you in your everyday life?

- Do you feel connected to your fellow church members? Why or why not?

SESSION SIX: WE ARE THE BODY



Read and Reflect

Read 1 Peter 2:4–5, 9

In Matthew 18:16, Jesus called Peter a “rock.” So it is only natural that Peter would use a similar illustration when describing the early Christian church. He refers to us as living stones who, together, combine to make “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.”

- How can you help your church act more like “a holy nation”?

Read Ephesians 2:19–22

This verse likens Christianity to a building. With Jesus as the cornerstone, Paul says, “strangers and foreigners” can be united through Him and built into a temple.

- What does it mean to be “built together”?

- Does this idea of being built together into something great for God preclude the possibility of individuals accomplishing great things for God? Why or why not?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Ask God how you are being built upon Him, the Living Stone. Pray that He will show you how to help build His church on the foundation. Praise Him because He has connected you with fellow citizens who can strengthen and encourage you.

Tuesday

Shout for joy. You are part of God's body of believers! Honor Him as the head of the church. Thank Him for guiding you on this endeavor. Pray that you will seek wisdom and insight as you study this lesson.



Today's Objective

A common reason for disillusionment within our church is the hypocrisy and failings of human leadership. But the Bible teaches us that Jesus is the head of the church. Our guiding principles ought to be determined by God, not by what our members think. Today, we'll discover how to embrace the true leader of the church.



Self-Examination

- Is it fair to expect more from church leaders than from members?

- Why do we find it more difficult to forgive the wrong decision of a church body than the wrong doing of a friend? Is this fair to our church?

SESSION SIX: WE ARE THE BODY



Read and Reflect

Read Ephesians 1:22–23

Paul says God set up the church with Christ at its head. That's it. He doesn't say that God merely inspires the head of our church or that God places men to lead us. It says Christ is the head.

- How can we prevent church policy from overshadowing biblical truths?

- If we embrace the idea of Christ as head of the church, why do you think we have corporate leadership?

- How do you come to grips with being part of a church body with which you may not always agree?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26–33

This passage talks about the importance of respecting differing views within our church community. It says it's not wrong to have disagreements, as long as it is done orderly and for the purpose of strengthening the church.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- How does your church deal with differing interpretations of Scripture?

- Verse 33 says, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." What does this mean to you?

Read Romans 14:13–19

Romans 14 is a great chapter to consult for guidance when interacting with church members who may disagree with your personal views. If you have the time, consider reading the entire chapter.

- How do we work towards "peace and mutual edification" without sacrificing the integrity of Scripture?

- How can we distinguish differing interpretations from those in opposition of Scripture?

Open up your heart. Digest the scriptural passages from the lesson. Tell God that you want to be reminded that all things should be done for the edification of God. Plead that He helps you not to put obstacles in front of someone. Thank Him for the blessing that you gain from studying His Word.

Wednesday

Lift up your voice in prayer. Tell God that you want to follow Him. Do you sometimes try to do things on your own? Share how you plan to work with others. Ask Him for advice.



Today's Objective

As part of Christ's body, we are connected to one another. The church as a whole cannot function when one member acts of their own accord. It is essential that we work together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to further God's work. Today, we'll learn how to maintain strong connections to those within our church.



Self-Examination

- How do you deal with disagreements with church members?

- How can you promote unity within your church?

- How are you helping build up members of your church?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

This passage precedes our focus verse for the week. It emphasizes the importance of working in tandem with other church members and keeping a united front. We must all buy into the idea that we are one body in Christ and do whatever we can to allow His will to be done.

- Verse 26 says, “if one suffers, all suffer.” How are you affected by the suffering of those within your church?

- What does this say about the nature of our connection with other Christians?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3

This chapter is often used at weddings as an example of perfect love. Yet, in context, Paul wasn't speaking of romantic love. He was talking about the love fellow church members ought to have for one another.

- Do you believe a church can be effective with only shared beliefs and a common purpose, or must they have a social relationship? Explain.

SESSION SIX: WE ARE THE BODY

Focus Verse Review

Re-read this week's memory verse (1 Corinthians 12:27). How has your understanding or perception of this passage changed?

Reflect upon the passages from this lesson. Share your frustrations, sins, and triumphs with God. Ask how you can work better with others. Are you supporting the work of others? Pray that God will show you how to share His love with your fellow workers. Praise Him for the love that He so abundantly showered upon you!

Thursday

Thank God for the blessing of His Word. Ask Him to continuously remind you of all that you have learned this week. Tell Him that you do want to be part of the body of Christ. Ask Him to show you where you fit into His great work.



Today's Objective

So far this week, we've studied quite a bit about being part of the body of Christ, focusing on God's leadership and unity among members. But how do we, as individuals, do our part within that framework? Today, we'll discover what we can contribute to our church to enhance the experience of others.



Self-Examination

- What gift has God given you to help you be of service to your community?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What are your thoughts on attending church regularly?

- Do you feel the need for fellowship? Why or why not?



