



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Living as a Disciple of Jesus

Following Jesus in Everyday Life

The Short Answer

A disciple of Jesus is someone who belongs to Jesus, learns from Jesus, follows Jesus, and increasingly becomes like Jesus. Discipleship does not earn salvation. Salvation is God's gift of grace received through faith in Jesus Christ. Discipleship is the lifelong response of someone who has been called to follow Him. Following Jesus touches every part of life.

**Matthew 4:18-22 · Luke 9:23-25 · John 8:31-32 · John 13:34-35
John 15:1-17 · Galatians 5:16-25 · Matthew 28:18-20**

Opening Memory Anchor

A disciple does not merely know about Jesus. A disciple learns to live with Jesus, follow Jesus, and become like Jesus.

PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

FOLLOWING JESUS

Jesus Still Says, “Follow Me”

When Jesus began His public ministry, He called ordinary people to follow Him. Fishermen. Tax collectors. Political zealots. Women and men. People with questions. People with failures. People who did not yet understand everything He was teaching.

Jesus did not wait until they had mastered theology or repaired every part of their lives. He called them to Himself: “**Follow Me.**”

The disciples traveled with Jesus, listened to Him, watched Him pray, saw how He treated people, witnessed His miracles, heard His teaching, misunderstood Him, asked questions, failed Him, were corrected by Him, and gradually learned what it meant to belong to Him.

After His resurrection, Jesus sent those disciples to make more disciples. That means discipleship did not end with the Twelve. It continues today.

This study explores what Scripture teaches about **living as a disciple of Jesus**. The goal is not to create another checklist Christians must complete to make God love them. The goal is to understand the life Jesus calls His followers to live—and the grace and power He provides for that life.

AN IMPORTANT FOUNDATION

DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH GRACE

Before discussing obedience, sacrifice, spiritual disciplines, fruitfulness, baptism, Communion, service, or making disciples, one truth must remain clear: **Discipleship is not a way to earn salvation.**

Ephesians 2:8–10 places the order beautifully. People are saved by grace through faith—not by works. Then those who have been saved are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Grace comes first. A changed life follows.

For fuller treatment of salvation and new life, see **Study #86 — What Is Salvation?**, **Study #87 — Repentance, Faith, and New Life**, and **Study #88 — What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?** Those studies explore the foundation more fully. This study begins with that foundation already established.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Discipleship is not working for salvation. It is learning to live from salvation.

1. WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

The basic idea of a disciple is a **learner or follower**. In the Gospels, Jesus' disciples did more than attend lessons. They followed Him. They listened to His teaching. They watched His life. They asked questions. They learned His ways. Eventually, they were sent to continue His mission. A disciple of Jesus is therefore more than someone who knows facts about Christianity. A disciple belongs to Jesus and is learning to live under His leadership.

2. WHAT WAS JESUS' BASIC INVITATION?

Again and again, it was simple: **Follow Me**. Read Matthew 4:18–22; Matthew 9:9; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:27–32; John 1:35–51. Jesus called people into relationship with Himself. Christian discipleship therefore begins not primarily with “Follow these rules.” It begins with “Follow Jesus.”

3. WHAT DID “FOLLOW ME” MEAN FOR THE FIRST DISCIPLES?

It meant reorganizing life around Jesus. Peter and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their fishing work with their father. Matthew left his tax booth. Their exact circumstances were different, but the central change was the same: **Jesus became their Teacher and Lord**. Following Him changed their direction.

4. DOES EVERY CHRISTIAN HAVE TO LEAVE A JOB OR HOME TO FOLLOW JESUS?

No. Jesus gave particular commands to particular people in particular circumstances. The New Testament includes faithful disciples who remained in homes, marriages, occupations, communities, and businesses. Following Jesus does not always mean leaving a location. It always means surrendering ultimate ownership of life to Him. A job can remain. A house can remain. Relationships can remain. But Jesus becomes Lord over all of them.

5. IS A DISCIPLE DIFFERENT FROM A CHRISTIAN?

The New Testament uses several descriptions for followers of Jesus, including disciples, believers, brothers and sisters, saints, servants, Christians, and members of Christ's body. Acts 11:26 says the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. These are not necessarily separate categories of people. The word **disciple** emphasizes the life of following and learning from Jesus.

6. DOES SOMEONE BECOME A DISCIPLE BY BEING GOOD ENOUGH?

No. Jesus called sinners. He ate with tax collectors and people considered morally disreputable. He did not call people because they had already made themselves righteous. Mark 2:17 records Jesus explaining that He came to call sinners. Discipleship begins with Jesus' grace, not human achievement.

7. DOES THAT MEAN OBEDIENCE DOESN'T MATTER?

No. Grace and obedience are not enemies. Jesus repeatedly connects loving Him with obeying Him. Read John 14:15, 21–24. Obedience does not purchase Jesus' love. Obedience grows from trusting and loving Him.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Grace is not permission to ignore Jesus. Grace makes following Jesus possible.

8. WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY “DENY YOURSELF”?

Read Luke 9:23–25. Jesus says anyone who wants to follow Him must deny himself or herself, take up the cross daily, and follow Him. Self-denial does not mean believing that a person has no value. Nor does it mean neglecting legitimate needs. It means surrendering the claim: “**My life belongs entirely to me.**” The disciple increasingly learns to ask, “What does Jesus want?” rather than simply, “What do I want?”

