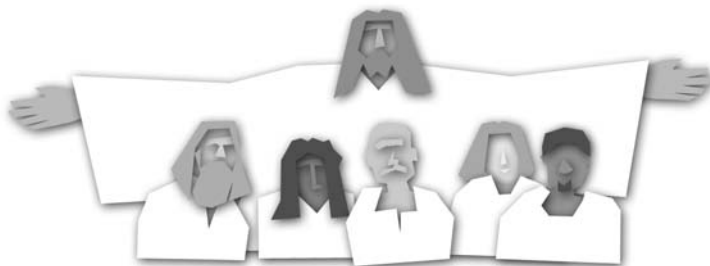


# A General Study of Discipleship<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 29

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 4:18–22; Matthew 10:24, 25; Mark 3:13, 14; Mark 8:34, 35; Luke 14:25, 26.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “One day Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee. There he saw two brothers. They were Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a net into the lake. They were fishermen. ‘Come. Follow me,’ Jesus said. ‘I will make you fishers of people.’” (Matthew 4:18, 19, NIV).

**DWIGHT E. STEVENSON TELLS A STORY** from the days of the Spanish explorers that teaches us something important about discipleship. “When Cortez, a famous explorer, unloaded soldiers upon the eastern coast of Mexico, he set fire to the ships.”—Adapted from Charles L. Wallis, editor, *Speakers’ Illustrations for Special Days* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975), page 25. As Cortez’s soldiers watched their ships go up in flames, they knew that they had no way of returning home to Spain. They had to be completely dedicated to the mission (task) of conquering (winning) the New World.

It is the same way for those who accept Christ and promise to be full-time disciples (followers). They are called to burn their ships in the harbor. There is no turning back. The motto<sup>2</sup> of this complete surrender (giving up one’s self completely) to Christ should be *Forward ever, backward never*.

**THIS WEEK’S LESSON IN BRIEF (SHORT):** What is discipleship? Who is a disciple? Can one volunteer (choose) to be a disciple? What can a person do to become a disciple? What are the important parts of discipleship?

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

2. motto—a short statement (sentence or phrase) used to express a principle (rule), a goal, or an ideal; a slogan.

**SUNDAY—DECEMBER 30****DISCIPLESHIP: HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL (Acts 11:26)**

The Bible gives us two ways to understand discipleship in Jesus' time. The first way is historical, and the second is personal.

Historical discipleship means the relationship between Christ, the Master Teacher, and His first followers. The first followers are known as disciples. Basically, discipleship means those who had a close and special relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As for the personal part, discipleship means the experience that happens between Christ, the converted (born again) believer, and the world. It also means the challenges (tests) a person faces as a Christian, and the growing life of faith. So, discipleship includes both what a Christian does for Christ and how he or she shows Christ to the world.

Here the two parts of discipleship, historical and personal, can work together. Modern disciples can learn from the experience of the historical disciples and the Master (Jesus).

**How does Matthew 4:18–22 help us better understand the meaning of discipleship? What did Jesus ask Peter and Andrew to do? Compare<sup>3</sup> the call to James and John with the call to Peter and Andrew. How does the answer given by these four disciples help**

3. compare—to show how two things are the same.

**us understand discipleship? What does John 1:40–42 teach us too?**



**“ ‘Come. Follow me,’ Jesus said. ‘I will make you fishers of people.’ ”  
(Matthew 4:19, NirV).**

**How does Acts 11:26 help us better understand the meaning of discipleship?**

**From what you have read so far, what is your understanding of discipleship? What personal lessons can you learn from the few verses we studied today?**

**MONDAY—DECEMBER 31****WHO IS A DISCIPLE?  
(Luke 14:25, 26)**

The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word *mathetes*. It means “learner,” “apprentice [student],” or “adherent [follower].” It refers to a person whose mind is set on a purpose. In the New Testament, the word is used mostly to describe Jesus’ disciples, especially in the Gospels. Here, disciple means “an apprentice or pupil connected to a teacher or movement. He or she is loyal to the instruction

[teaching] of the teacher or movement.”—Adapted from Paul J. Achtemeier, editor, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), page 222. So, a disciple is a pupil or learner who is connected to a master or teacher for the purpose of receiving instruction. There can be no disciple without a teacher.



**There can be no disciple without a teacher.**

**Discipleship involves willingness to follow commands and to follow up with actions. What does Jesus mean in Luke 14:25, 26? How are these words to be used in our daily life?**

If today’s Christians are disciples, who is their teacher? Who should today’s Christians be loyal to? Should it be the church? The doctrines (church beliefs)? A popular preacher who does a good job of teaching and instructing? Or Jesus? What truth does 1 Corinthians 1:10–17, especially verse 12, give to this subject?

**In the New Testament, a disciple was one whom Jesus taught. He was the one who promised to follow Jesus all the way. How well does Luke 14:26 describe your life? Are you truly a disciple of Christ? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your promise to the Lord?**

## TUESDAY—JANUARY 1

### HOW DOES ONE BECOME A DISCIPLE? (Mark 1:19, 20)

**What do Mark 1:19, 20 and Matthew 4:18, 19 tell us about how people became followers of Jesus?**

In most New Testament examples, disciples were chosen. They were called by the Lord, and they accepted the call. In other words, one does not make oneself a disciple. Instead, one becomes a disciple by accepting a call.

**What do the following verses say about this topic? Mark 2:13, 14; Mark 3:13, 14; Luke 5:8–11; John 1:43; Acts 9:4–6.**

These verses teach that the call to discipleship in the historical situation did not depend on a person. Instead, it depended on Jesus, the Master Teacher. Each disciple accepted a call from the Lord.