Read and Reflect

Read Romans 12:3–8

Each of us has a unique role to play as part of the body of Christ. Here we see examples of these different functions — from prophecy to leadership to simply being cheerful.

- What is your role in your church?

- How do others benefit from your fellowship?

Read Hebrews 10:24–25

Here we read the importance of meeting together as a group and encouraging others through trying times.

SESSION SIX: WE ARE THE BODY

- Do you feel this verse is a biblical imperative to attend church regularly? Why or why not?

- How does physically being with other believers help “stir up love and good works”?

As you pray, take time to think about your church family. Ask God to show you if you think too highly of yourself. Tell Him that you want to be an active member of His church. Ask Him to show you how to help this body of believers show love to each other. Thank Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit who leads and directs your thoughts.

Friday

It is exciting to begin a new lesson. Pray right now. Praise God for the messages He has given in His Word. Tell Him what you learned this week. Reveal your innermost thoughts. Don't hold anything back. Pray for wisdom as you study today.



Today's Objective

The book of Acts chronicles the formation of the early Christian church. It's incredible to imagine that a small group of twelve fishermen started what would become a dominant world religion. Their story is a testament to the power of a

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

church body committed to a shared purpose. Today, we'll examine the book of Acts and see what we can learn from their mission-focused perspective.



Self-Examination

- How can you develop closer relationships with members of your church?

- How can you be of the most use to your church?

- How can your church do a better job of being mission focused?



Read and Reflect

Read Acts 5:38–39

When the disciples were thrown in jail for their preaching, Gamaliel, a Pharisee, defended them in front of the Sanhedrin. His argument was that if they weren't doing God's work, they would eventually fail. But if they were doing His work, nothing could stop them.

- How does this embolden you to work with your church to affect change in your community?

SESSION SIX: WE ARE THE BODY

- How can you know whether or not your efforts are what God wants?

Read Acts 5:12–14, 42

Early in their mission, the disciples faced resistance. Verse 13 says, “no one else dared join them.” Yet they remained steadfast and continued preaching. As a result, God blessed their work and their congregation grew.

- How can your church show similar resolve in your projects?

Application/Community

The early church faced some of the same challenges our churches face today. Yet they were focused on their mission to spread the gospel. Based on your readings this week and the example of the early Christian church, answer these questions to better understand how this came to be.

- What can you reasonably expect from pastors and leaders of the church in fostering a mission-focused congregation?

- How can we nurture new members without nitpicking on issues that might drive them away?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What can you do to help the pastor and church elders be less burdened by church administration and to allow them more time to minister to the congregation?

- How can your church develop a more active mission outreach in your community and overseas?

Tell God your fears right now. Be honest. Sometimes His work can be dangerous. Maybe you are excited. Share these feelings with Him. Are you ready to stand for Him? Are you eager to proclaim His name? Ask Him to help you support your church family as you carry out His work. Tell Him that you want to share what He has done in your life with the entire world. Tell Him that you are ready!



Expect great things — see a great
God at work in you.

**equipped
for ministry**



troy fitzgerald

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Forgive Us for Getting (and not going)

Today we are going to challenge each other with God's master plan for equipping believers to do the work He commissioned us to do before He returns. To begin with, we will consider a few snapshots of how the church began. Next, we will consider the *almost* unbelievable things Jesus expects of His followers. Finally, I will give you a chance to respond to God's desire to equip you for His mission.

Snapshots of the Church

Getting ready for school, the young boy threw on his shirt and buttoned all the buttons until he noticed he had one button left and no buttonholes. Then, the boy took a step back, looked in the mirror, and discovered that somewhere in the process he either missed a button or started with a button in the wrong button hole. It's not a crime and it can be fixed. He just needs to line up the buttons.

Have we as a church put the mission of Christ on like a shirt and then buttoned the wrong button first? It's easy to do. If the church has missed a button, perhaps it is this one: Have we become so dependent on church leaders to lead the church home that we have neglected to believe the promise God made to *all* who believe?

When we look at how the Christian church has grown throughout history, we see that it is the result of the Holy Spirit filling **every believer** — not just the pastor, evangelists, teachers, or church elders. Compare the respectful dependence we have on church leaders today to when the Christian church began:

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about **three thousand** were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **Everyone** was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. **All the believers** were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of **all the people**. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:41–47).

At that time they had apostles, leaders, and teachers, but all were working together. Did you hear how the Holy Spirit was making a difference in "all people," "everyone," and "all the believers"? Notice this same effect in another snapshot of the church a little while later in Acts 4:

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And **they were all filled** with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. **All the believers** were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:31–34). Again we see an organized church with leaders, teachers, and apostles get even more organized. Listen to this story in Acts 6:

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6:1–4).

Not far into the life of the church, personal issues and prejudices began to cause problems — problems due to growth. And this story is so important because it shows how the

SERMON SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

different gifts were distinguished among the believers, but more importantly how “everyone” “all” and “anyone” could go and share Christ with the world. But first they needed to get more organized, so God called some of them to function as deacons who would go and get this much needed work done. Consider what happened:

“This proposal pleased the **whole group**. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:5–7).