9. WHAT DOES “TAKE UP YOUR CROSS” MEAN?

Today, people sometimes call any inconvenience “a cross to bear.” Jesus' original hearers would have heard something far more serious. The cross was an instrument of Roman execution. Jesus was calling His followers to a loyalty so deep that even suffering, rejection, loss, or death could not ultimately replace Him as Lord. For most disciples, this does not mean literal martyrdom. But discipleship always involves surrender.

10. DOES FOLLOWING JESUS MEAN HATING YOUR FAMILY?

Jesus uses shocking language in Luke 14:26 about “hating” father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters, and even one's own life. Jesus is not commanding cruelty toward family. That would contradict His teaching about loving others and honoring parents. Matthew 10:37 helps clarify the comparison: anyone who loves father or mother **more than Jesus** is not worthy of Him. Jesus is demanding supreme allegiance. Even the deepest human relationship cannot take His place.

11. WHY DOES JESUS SAY TO “COUNT THE COST”?

Read Luke 14:25–33. Jesus uses illustrations of building a tower and a king considering war. His point is serious: do not pretend following Jesus is merely adding a religious activity to an otherwise unchanged life. Jesus deserves more than casual attachment. Discipleship has a cost. But Scripture also teaches that what is gained in Christ is infinitely greater than what is surrendered.

12. DOES JESUS REALLY EXPECT TO COME BEFORE EVERYTHING ELSE?

Yes. That sounds radical because it is. Jesus claims the allegiance that Scripture says belongs to God. But putting Jesus first does not mean caring less about people. Following Jesus should actually teach a person to love others more faithfully. The difference is that no created person or thing occupies God's place.

13. WHAT DOES A DISCIPLE LEARN?

Everything Jesus teaches. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus tells His followers to teach new disciples to obey **everything He commanded**. That includes teachings about God, the Kingdom, love, forgiveness, holiness, money, prayer, sexuality, relationships, enemies, justice, humility, service, truth, faith, repentance, and eternal life. Discipleship is whole-life learning.

14. WHY IS SCRIPTURE SO IMPORTANT TO DISCIPLESHIP?

Because disciples need to know the One they are following. Jesus continually appealed to Scripture. After His resurrection, Luke 24 describes Him explaining how the Scriptures pointed toward God's redemptive purposes fulfilled in Him. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 describes Scripture as useful for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. A disciple cannot faithfully follow a Jesus invented from personal preferences. Scripture continually brings the disciple back to the real Jesus.

15. HOW SHOULD A DISCIPLE READ THE BIBLE?

Not merely to finish chapters. Read to know God. Ask: What does this passage actually say? What did it mean in its context? What does it reveal about God? How does it fit within the larger biblical story? Does it reveal something to believe, obey, confess, trust, or remember? How does this passage connect naturally to Jesus and the Gospel? The goal is not merely information. It is faithful formation.

16. WHAT IF SOMEONE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE VERY WELL YET?

Keep reading. The disciples themselves frequently misunderstood Jesus. Understanding grows over time. Helpful practices include reading whole sections rather than isolated verses, comparing related passages, using a readable translation, asking questions, learning historical context, studying with mature believers, and praying for wisdom. Confusion is not failure. It can become an invitation to deeper study.

17. WHY IS PRAYER ESSENTIAL?

Because discipleship is relationship, not merely education. Jesus prayed regularly. Read Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 11:1–13; John 17. The disciples saw Jesus pray and asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Prayer brings praise, confession, gratitude, need, grief, questions, intercession, and surrender before God.

18. WHAT IF PRAYER FEELS AWKWARD?

Pray anyway. Jesus gave His disciples a pattern in Matthew 6:9–13. Prayer does not require impressive vocabulary. The Psalms show prayers of joy, fear, anger, grief, repentance, confusion, thanksgiving, and worship. A disciple learns prayer by praying.

19. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “ABIDE” IN JESUS?

Read John 15:1–17. Jesus uses the picture of a vine and branches. Branches cannot produce life independently from the vine. Jesus says, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” To abide means to remain, continue, or dwell. Christian fruitfulness comes from ongoing dependence on Christ.

MEMORY ANCHOR

A disciple does not produce spiritual life independently. The branch must remain connected to the Vine.

20. WHAT KIND OF “FRUIT” SHOULD A DISCIPLE PRODUCE?

The New Testament uses fruit imagery in several ways. Fruit may include Christlike character, obedience, love, good works, praise, generosity, Gospel ministry, and lives influenced toward Christ. Galatians 5:22–23 describes the **fruit of the Spirit**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Fruit grows from God's work within His people.

21. WHO ACTUALLY CHANGES A DISCIPLE?

God does. Christian growth involves real human choices and obedience, but transformation is not a self-improvement project. Read John 15:1–5; Romans 8:1–14; Galatians 5:16–25; Philippians 2:12–13; 2 Corinthians 3:18. The Holy Spirit works within believers to form Christlike character.