**A person does not make himself or herself a disciple. A person becomes a disciple by accepting a call.**

Even the acceptance of the call from Jesus did not fully depend on the person. This, too, required God's action. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me brings him" (John 6:44, NIV). Discipleship is a work of grace.<sup>4</sup> God opened the way for people to be saved. God Himself calls us. He encourages us to accept His calling. Can anyone doubt that salvation<sup>5</sup> is completely a work of grace?

**You are now reading these words. This, in itself, is an example of grace. This shows the work of God in your life. How have you accepted the call of the Master (Jesus)? How do your works reveal (show) the answer?**

### **WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 2**

#### **REQUIREMENTS<sup>6</sup> OF DISCIPLESHIP (Matthew 16:24, 25)**

We can learn a few conditions (rules) for discipleship from our study so far:

First, discipleship in the New Testament began with Jesus' call to people to follow Him. It was very important that people accepted His call. So, acceptance of His call to follow Him must have been a requirement of discipleship.

Second, acceptance must be dependent on something very important. Did those who received the call find something in Jesus they had not noticed in anyone else? If so, they used faith in Him to follow Him.

The third requirement of discipleship is a natural result of the first two. Deciding to follow Jesus and believing in Him must have led to a positive answer to His call to discipleship. Without a positive answer there could be no discipleship.

A positive answer and a desire to follow Jesus will not work if the disciple does not obey. Jesus invited each person He called to follow Him, and they did so quickly. This means that they were obedient and that obedience was a requirement for discipleship. No disobedient person can be a successful follower of Jesus.

Also, the disciples' acceptance of the call suggests a total break with the past. They left their jobs, their families, and their homes to follow Jesus. And they accepted the call to love these things less than they loved the Master. Being a disciple does not

4. grace—God's mercy to us.

5. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

6. requirements—something needed or demanded.

always mean that we have to leave all those things. It means only that we are willing to, if needed.

**What other requirements of discipleship can you find in Matthew 16:24, 25; Mark 8:34, 35; Luke 9:23? What is the basic message that Jesus is giving to us here? How can you use this principle (rule) in your own life?**

### THURSDAY—JANUARY 3

#### THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF DISCIPLESHIP (John 15:5)

Following the Master was a call to a life of community<sup>7</sup> and fellowship.<sup>8</sup> Jesus and the disciples must have had a close relationship. Such a relationship is a very important part of discipleship. Jesus' words in John 15:5 teach that " 'I am the vine. You are the branches' " (NIRV). The close connection between a vine and a branch is an important lesson for us to learn.

In John 15:9, Jesus compares their relationship with the relationship between Him and His Father. He also calls on His disciples to remain faithful in His love. This further supports the idea of our need to be closely connected to Him.

**From each of the verses below, what else can we learn about discipleship? Matthew 10:32, 33; Matthew 22:37–40; John 14:15.**



Disciples must be as closely connected to Jesus as a vine is to the branch so that they may bear fruit.

**What is your understanding of Matthew 10:24, 25 and Luke 6:40? What do they teach us about discipleship?**

Discipleship requires a clean break with the past. So, it must inspire a vision of the future. The disciple pictures himself or herself with the Master, learning from Him and becoming like Him. Mark 3:14 says that disciples were called to "be with Him" (NKJV). It is impossible (not possible) for a disciple not to want to be like Jesus. So, the disciple would also catch the vision of His kingdom and would want to be part of it.

**Do you sometimes feel discouraged (hopeless) in your walk with the Lord? Go back over the week's**

7. community—our need for one another.

8. fellowship—friendship; joining and taking part in a group; companionship.

**lesson. What can you find from the verses that can help you find encouragement and hope?**

### FRIDAY—JANUARY 4

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 319, 322, 323, 374, 484, 582, 584, 585, 592–594, 738, 749, 750, 910, 1036, 1037, 1083, 1084; Ellen G. White, “We Have Found the Messiah,” pages 132–143; “The Call by the Sea,” pages 244–251; “He Ordained Twelve,” page 292, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“No theory<sup>9</sup> of truth or claim to be a disciple will save any soul. We do not belong to Christ if we do not belong to Him fully. Some men become half-hearted in the Christian life. They are the ones who become feeble and changeable.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 50.

“Matthew ‘left all, rose up, and followed Him.’ He was not sorry about losing his tax business. He was not sorry about becoming poor and going through hardship. . . . The same was true of the other disciples called by Jesus.

“When Jesus called Peter and his companions to follow Him, they quickly left their boats and nets. Some of these disciples had friends who depended on them for support. But when they received Jesus’ invitation, they did not waste time by asking,

How shall I live, and support my family? They quickly obeyed the call.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 273.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What is the difference between discipleship and church membership? Why is it important for us to know the difference? In what ways can a person be a church member and not be a disciple?
- ❷ Read the second Ellen G. White quote above. On one level, the meaning is clear: We must be fully devoted (dedicated) to Jesus. It should not matter what the personal cost would be to us. At the same time, how can this principle (rule) be abused? In what ways could this idea be used by someone to avoid responsibilities that God gave him or her? How can we know the difference between being dedicated to God and obeying God for personal reasons?
- ❸ What does it mean to be fully dedicated to the Lord? What are the useful and positive ways that obedience and discipleship can be shown? Also, ask yourself this question: How does my faithfulness to the Lord help the lives of those around me?
- ❹ What does it mean to deny self and take up your cross? But would these words be meaningful to your local church? If so, how?

9. theory—an explanation of how or why something happens.