What an amazing example of God equipping all to do something for His cause. But some might say, “So, the deacons did menial work while the apostles did pastoral or priestly work, right?” WRONG! NO! God forbid! Because that would mean that only pastors can preach or teach. This is not what happened. The reason people were “added to their number daily” and “even priests became obedient to the faith” was because **all** were testifying and sharing and everyone worked in their place of giftedness. The seven deacons were filled with the Holy Spirit, which is why they could testify and also wait on tables — so to speak. How do we know that?

Skip a chapter over to read about a man named Stephen who preached a mighty sermon to the Sanhedrin, calling for revival. He was executed, but the word of God broke loose throughout Judea and Samaria. Stephen, gifted as one who waits on tables, also spoke boldly about Christ, and the Good News spread throughout the region.

Skip over to chapter 8 and you have Philip, another deacon who “does the work of waiting on tables” and hears the voice of God telling him to go to the highway and watch. Philip obeyed. When the Ethiopian eunuch came in a chariot, Philip reached out to him, as the Bible states: “Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

So Philip taught the Ethiopian the way Peter, Paul, and even the way the Savior Jesus Christ would have taught seekers. Keep skipping throughout the book of Acts and you will continue to see all believers doing the specific ministries they were gifted for — but all are openly, personally, and faithfully telling others the good news of Christ. These snapshots remind us of an unbelievable promise Jesus made that perhaps many have forgotten.

The Almost Unbelievable Expectation

Studies have shown that when teachers expect students to learn, they tend to learn better. When factories urge their workers to work as hard as they can, they produce more than they would have if they were given a quota to reach. When athletes train to their very best, they tend to overachieve rather than simply attain a specific skill. Even psychologists will maintain that patients who expect to become whole tend to experience restoration, while those who don't believe counseling helps don't find much healing. Researchers have even demonstrated that patients who are given placebo drugs, which are non-medicinal, often experience wellness for some ailments due to the fact that they "expected" the drug to work. This means that what is expected is related to what we see happen.

What does Jesus expect from "all believers"? Consider the words of Christ to His disciples:

"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:12, 13).

What is your response to this? Jesus said, "You will do the works I have been doing..." Are any of us doing the works Jesus did? Has anyone here healed someone with leprosy? Is there anyone who has fed thousands with a handful of grain, meal, or a piece of fruit? Has anyone stopped a tsunami or settled an earthquake by saying, "Peace, be still"? What about raising the dead? Have you stopped a funeral and spoken words to awaken the dead? All these miraculous things that Jesus did — do you actually do them today?

SERMON SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

How can Jesus hold such high expectations for His disciples? Is He kidding? Perhaps He wants us to try because it is good for us to struggle. Have you heard that before? “We can’t be perfect but we should try anyway because it will make us better.” Does God really do that? Does God tell us to do great things but expect less — for our own good? Does that even make sense to you? Do I tell my three-year-old son to change the tire on the car? Absolutely not. Surely God does not ask us to aim for great things while knowing we can’t achieve them.

It can’t be that way. Because we would have to take everything Jesus commanded before and assume He doesn’t really mean it. I can’t imagine doing that, can you? No. So we must take Jesus at His word, but His words can be hard to take sometimes, can’t they?

It gets even more troubling if you are brave enough to read on. Read the next sentence in John 14:12 where Jesus says: “Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, **and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.**”

Greater things? Alright, Jesus has either lost His mind or we have lost ours by not paying attention to His plan. What do you think? Since we know Jesus does not lie, trick, or over exaggerate His expectations of us, then we must consider the reality that we may have missed something. Is it possible that we have missed a button?

We are not talking about some awful heresy, but a simple misplaced priority that gets more and more attention over time. We began to see church pastors and other leaders with respect, but that respect turned into dependence, and that dependence turned into apathy. As a church, we grow by leaps and bounds when the laity — every believer — goes out with the promise that Christ dwells in them and gives salvation to the world.

When two students, James and Kendra, prayed for God to open the doors for them to witness to others at the public university they attended, they fully expected God to answer. Each day they would pray specifically: “Dear God, introduce me to someone today that

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

I would not otherwise meet unless I prayed this prayer. I'm looking forward to telling someone the good news about You today. Help me to see them and not fail to reach out boldly with your love."

Expecting opportunities opened their eyes in ways they would never have seen. James and Kendra would testify today, "God has never disappointed us." They started a small group Bible study, which turned into a collegiate prayer meeting and has blossomed into a collegiate ministry office on campus, which continues to be an epicenter for gospel ministry there. Expect great things — see a great God at work in you.

When Jesus told the disciples He expected them to do greater things, He meant that when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, His church would be filled with the Spirit — all believers, everyone! Does Jesus need people to heal those who have leprosy or to stop the winds and the waves? Does He really need us to multiply bread and fish? And what good would it do to raise someone from the dead on this side of the second coming of Jesus? They would just die again. Some would call the resurrection a sham. Others would be frightened of some satanic conspiracy, and still others would be inspired for a time, but get over it after a while.