22. DOES THAT MEAN DISCIPLES DON'T HAVE TO MAKE AN EFFORT?

No. The New Testament holds dependence and effort together. Philippians 2:12–13 tells believers to work out what God is working within them. Spiritual effort does not compete with grace when that effort itself depends upon God's grace. A disciple practices obedience because God is at work.

23. WHAT IS REPENTANCE'S ROLE AFTER SOMEONE BECOMES A CHRISTIAN?

Repentance remains part of discipleship. Believers still recognize sin, confess it, turn from it, and return to God's ways. 1 John 1:8–9 warns believers against claiming to be without sin and points them toward confession. Repentance is not repeatedly becoming saved. It is part of learning to walk honestly with God.

24. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A DISCIPLE FAILS?

Look at Peter. He followed Jesus. He loved Jesus. He made bold promises. And then he denied Jesus three times. Peter's failure was serious. But it was not the end of Peter's story. John 21 shows the risen Jesus restoring him and again giving him responsibility. Christian discipleship is not the story of people who never fail. It is the story of people who repeatedly return to the faithful Savior.

25. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONVICTION AND CONDEMNATION?

The Holy Spirit exposes sin so that believers can repent and return to God. Condemnation tells a believer there is no hope. Romans 8:1 declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Biblical conviction is specific and leads toward repentance. Destructive shame often becomes vague and hopeless: “You failed, therefore you are worthless and should hide from God.” The Gospel says: bring sin into the light and return to Christ.

26. DOES A DISCIPLE HAVE TO BECOME PERFECT?

Not in this life. Christians are being transformed. Philippians 3:12–14 records Paul acknowledging that he had not already reached perfection, yet he continued pressing forward. Discipleship involves direction and growth. The goal is Christlikeness. The process continues throughout life.

MEMORY ANCHOR

A disciple is not someone who never stumbles. A disciple keeps returning to Jesus and learning to walk with Him.

27. WHY DOES JESUS MAKE LOVE SUCH A BIG PART OF DISCIPLESHIP?

Because love reflects God's character. Read John 13:34–35. Jesus tells His disciples that people will recognize them by their love for one another. This does not mean truth is unimportant. Biblical love and biblical truth belong together. A disciple learns to love God, neighbors, fellow believers, strangers, vulnerable people, difficult people, and even enemies.

28. DOES LOVING PEOPLE MEAN APPROVING EVERYTHING THEY DO?

No. Jesus perfectly combines love and truth. Love does not require calling destructive behavior good. Neither does truth justify cruelty. Ephesians 4:15 speaks of **speaking the truth in love**. Christian discipleship refuses the false choice between truth without love and love without truth.

29. WHY DOES FORGIVENESS MATTER?

Because forgiven people are called to become forgiving people. Read Matthew 18:21–35; Ephesians 4:31–32; Colossians 3:12–13. Forgiveness does not mean pretending harm never happened, calling evil acceptable, refusing appropriate consequences, restoring trust immediately, or remaining in unsafe situations. Forgiveness releases personal vengeance to God while pursuing truth, wisdom, and appropriate justice.

30. DOES A DISCIPLE NEED OTHER CHRISTIANS?

Yes. Jesus did not form isolated disciples. He formed a community. Acts 2:42 describes believers devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. The New Testament's many “one another” commands assume believers live in relationship: encourage one another, serve one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, pray for one another, and love one another.

31. WHY DO DISCIPLES WORSHIP TOGETHER?

Because God's people are called not only to know one another, but to gather around God. The early Church gathered for teaching, prayer, fellowship, Communion, praise, and mutual encouragement. Read Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 5:18–20; Colossians 3:16–17; Hebrews 10:24–25. Corporate worship may include Scripture reading, preaching and teaching, singing, prayer, confession, Communion, baptism, giving, testimony, and mutual encouragement. Different churches organize gathered worship differently. The central purpose remains the same: **God's people gather to honor God, hear His Word, remember the Gospel, and encourage one another in faith.**

32. DOES CHURCH ATTENDANCE ALONE MAKE SOMEONE A DISCIPLE?

No. A person can sit in a church building without actively following Jesus. But discipleship was never designed as a solitary life either. Healthy Christian community provides worship, teaching, correction, encouragement, service, accountability, Communion, and opportunities to love.

33. WHY DOES JESUS EMPHASIZE SERVING?

Because Jesus Himself serves. Read Mark 10:35–45 and John 13:1–17. When the disciples argue about greatness, Jesus overturns their assumptions. Kingdom greatness is not measured primarily by status. Jesus says He came not to be served but to serve and give His life. Disciples learn greatness from their King.

34. DOES EVERY DISCIPLE HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE?

Yes. 1 Corinthians 12 compares the Church to a body with many parts. No member possesses every gift. No faithful member is unnecessary. God gives different abilities and opportunities for the good of others. Discipleship asks not only, “What am I receiving?” but also, “How can what God has given be used to serve?”

35. WHAT DOES FOLLOWING JESUS HAVE TO DO WITH MONEY?

A great deal. Jesus spoke frequently about possessions because money reveals trust, priorities, contentment, generosity, and allegiance. Read Matthew 6:19–34; Luke 12:13–34; Luke 19:1–10; 1 Timothy 6:6–19. Money is a tool. It is a terrible god. Disciples learn to hold possessions with gratitude and open hands.