No. The most amazing miracle of all is when one believer — who has not seen Jesus — believes in Him and tells someone who is lost about the good news of Christ. That is the greatest miracle! Peter said to those who, like us today, did not see Jesus in person: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8). This is what it means to have Jesus dwelling in you to do great things.

Why did this equipping come at Pentecost? Before Jesus ascended to heaven He was in a human body — He could only be in one place at one time. Get this: When He went to heaven and He came back to us in the Holy Spirit, He came to every believer. It is still Jesus talking to the demoniac — but through you. It is still Jesus feeding the multitudes, but through you. It is still Jesus healing the sick and teaching others about heaven, but through

SERMON SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

you, all of you. Jesus multiplied Himself by the number of His disciples, which caused the world to get turned upside down. So, are you ready to say “yes” to God’s plan to reach the world through you?

Responding to the Call to Equip All Believers

First, we must **SEE** the condition of the mission. The condition of the church is much like it was when Jesus saw the crowds of people and declared: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37, 38). But there is another condition in Jesus’ expectations. When He said, “If anyone believes,” Jesus made the whole promise conditional. We must believe. “If” is a conditional word.

What do you say? Are you willing to say “Yes, I believe” and “Yes, I will obey”? It is time. We need more laborers! Not harder working landowners! We need more who are willing and able to work, give, serve, spend, lift, labor, share, preach, listen, love, learn, pray, plan, heal, visit, feed, care, sing, hug, hope, instruct, encourage, forgive, praise, persevere, wait, write, suffer, struggle, fight, build, search, study, think... For every believer there is a witness to be given. E.M. Bounds once said:

“We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man (*or woman*) or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God's method... What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use.”

Second, we must embrace the promise of the mission. What does it mean to embrace a promise? Many of you have done what is called a trust fall. It is where you stand on a platform with your back facing a line of people below you who promise to catch you. It is

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

amazing to watch this because you will notice all kinds of approaches to falling. In every case, however, there is a place where the person falling leans across a tipping point where they cannot turn back or stop. Once they lean past a certain point, gravity takes over — this tipping point is what makes it a trust fall. You mentally and physically commit without knowing the result or seeing the promise fulfilled until after you cannot turn back. In every case there is someone who struggles to believe the promise is true.

God makes promises to empower and equip everyone who believes in Him. Paul declares:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to **equip his people** for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–13).

Are you ready to tip back and fall into the promise that you will be equipped and deployed? Even though some of you are gifted in ways I am not and others are blessed with gifts that you are not — we are all equipped. So the question comes back to the condition: “*If you believe...*” Do you believe?

And the next step is: Will you embrace the promise?

Jesus explained to the would-be-disciple Nathanael:

“You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man” (John 1:50–51).

Throughout the Bible Jesus offers a promise that those who believe and are equipped will do greater things.

In Matthew, Jesus promises His disciples, “**You will** be salt. **You will** be light. **You will** be a cup of cool water.”

S E R M O N S E V E N : E Q U I P P E D F O R M I N I S T R Y

For those who seek — “**you will** find” (Matthew 7:7).

“Thus, by their fruit **you will** recognize them” (Matthew 7:20).

In Matthew 10:19, Jesus declares to those who worry about whether they know enough, “Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time **you will** be given what to say.”

Just take your busy, heavy, burdened-filled life and believe in Him — hand your life to Him and He promises that “**You will** find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

When we completely sell out to God, He promises that “**you will** have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21).

The disciples believed but were afraid, and Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid; from now on **you will** fish for people” (Luke 5:10).

In Luke 6:21 Jesus promises those who hunger now: “**You will** be satisfied.”
For those who weep now, “**You will** laugh again.”

And when we step out of our comfort zone and love our enemies, Jesus promises that it will be unmistakable that “**You will** be children of the Most High” (Luke 6:35).

So be faithful to obey God’s law and God promises in Luke 10:28, “**You will** live.”

In Luke 21:19, Jesus simply states: “Stand firm, and **you will** win life.”

In John 13:7, Jesus assures all who believe that even though everything around you is so confusing, “**You will** understand.”

And to the big questions in life like, “Who is God?” Jesus claims, “If you really know me, **you will** know my Father as well” (John 14:7).

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

If we remain with Christ He promises that, “**You will** bear much fruit” (John 15:5).

In John 16:22, while the world loses hope at death, Jesus declares, “Even though you grieve...**you will** rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

And lastly, Jesus’ final words on earth before Pentecost offer the same promise:

“But **you will** receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will** be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The promise is for you! You will do even greater things. Why? Because when Christ is in all believers at once — all of the promises are true, all the time, in all the world!

What do you say today? Do you believe? Will you take the plunge into ministry as a committed believer?

Let’s pray:

“Holy Father in heaven, we ask for the promise of the Holy Spirit to do in us what you planned long ago. Forgive us for forgetting — or maybe we should say: Forgive us for getting — getting gifts and not giving. For getting rich in your Word and not sharing. For getting hope and not proclaiming. For getting your love and loving only those who are easy to love. For getting redeemed from sin and failing to redeem the time we have to invite others to receive your mercy. Forgive us for getting clear about who we think you are and forgetting who we are. Forgive us getting the honor of being made your ambassadors of grace and forgetting to go on your behalf.

Pour out your gifts on each believer here today, we pray. And equip us for ministry in our special area of giftedness. But moreover Lord, grant us the courage to believe the promise is true for us, and enable us to go and bear witness of the good news about You, we pray.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Sabbath

Dear Loving Father, you have touched my life in special ways during the last six weeks. I continue seeking an even closer walk with you. Help me know you more. I open my heart to you. Help me understand more of what you have for me. Use me to touch someone else around me with your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction

We have spent the last six weeks seeking a closer walk with God. This week we will discover that when we walk with God we are immediately called to and equipped for ministry. Christian discipleship has both a vertical and horizontal focus. It never has a self-centered focus.

The inward focus of our relationship with God is really a vertical focus. We look to God to discover who we are. We seek to grow in our relationship with Him as well as our information about Him. A natural extension of that growth leads to an outward focus — our calling to ministry. This calling is part of our discipleship. Our continued growth with God is dependent upon our involvement in the ministry to which He calls us.

Our gifts will be different. Each of us has a different role to play. But each of us is equally important and needed. Every part of the body has a unique function to fulfill. God has designed His Church with us in mind. Best of all, He empowers our gifts and ministry with His presence. His promise to be with us came in the context of His commission to “Go . . . and make disciples.”

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Spiritual Practices — Scripture Memorization

Throughout the last six weeks we have been exploring different spiritual practices. These spiritual skills help open our lives to God's presence. They become habits that give God room to transform us.

We began memorizing biblical verses with our very first week of this study. Now we want to explore the importance of this Spiritual Practice and a way of making it more effective.

Scripture memorization is one of the most powerful tools for shaping the mind. The Psalmist stated: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11, NIV). God's Word is powerful. It can change our lives. Memorizing Scripture is one of the key tools for putting that power to work.

Regularly memorizing biblical passages has a number of benefits for our spiritual journey. These include:

- Saturating the mind with God's Word.
- Providing more contact points for the Holy Spirit to work in our minds.
- Building new thought patterns in the brain. As we memorize Scripture, new thought patterns develop and grow.
- Connecting us with God. Memorized Scripture provides us with a solid foundation for our relationship with God.

Because of how the mind works, it is helpful to have a memorization system. The following pointers are part of a systematic way of memorizing Scripture:

- Choose a Bible version to use as your regular version for memorization in order to reinforce the memory and avoid confusion. It is better if you stay with the same version for all your memorization.

SESSION SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

- Select the passage you wish to memorize. Choose a verse that has a special meaning to you or that has helped you in your relationship with God.
- Write out the passage on a card and carry it with you. Repeat the passage several times throughout the day to memorize it.
- Seek to be word perfect each time you repeat the passage. This will help you in transferring the passage to your long-term memory.
- Meditate on the passage as a way to internalize it. This will help make memorizing easier, and it will help make it more meaningful to your daily life.
- Review the passage the next day, then two days later, a week after that, and finally two weeks later. This review process will transfer the passage to your long-term memory.
- Use the passage in your ministry. This reinforces the memory process and makes the Bible passage useful in helping others.

Memorizing is more difficult for some of us than for others. However, as we persist, we will discover that with practice it will become easier. The results in transformed lives are well worth the effort. Our lives will be changed, and God will use us to help change others.

List below what you want to accomplish in your spiritual journey this week. Claim God's presence and power to help make this happen.

Sunday

Dear Lord, Help me with your presence throughout this day. Help me understand that you have a purpose for my life. Help me recognize who I am because of you. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today's Objective

Our objective for today's study is to discover who we are within the "Body of Christ." We have an exciting new identity. We have a dynamic new role as vital parts of God's Church.



Scriptural Focus

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

Our weekly focus verse will help guide our study. Review it before and after you begin and be sure to pick a version that is most meaningful to you.



Self-Examination

- How would you define your life purpose?

SESSION SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

- How does your calling to declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness inform your life purpose?

- If there was one thing you could accomplish for God, what would it be?



Read and Reflect

Read Luke 10:1–17

Reflect on this story of Jesus sending His disciples out to do ministry. Imagine that you were one of those disciples. What do you think your experience would have been? How would you have felt when you returned to Jesus?

Read 1 Peter 2:4–10

- Compare this passage with Exodus 19:6. What does it mean for us to be a “holy priesthood” or a “royal priesthood”? How can we as priests declare God’s praises?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20

- What does it mean to be God’s ambassador?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Dear God, Help me to recognize who I am in Christ. Help me to live this day to your honor and praise. Help me to understand that you have called me to active ministry just as truly as you did your other disciples long ago. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Monday

Loving Father, I come to you today to open my life to you. Teach me what it means to walk with you. Help me hear your call to ministry. Help me discover where you want me to minister today. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today's Objective

We are called to ministry. Today we want to study Jesus' call to His first disciples to discover insights that will help us in our own ministries.