36. DOES JESUS REQUIRE EVERY DISCIPLE TO SELL EVERYTHING?

Jesus commanded a wealthy ruler in Mark 10:17–31 to sell what he owned and follow Him. Elsewhere, faithful believers still possessed homes and resources. The specific command exposes that man's particular bondage. But the principle reaches everyone: **Nothing may be held above Jesus**. A disciple should be willing to surrender anything Christ rightfully asks.

37. WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

Spiritual disciplines are practices that help believers intentionally make room to seek God and respond to His grace. Examples include Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, worship, solitude, silence, confession, generosity, service, fellowship, and rhythms of rest. These practices do not earn God's love. They create intentional opportunities to attend to God.

38. DID JESUS FAST?

Yes. Matthew 4 records Jesus fasting before His wilderness temptation. Matthew 6:16–18 assumes His followers may fast and warns against doing it to impress others. Biblical fasting usually involves voluntarily going without food for a period while intentionally seeking God. Fasting is not a hunger strike designed to force God to act. It is a practice of dependence, prayer, humility, and focused attention.

39. WHAT ABOUT SOLITUDE AND REST?

Jesus regularly withdrew from crowds to pray. Read Luke 5:15–16. He also invited exhausted disciples to come away and rest in Mark 6:31. Discipleship is not endless religious productivity. Human limitations are part of being creatures. Rest can become an act of trust: **God remains God while a disciple sleeps**.

40. WHAT ROLE DOES BAPTISM PLAY IN DISCIPLESHIP?

Baptism is one of the practices Jesus explicitly gave His disciples. Read Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 2:37–41; Romans 6:1–4. In the New Testament, baptism is closely connected with responding to the Gospel and publicly identifying with Jesus and His people. Baptism points toward union with Christ in His death and resurrection and marks visible identification with the Christian community. Faithful Christian traditions differ about who should be baptized, the proper mode of baptism, how baptism relates to regeneration and covenant membership, and whether baptism is understood as ordinarily necessary for salvation or as an act of obedience that follows saving faith. Those differences deserve fuller treatment elsewhere. The central point here is simple: **Jesus commanded baptism as part of making disciples**.

41. WHY DO DISCIPLES SHARE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Jesus gave His followers a meal by which they remember Him. Read Matthew 26:26–29; Luke 22:14–20; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17; 11:23–26. The Lord's Supper—also called **Communion** or the **Eucharist** in different Christian traditions—directs believers toward Christ's body given for them, His blood shed for the new covenant, fellowship with Christ and His people, examination of one's life, gratitude, unity, proclamation of Christ's death, and hope in His return. Christians differ over exactly how Christ is present in Communion and how frequently it should be celebrated. But all Christian traditions recognize that the meal is rooted in Jesus' command and centers the Church again on His saving work.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Baptism identifies disciples with Jesus. Communion repeatedly brings disciples back to Jesus.

42. HOW DO DISCIPLES MAKE DECISIONS?

Scripture does not promise a personalized verse or supernatural sign for every decision. Disciples learn wisdom through Scripture, prayer, God's revealed moral will, wise counsel, circumstances, growing discernment, and dependence on the Spirit. Where Scripture gives a command, obedience is not optional. Where Scripture permits several faithful choices, wisdom may be required.

43. DOES FOLLOWING JESUS MEAN LIFE WILL GO WELL?

Not necessarily. Jesus never promised His followers an easy life. He warned them about rejection and suffering. Read John 15:18–21; John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12–16. Christian faith does not guarantee wealth, health, popularity, or protection from tragedy. Jesus promises something greater: **His presence**.

44. IS EVERY HARDSHIP “PERSECUTION”?

No. Christians may suffer because of ordinary life in a fallen world, poor decisions, another person's sin, natural consequences, injustice, illness, conflict, or faithfulness to Christ. Not every criticism of a Christian is persecution. Sometimes correction is deserved. Biblical humility asks what is actually happening rather than automatically assuming opposition proves faithfulness.

45. DOES “TAKING UP YOUR CROSS” MEAN STAYING IN AN ABUSIVE SITUATION?

No. Jesus' call to self-denial must never be used to protect abusers or require victims to remain in danger. Scripture condemns violence, exploitation, oppression, and abusive leadership. Seeking safety, reporting criminal behavior, establishing boundaries, or pursuing appropriate justice is not automatically a failure of forgiveness or discipleship.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD

No person has biblical authority to use “submit,” “forgive,” “deny yourself,” or “take up your cross” as tools to coerce someone into tolerating abuse. Jesus calls disciples to Himself. He does not authorize people to become someone else's unquestionable master.

46. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WITNESS FOR JESUS?

A witness tells what is true about Jesus. Acts 1:8 connects the Holy Spirit's power with Jesus' followers becoming witnesses. Witness includes both words and life. A disciple should increasingly be able to explain who Jesus is, what sin is, what Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection, what grace means, and why repentance and faith matter.

47. DO ALL DISCIPLES HAVE TO BE EVANGELISTS?

Not everyone has the same spiritual gift or ministry role. But all Christians participate in Jesus' mission. 1 Peter 3:15 tells believers to be ready to explain the hope within them, doing so with gentleness and respect. Some preach publicly. Some teach. Some serve. Some invite. Some encourage. Some disciple children. Some build relationships across cultures. The mission belongs to the whole Church.

48. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “MAKE DISCIPLES”?

Read Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus does not merely say, “Get people to make a decision.” He commands His followers to **make disciples**. That includes going, baptizing, teaching, and helping people learn obedience to Jesus. Evangelism matters enormously. But the Great Commission continues beyond a person's first response to the Gospel. The goal is lifelong followers of Jesus.

49. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING DISCIPLES?

The whole Church. Pastors and missionaries have important roles, but Jesus did not design disciple-making as a professional ministry reserved for specialists. Parents disciple children. Older believers encourage younger believers. Friends study Scripture together. Christians teach, mentor, serve, pray, model faithfulness, share the Gospel, and help one another follow Jesus.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Disciples follow Jesus—and help others follow Jesus.

PART ONE SUMMARY

A disciple is someone who belongs to Jesus and learns to follow Him. Discipleship begins with grace. It involves abiding in Christ, learning Scripture, prayer, repentance, obedience, dependence on the Holy Spirit, love, worship, fellowship, baptism, Communion, service, generosity, spiritual disciplines, endurance, witness, and helping others follow Jesus.

A disciple will not do these things perfectly. The Christian life is not sustained by human determination alone. Jesus is the Vine. The Spirit produces fruit. Grace restores those who stumble. And Jesus continues to say: **“Follow Me.”**

PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF DISCIPLESHIP

READER NOTE

Some sections explore deeper theological questions about grace, obedience, spiritual formation, assurance, suffering, Church practices, and disciple-making. You do not need to master every theological distinction to understand the central biblical point: **Jesus calls His people to remain with Him, become like Him, and participate in His mission.**

50. WHERE DOES THE IDEA OF DISCIPLESHIP BEGIN IN THE BIBLICAL STORY?

The word “disciple” becomes especially prominent around Jesus, but the underlying pattern appears earlier. God calls people to know Him, trust Him, obey Him, walk in His ways, teach His words, and pass faith to future generations. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 commands Israel to love God wholeheartedly and teach His words diligently. Psalm 1 describes the blessed person meditating on God's instruction. The prophets repeatedly call God's people back to covenant faithfulness. Jesus brings this pattern into sharper focus by calling people to follow **Him personally**.

51. HOW WAS JESUS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TEACHERS?

First-century Judaism included teachers with students or disciples. But Jesus' authority is extraordinary. He does not merely invite students to study Torah under His interpretation. He repeatedly places Himself at the center of the call: Follow Me. Come to Me. Believe in Me. Abide in Me. Love Me. Jesus does not simply point away from Himself toward truth. He identifies Himself with the truth His disciples need. Read John 14:6.

52. WHY WERE THE TWELVE IMPORTANT?

Jesus chose twelve apostles in a way that naturally recalls Israel's twelve tribes. Read Mark 3:13–19 and Luke 6:12–16. The Twelve had a unique foundational role as eyewitnesses and authorized representatives of Jesus. Their role should not simply be duplicated by every later believer. But their discipleship still teaches important patterns: they were called to **be with Jesus** before being sent out. Relationship preceded mission.

53. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DISCIPLE AND AN APOSTLE?

The terms overlap but are not identical. A **disciple** is a learner or follower. An **apostle** is someone sent with a particular commission or authority. The Twelve were both disciples and apostles. The New Testament uses apostolic language in several ways, but the Twelve and Paul occupy a distinctive foundational role in the Church. Every Christian is called to discipleship. Not every Christian is an apostle in the foundational New Testament sense.

54. WHY DOES JESUS CONNECT DISCIPLESHIP WITH HIS WORD?

Read John 8:31–32. Jesus tells those who believed Him that continuing in His word identifies genuine discipleship. A disciple does not merely hear Jesus temporarily. A disciple remains under His teaching. This makes biblical literacy important. Without Scripture, Christians can easily reshape Jesus into someone who simply agrees with whatever they already believe. The Word corrects the disciple.

55. WHY DOES JESUS CONNECT DISCIPLESHIP WITH LOVE?

Read John 13:34–35. Jesus says love among His disciples will become a visible mark of their relationship to Him. Christian love is not sentimental niceness. Jesus' own love includes compassion, truth, sacrifice, patience, correction, service, forgiveness, and willingness to lay down His life. Discipleship makes Jesus' character increasingly visible through His people.

56. WHY DOES JESUS CONNECT DISCIPLESHIP WITH FRUIT?

Read John 15:1–17. Fruit demonstrates life. A branch does not become connected to the vine because it manufactures fruit. It bears fruit because it is connected. That order matters. Christian obedience should not be imagined as manufacturing spiritual life. It is evidence of God's life at work.

57. WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

Sanctification is the biblical and theological language Christians use for the believer's growth in holiness and increasing conformity to Christ. Scripture describes believers as already set apart for God while also calling them to ongoing growth. Read Romans 6; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8; Hebrews 10:10–14; 2 Corinthians 3:18. Christians agree that God's people are called toward holiness, but traditions describe the process differently. Reformed and many evangelical traditions usually emphasize **progressive sanctification** throughout the Christian life. Wesleyan traditions have historically spoken more strongly about **entire sanctification** or Christian perfection, while still affirming continued dependence upon grace. Catholic and Orthodox traditions often describe growth in holiness through participation in the life of the Church and God's grace, with Eastern Christianity frequently emphasizing **theosis** or participation in God's life by grace. These frameworks differ in important ways. The shared biblical center remains: **God is transforming His people toward Christlikeness.**

58. IS DISCIPLESHIP THE SAME THING AS SANCTIFICATION?

They strongly overlap, but the words emphasize somewhat different aspects. **Discipleship** emphasizes following and learning from Jesus. **Sanctification** emphasizes God's work of making believers holy and transforming their lives. Both point toward increasing Christlikeness. Neither should be reduced to behavior management.

59. HOW DO GRACE AND EFFORT WORK TOGETHER?

This is one of the most important tensions in discipleship. Paul can say, "I worked harder..." and immediately add that it was God's grace working through him. See 1 Corinthians 15:10. Philippians 2:12–13 similarly places human obedience alongside God's work within believers. Grace is not opposed to faithful effort. Grace is opposed to earning. A disciple practices because God is already at work.

60. CAN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES BECOME LEGALISTIC?

Yes. Any good practice can be distorted. Bible reading can become a scorecard. Prayer can become performance. Fasting can become pride. Church attendance can become self-righteousness. Giving can become a way to seek recognition. Jesus repeatedly warns against religious practices performed to be seen by others in Matthew 6. The solution is not abandoning spiritual practices. It is remembering their purpose.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Spiritual disciplines are tools for relationship and formation—not currency used to purchase God's favor.

61. WHAT ROLE DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT PLAY IN DISCIPLESHIP?

A central one. Jesus does not leave His followers to imitate Him through willpower. The Holy Spirit teaches, reminds believers of Jesus' words, convicts, gives power for witness, produces fruit, distributes gifts, helps believers pray, and transforms God's people. Read John 14–16; Acts 1:8; Romans 8; Galatians 5; 1 Corinthians 12. Christian discipleship is Spirit-empowered life.

62. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "WALK BY THE SPIRIT"?

Read Galatians 5:16–25. Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit means living in ongoing dependence upon and responsiveness to God's Spirit rather than allowing sinful desires to rule. This does not mean waiting passively for spiritual feelings. The Spirit leads believers toward what agrees with God's revealed character and Word.

63. HOW CAN SOMEONE KNOW WHETHER THEY ARE ACTUALLY GROWING?

Growth is often easier to see over months and years than days. Questions may include: Is repentance becoming quicker? Is love becoming deeper? Is pride being recognized more readily? Is forgiveness becoming possible where bitterness once ruled? Is Scripture shaping decisions? Is prayer becoming more honest? Is sin being resisted rather than comfortably defended? Is concern for others growing? Is Jesus becoming more precious? Fruit often grows slowly. Slow growth is still growth.

64. WHAT ABOUT A CHRISTIAN WHO STRUGGLES WITH THE SAME SIN REPEATEDLY?

Repeated struggle should be taken seriously. But repeated struggle is not identical to peaceful surrender to sin. A believer may fight the same temptation many times. The appropriate response is not, "This struggle proves there is no hope." Nor is it, "Grace means the sin doesn't matter." Bring sin into the light. Confess it. Seek accountability where helpful. Remove opportunities for temptation. Receive forgiveness. Continue following Jesus.

65. SHOULD CHRISTIANS CONSTANTLY QUESTION WHETHER THEY ARE REALLY SAVED?

No. Scripture contains both strong assurances and serious warnings. Those should not be played against one another. The New Testament calls believers to examine themselves, persevere, and take Jesus seriously. It also points believers toward Christ, God's promises, the Spirit's work, and the security found in Him. A struggling Christian should not be taught that every failure automatically proves salvation was unreal. Neither should someone be encouraged to find assurance in a verbal profession while deliberately rejecting Jesus' lordship without repentance. This study does not attempt to re-cover the full theology of salvation and assurance. For the foundation, return to **#86 — What Is Salvation?**, **#87 — Repentance, Faith, and New Life**, and **#88 — What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?** Peter failed badly. Thomas doubted. The disciples misunderstood. Jesus corrected them, restored them, taught them, and continued forming them.

MEMORY ANCHOR

The question is not “Have I followed Jesus perfectly?” but “Am I continuing to turn toward and follow Him?”

66. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH JESUS' STRONG WARNING PASSAGES?

Take them seriously. Passages such as Matthew 7:21–23, John 8:31, John 15, and other New Testament warnings confront empty profession, hypocrisy, unbelief, and false confidence. But warnings should be allowed to do what Scripture intends rather than being turned into tools for chronic spiritual terror. Warnings call people toward genuine faith, repentance, perseverance, and dependence upon Christ. They are not invitations to obsessive self-condemnation.

67. WHY DOES JESUS SOMETIMES MAKE DISCIPLESHIP SOUND SO DIFFICULT?

Because He refuses dishonest advertising. Jesus never markets discipleship as a path to comfort, popularity, or uninterrupted success. He speaks openly about sacrifice. Yet He also describes knowing Him as treasure. Read Matthew 13:44–46. The person who finds the treasure gives up everything else with joy because the treasure is worth more. Christian discipleship involves cost. It also involves incomparable gain.