Self-Examination

- What steps are you taking to discover Christ's calling for your life?

- What do you think it meant that Jesus "called to Him those He wanted"? How does this enlighten your journey of discipleship?

SESSION SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

- How does the focus of Jesus' ministry on earth inform your ministry to others?



Read and Reflect

Now it is time to turn to Scripture in order to understand our calling to ministry. Pray that God will give you a vision of what you can do in His name.

Read Mark 3:13–15

- According to this passage, what reasons does this passage tell us Jesus had in appointing twelve disciples?

- What does this passage in Mark 3:13–15 tell us about the importance of ministry as part of discipleship?

Read Luke 4:16–21

- What can we learn for our ministry from the focus of Jesus' ministry?



STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Read John 14:1–14

- What does this passage tell us about ministry and its source? In what ways might we be able to “do even greater things” than Jesus did during His ministry?

Dear Lord and Father, Help me to understand that I am called to ministry. Help me see someone around me today to whom I can minister in your name. Walk with me through this day and transform it with your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday

Dear God, Open my mind and heart today to hear your Word. Help me believe and understand that you have gifted me for ministry. Open my eyes that I might know how to serve you. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today's Objective

Our purpose today is to explore the fact that we are each gifted for ministry. God gives us spiritual gifts to be used in building up the “Body of Christ.”

SESSION SEVEN: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY



Self-Examination

- Who is influential in your life? Do you have someone who you consider to be a mentor? Why is this important?

- Where do you see yourself fitting in to the ministries of your church? Are there needs in your community that are not being met?

- What steps can you take to further utilize and develop your gifts and talents?



Read and Reflect

Scripture provides us room to grow with God. Let's open the Bible and explore our giftedness for ministry.

Read Romans 12:1–8

- What do these verses tell us about ministry and how God equips us for ministry?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11

- What do these verses tell us about the purpose of our spiritual gifts and who determines what gifts we have?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–26

- What are the implications of this passage for our ministries?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27–31

- Reflect on these verses and use them as a starting point for summarizing what you have learned today about your giftedness for ministry.

Dear Lord, you have gifted me for ministry. Yet I don't always know what my gifts are or how to use them. Give me wisdom to understand. Grant me strength to serve. Walk with me through this day and transform it with your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday

Loving God, You have called me to follow you as your disciple. Use this time to shape my heart. Draw me closer to you. Help me serve you during this day. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today's Objective

Our purpose today is to better understand the spiritual gifts God gives to His Church. We want to explore the purpose of leadership gifts within the Body of Christ.



Self-Examination

- What does leadership mean to the secular world? How is this different from the Christian perspective?

- What is your response to the mercy God has shown you?

- How does Christ's willingness to serve inform your life?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

Once more it is time to open our Bibles. We want to study what the Scripture tells us about the role of leadership gifts within the “Body of Christ.”

Read Acts 6:1–7

- What does this story tell us about the need for different ministries and their function within the Church?

Read Ephesians 4:7–16

- What do these verses tell us about the role of the pastor?

- What is the purpose of the service given by God’s people in using their gifts? What will be the results?

Almighty God, It is amazing to think that you want to use me in your Church. I am excited to think about the gifts you have given me for ministry. Help me identify and use them. Walk with me through this day. Help me be open to your presence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Thursday

Dear God, Help me to know your love more today. Help me to love you more today. Teach me to love others around me. Open my heart that I might know Jesus today in a deeper way than ever before. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today's Objective

Today we want to identify the purpose for all of our ministries. They really come back to one ultimate focus — making disciples — people who are passionately in love with Jesus Christ.



Self-Examination

- How are you living out the Gospel Commission daily? Weekly? Monthly? Yearly?

- The call to be a “living sacrifice” is the first result of recognizing what Christ has done for us. What does this look like in your life?

- What is the worldly implication of “servitude”? What does it mean to you?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

It is time to open God's Word once again. We want to study and reflect on God's purpose for ministry.

Read Matthew 24:1–14

- What do these verses tell us about the time in which we live? What does the last verse tell us?

Read Matthew 28:16–20

- How important do you think Jesus' final words to His disciples are and why?

- Notice verses 18 and 20. What do these two verses tell us about the context of the gospel commission? What do verses 18–20 tell us is the purpose of our call to ministry? What implications does this have for you?

Loving Lord, Help me remember that you have shared your presence with me for the purpose of helping others know and walk with you. Thank you for the privilege of ministry and for the promise of your power. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Friday

Dear Loving Father, The last seven weeks have been an exciting journey with you. Help me to realize that this is only a beginning. Help me to see that you want me to know you even better. Open my eyes today to the wonder of your love and what you want to do in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today's Objective

Our purpose today is to summarize our study of discipleship and ministry. We want to reflect on how God has fulfilled His promise that if we would seek Him, we would find Him.



Self-Examination

- What/who are you surrounding yourself with in order to encourage and continue your discipleship journey?

- What is your testimony? Have you shared it yet?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP



Read and Reflect

We want to continue our daily habit of turning to God's Word for study and reflection:

Read Matthew 12:15–21

- What do these verses tell us about Jesus and His ministry? What can we learn from this passage to help us in our own ministries?

Read Ephesians 3:14–21

- What can we learn from these verses about the foundation for any ministry?

- What is the result of fully knowing the love of God? (See verse 19.)

- What is God able to do for and through us? Who should get the glory?

Almighty God, We have come to the end of the Steps to Discipleship plan. Help me to know that this is not the end, but only the beginning. Help me to continue my daily time with you and your Word. Take my life. Help me walk with you as your disciple. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Application/Community Questions

- How has your daily time with God affected you and your life over the last seven weeks?

- What difference is it making in the way you live?

- Where have you experienced challenges in your discipleship walk during the past seven weeks?

- How is “what God has done for you” starting to impact your life?



STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- What gifts do you think God has given to you for ministry? What are some of the areas of special interest or concern that might be areas of potential ministry?

- How would you like to see God work in your life during the next few weeks?



The power of this process is in
God and His Word.

**plans for
the future**



gilbert cangy

Gilbert Cangy was born of missionary parents in the Seychelles Islands. He grew up in Mauritius with his six brothers and sisters and joined the Merchant Navy as a cadet officer after his high school years. Gilbert graduated from Avondale College in 1987 and pastored in the state of Victoria for six years before being called to be Youth Director in Sydney in 1993. In 1999, he was appointed as the Director for Youth Ministries for the South Pacific Division. In 2009, he asked for a change to pastor a local church in Sydney, from where he was called to be the General Conference Youth Director in 2010. Gilbert obtained a Masters in Youth Ministry from La Sierra University in 1997 and is currently working on a Doctoral program. His dream is to see youth take hold of the mission of the church and stand up as a global movement for Jesus to bring hope and meaning to our hopeless world.

SESSION EIGHT: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

We have come to the end of our *Steps to Discipleship* plan. And yet, this is not the end. Instead, it is really only the beginning of a lifestyle. Seven weeks ago we accepted the challenge to dedicate 30–45 minutes a day in searching for a closer walk with God. He heard our prayers. Our time with Him has enriched our daily lives. Isn't it time to follow this with a serious commitment to a discipleship lifestyle of daily living with Jesus? If this seven-week plan has made a difference in your life, why not make it a lifestyle?

There are four practical steps that will help you transition from a seven-week process to a discipleship lifestyle in strengthening your relationship with Christ.

Reaffirm Relationship

The first important step in this transition is to daily reaffirm your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Three key factors will strengthen this reaffirmation:

1. Daily choose to believe that Jesus is your Savior and that you have eternal life in Him.
2. Daily choose to accept Jesus as Lord of your life, inviting Him to guide and control each area of your life.
3. Daily choose to accept the reality of Jesus Christ dwelling in you by faith.

These three choices were the focus of weeks 2–4 in our *Steps to Discipleship* process. It might be good to go back over the material in the participant's manual for those three weeks as a way to review and strengthen those choices.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Daily Time With God

The second step in strengthening the transition to a discipleship lifestyle with Jesus is to continue the daily time with God in prayer and Bible study. This time with God is the primary source of your spiritual strength.

During the last seven weeks, you have developed the habit of daily time with God. This habit needs to be maintained and reinforced. If you do not set aside that daily time with God and build it into your schedule, you will lose the habit. Here are some practical suggestions for continuing this daily devotional time:

- Stick to your daily time with God. By now you have found that it is possible to have 30–45 minutes with God each day as part of your regular routine. Keep it up!
- Set personal goals for what you would like to accomplish or receive as a result of your daily devotional time. These can be as general or as detailed as you want to make them. Having a clear goal helps to reinforce the importance and value of your daily time with God. These goals can include knowledge, relationships, and areas of daily living.

Go back through the *Steps to Discipleship* material. Several individuals have commented that they were unable to go as deeply into each subject as they wanted to. Going back through the same material again will help deepen your understanding of these subjects. You also do not need to try to cover everything in seven weeks. What is important is having the daily time with God in prayer and in His Word. It is OK if you need to spend more than one day on a daily section.

SESSION EIGHT: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

- Develop a plan for your daily time with God. Without a plan, that time can deteriorate and lose its focus. (You will find a suggested process for developing your daily devotional plan on page 233 of this material.)
- Make an appointment to meet with God each day. If it is helpful, even write the time with God into your daily schedule or calendar.

Remember, the power of this process is in God and His Word. Our time with Him will reward us with the rich dividends of continuing transformation into His likeness.