68. WHAT DOES “LOSE YOUR LIFE TO SAVE IT” MEAN?

Read Mark 8:34–38. Jesus exposes the paradox of discipleship. A life built around preserving self-rule ultimately loses what it is trying to protect. A life surrendered to Jesus discovers true life. This is not a command to despise existence. It is an invitation to stop treating autonomous self-rule as life's highest good.

69. HOW SHOULD DISCIPLES THINK ABOUT SUFFERING?

Neither seek suffering for its own sake nor assume it means God has abandoned them. The New Testament recognizes suffering connected with living in a fallen world, persecution, faithful obedience, loving others, resisting sin, and sharing in Christ's mission. Suffering is not inherently holy. What matters is faithfulness within suffering.

70. CAN SUFFERING BE SPIRITUALLY MISUSED?

Yes. Christians have sometimes glorified avoidable suffering, told victims to remain silent, or treated endurance of abuse as evidence of holiness. That is a distortion. Jesus willingly suffered for redemption. His sacrifice does not authorize one human being to exploit another. Christian communities should protect vulnerable people, confront wrongdoing, pursue truth, and take legitimate allegations seriously.

71. WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP LOOK LIKE IN ORDINARY LIFE?

Usually less dramatic than people imagine. It may look like telling the truth when lying would be easier, being patient with a difficult person, working honestly, caring for family, refusing gossip, forgiving, keeping a promise, praying when discouraged, giving quietly, serving unnoticed, repenting after failure, opening Scripture again tomorrow, and choosing obedience when no one is watching. Most discipleship happens in ordinary faithfulness.

72. WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP HAVE TO DO WITH DIGITAL LIFE?

Digital life is still life under Jesus' lordship. Phones, social media, entertainment, news, games, and online communities can be useful tools. They can also shape attention, desires, speech, anger, comparison, and use of time. Biblical questions still apply. Read Philippians 4:8; Ephesians 5:15–16; 1 Corinthians 6:12; James 1:19–20. Ask: What is shaping thought most deeply? Does this encourage wisdom or constant distraction? Does online speech reflect truth, gentleness, and self-control? Are screens displacing prayer, sleep, relationships, service, or attention to God? Is technology serving a good purpose—or beginning to master the user? Scripture does not speak directly about smartphones. It gives enduring principles for attention, self-control, wisdom, speech, stewardship, and what shapes the heart.

73. DOES VOCATION MATTER TO DISCIPLESHIP?

Yes. Following Jesus is not limited to explicitly religious activity. Colossians 3:17 and 3:23–24 call believers to live and work in the Lord's name. A teacher, mechanic, farmer, caregiver, business owner, nurse, retiree, student, parent, tradesperson, artist, or office worker can follow Jesus within ordinary responsibilities. The question becomes: **How can this part of life come under Christ's lordship?**

74. WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP LOOK LIKE IN RELATIONSHIPS?

It means learning the relational ways of Jesus. That includes truthfulness, humility, patience, faithfulness, sexual integrity, forgiveness, hospitality, compassion, boundaries, reconciliation where possible, and love without manipulation. Relationships are one of the primary places where Christlike character becomes visible.

75. WHAT ABOUT ENEMIES?

Jesus gives one of His most difficult commands in Matthew 5:43–48: Love enemies. Pray for persecutors. This does not mean calling evil good. It means refusing to let another person's hatred determine the disciple's character. Romans 12:17–21 similarly tells believers not to repay evil for evil. Justice belongs to God. Christians may pursue legitimate justice while refusing personal vengeance.

76. WHY IS HUMILITY SO IMPORTANT?

Because disciples follow a humble King. Philippians 2:3–11 points believers toward Christ's self-giving humility. Humility does not mean pretending gifts do not exist or accepting mistreatment. It means no longer needing to make the self the center. Humility makes room to listen, learn, repent, serve, and honor others.

77. WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP HAVE TO DO WITH POWER?

Jesus transforms how His followers understand power. In Mark 10:42–45, Jesus contrasts worldly rulers who “lord it over” others with leadership among His disciples. Christian authority should serve. The greater the authority, the greater the responsibility. Leadership is never permission for domination.

LEADERSHIP SAFEGUARD

A Christian leader who demands unquestioning loyalty, suppresses legitimate questions, uses spiritual threats to control people, or treats accountability as rebellion is not modeling Jesus' teaching about leadership. Jesus remains the Lord of the Church.

78. WHY DOES COMMUNITY SOMETIMES MAKE DISCIPLESHIP HARDER?

Because Christian community contains imperfect people. Churches can disappoint. Believers can misunderstand one another. Leaders can fail. Conflict happens. The New Testament does not romanticize churches. Many New Testament letters were written precisely because churches had problems. Community becomes one of God's classrooms for patience, forgiveness, truth, service, humility, and love.

79. DOES UNITY MEAN CHRISTIANS MUST AGREE ABOUT EVERYTHING?

No. Romans 14 demonstrates believers disagreeing over some matters while remaining accountable to the same Lord. Not every disagreement is equally important. Some issues concern central Gospel truth. Others involve important but secondary doctrine. Others involve wisdom, conscience, culture, or preference. Maturity includes learning to distinguish them. Unity does not require pretending differences do not exist. It requires keeping Jesus at the center.