Share Your Experience

The third practical step in helping transition to a discipleship lifestyle is to start sharing what you are receiving from God. Ask God to give you the courage to share. Then let it happen naturally. Here are some practical pointers:

- Write out a short testimony of what God is doing in your life. You may want to start with how the last seven weeks are making a difference in your relationship with Him. (See the suggested process for this personal testimony on page 238 of this material.)
- Ask God to lead you to people around you who need to hear about Him. Give Him permission to bring them into your life. Remember, He is the One who will give you wisdom as to what to share and how to do it.
- Identify specific people around you who do not know God or who might need to grow in their relationships with Him. Make a list of these individuals and begin praying specifically for them. Give God permission to bring them to you.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

- Share what God is doing for you. Remember, it is not your job to convert someone else. The Holy Spirit will do that in His time and place. But He wants to use you to lift up Jesus and make Him real. The best way to do that is through telling your personal story.

Sharing what God is doing in your life is a natural part of your spiritual growth process. I know it is scary. Trust God to help it happen in your life.

Put It to Work

The fourth practical step in making the transition from a seven week process to a discipleship lifestyle is to get to work. Identify your spiritual gifts. Find your ministry. Put it to work in your life. Here are some ideas which might be helpful:

- Accept the fact that God has called you to ministry. This ministry is part of your reason for being where you are. Believe in your calling.
- Identify your spiritual gifts. Look for natural talents that coincide with your sense of God's convictions and specific concerns He has placed on your mind. Talk this over with close friends around you. What potential do others see in you? Check with your pastor and take a Spiritual Gifts Inventory. Most important of all, make this an issue of prayer and listen to God. He will make your gifts clear. He never calls us to ministry without equipping us for that ministry.
- Look for opportunities of ministry in your church and community. How can you serve God with the gifts and calling He has given you?
- Start using your spiritual gifts. Put them to work. Use them to God's glory.

SESSION EIGHT: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Developing a Plan

Having a personal plan for your devotional life is a powerful tool for bringing meaning into that devotional life. A plan simply serves as a map to guide you in your progress and growth. This personal plan needs to have the following elements:

- Clear goals or purpose. If you don't know where you are going you will never get there.
- Specific time and place. Having the same time and place for your meeting with God helps make it easier to maintain a regular devotional life.
- Regular tools. Start with the Holy Habits that are easiest for you. Then expand to new skills and tools.

Here is a suggested worksheet to help you develop your devotional plan. Work through the questions and sections below to help you develop your plan.

Write Out Your Goals and Objectives for Your Devotional Life

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Write down the best place and time for your daily time with God:

Place:

Daily Time:

- List the Holy Spiritual Practices that are easiest and most meaningful to you: (During the last seven weeks we have explored the following Spiritual Practices: *Relational Bible Reading, Prayer, Letting go, Practicing the Presence, Journaling, Meditation, Scripture Memorization.*)

- Which Spiritual Practice would you like to integrate into your time with God during the next month?

- What are your favorite sections of Scripture?

SESSION EIGHT: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

- What new areas of Scripture would you like to explore? (If you are just starting your devotional life, begin with the Gospels in the New Testament and the Psalms in the Old Testament.)

- What areas of your life need to grow in your discipleship walk with God?

- What key Bible verses would you like memorize?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Weekly Devotional Worksheet

Use this worksheet to help you plan your time with God for the week

- What would you like to accomplish in your devotional time during this next week?

- What key passages or stories would you like to focus on during your time with God for this next week?

- What Spiritual Practice do you want to use throughout this next week?

- What areas of your life do you want to open to God's presence in a new way during this next week?

- Who or what are you praying for today?

- What key biblical passage did you focus on during today's time with God?

SESSION EIGHT: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

- How can the points in this passage apply to your life today?

- What specific verse from today's study stands out in your mind as a verse to memorize?

- Write the verse out on a card and follow the process we have used in the *Steps to Discipleship* plan. Or what verse are you reviewing today?

- Write down the days you will review this passage. Write these dates on the back of the memory verse card and use them to schedule your review process.

Next day review: _____

Review two days later: _____

Review one week later: _____

Review two weeks later: _____

- What specific prayer do you have for your discipleship walk with God today?

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

Preparing Share

As we now know, sharing is a vital part of our discipleship walk. This form is designed to help you prepare for and plan your sharing.

Preparing Your Personal Testimony

Use the following questions to write out your personal testimony.

Be as brief, simple, and concise as possible.

- What was your life like before you met Jesus?

- How did you come to know Jesus as your personal Savior?

- How is your life changing as you walk with God?

SESSION EIGHT: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

- What are you doing differently that helps you in your walk with God?

- Whom has God placed around you who does not know Him or is hungering for a deeper walk with Him?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

- When do you plan to start praying for each of these individuals?

Pray, asking God to give you courage to share and to open the door for you to share.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

BENEDICTION

MAY THE GOD OF LOVE WALK BESIDE YOU TODAY.

MAY JESUS, LORD OF LIFE, DWELL IN YOUR HEART TODAY.

MAY THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKE YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD REAL TODAY.

MAY GOD'S LOVE TRANSFORM YOUR RELATIONSHIPS TODAY.

MAY YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS GROW TODAY.

MAY YOUR LIFE GROW WITH GOD TODAY.