80. WHY IS MAKING DISCIPLES MORE THAN TRANSFERRING INFORMATION?

Because Jesus forms whole people. A person may know substantial theology while remaining proud, harsh, dishonest, or unloving. Knowledge matters. But discipleship seeks transformation. Paul describes ministry not merely as transmitting information but helping believers mature in Christ. Read Colossians 1:28–29.

81. WHAT DOES HEALTHY ONE-TO-ONE DISCIPLESHIP LOOK LIKE?

It may include reading Scripture together, praying, asking honest questions, discussing life, encouraging obedience, confessing struggles appropriately, sharing wisdom, serving together, and helping someone learn to study Scripture independently. The goal is not dependence upon the mentor. The goal is deeper dependence upon Jesus. A healthy disciple-maker eventually rejoices when another believer can open Scripture, seek God, exercise discernment, and help someone else grow.

82. CAN DISCIPLESHIP BECOME CONTROLLING?

Yes. Unhealthy discipleship may appear when a leader expects to make personal decisions for another adult, demands access to private information, claims special revelation to control choices, discourages outside relationships, or equates disagreement with rebellion against God. That is not the goal of biblical discipleship. Paul could say, “Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.” Christ remains the standard. The disciple-maker points beyond himself or herself.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Healthy discipleship produces greater dependence on Jesus—not unhealthy dependence on a human leader.

83. HOW DID JESUS MAKE DISCIPLES?

Jesus used many methods. He taught crowds, invested deeply in the Twelve, spent additional time with Peter, James, and John, asked questions, told stories, explained Scripture, modeled prayer, sent disciples to minister, corrected them, allowed them to fail, debriefed experiences, served them, and entrusted responsibility to them. Jesus' discipleship involved both instruction and shared life.

84. WHY DID JESUS SEND DISCIPLES OUT BEFORE THEY KNEW EVERYTHING?

Because participation is part of learning. In Luke 9 and 10, Jesus sends disciples into ministry while they are still growing. They learn not only by listening but by doing. Christian discipleship therefore includes opportunities to practice praying, serving, sharing faith, teaching appropriately, showing hospitality, and caring for others.

85. WHAT IS THE GREAT COMMISSION ACTUALLY COMMANDING?

Read Matthew 28:18–20 carefully. Jesus begins with His authority: **All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him.** Then comes the mission: **Make disciples of all nations.** The passage includes going, baptizing, and teaching people to obey Jesus. And it ends with a promise: **Jesus is with His people.** The Great Commission begins with Jesus' authority and ends with Jesus' presence.

86. DOES “ALL NATIONS” MEAN MODERN COUNTRIES?

Not exactly. The Greek expression commonly translated “all nations” refers broadly to peoples or nations, not merely modern political states. Jesus' mission crosses cultural, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and social boundaries. Acts shows this expansion repeatedly: Jerusalem. Judea. Samaria. Then outward into the Gentile world. Revelation 7:9 pictures redeemed people from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping before God. Disciple-making belongs within that global biblical storyline.

87. IS CHRISTIAN MISSION MAINLY WESTERN CHRISTIANS GOING TO OTHER COUNTRIES?

No. Christianity is global. The Great Commission belongs to Christ's whole Church. African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern, Indigenous, European, North American, and other Christians participate in God's mission. Mission increasingly moves: **EVERYWHERE ↔ EVERYWHERE.** Acts already begins breaking the idea that God's mission belongs to one ethnicity or region. The Gospel moves outward through Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, migrants, travelers, local churches, missionaries, and ordinary believers. A disciple may cross an ocean. Another may cross a street. Both can participate faithfully in Jesus' mission.

88. DOES EVERY DISCIPLE NEED TO PERSONALLY DISCIPLE SOMEONE ELSE?

Not necessarily in the form of a formal weekly mentoring relationship. Circumstances, maturity, gifts, age, opportunity, and season of life vary. But every growing Christian can contribute to the growth of others. A mature disciple should increasingly become someone who can say, “Come learn to follow Jesus alongside me.” Disciple-making is multiplication, not merely accumulation.

89. WHAT IF SOMEONE FEELS UNQUALIFIED TO HELP ANOTHER PERSON FOLLOW JESUS?

That feeling may actually protect against pride. A disciple-maker does not need all the answers. The goal is not, “Become like me because I have mastered Christianity.” It is, “Come follow Jesus. Let's open His Word together.” The most helpful words may sometimes be: “I don't know. Let's study that.”

90. WHY DOES MATURITY INCLUDE TEACHING OTHERS?

Because what is received is meant to be passed on. 2 Timothy 2:2 describes truth moving from Paul to Timothy to faithful people who will teach others. That is multiplication across generations. The Church survives not because one generation follows Jesus faithfully, but because the Gospel is entrusted to the next.

91. WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?

Children can be intentionally taught to know Scripture, pray, worship, understand the Gospel, ask questions, serve others, and see faith practiced in everyday life. Deuteronomy 6 places spiritual instruction within ordinary rhythms: at home, on the road, at bedtime, and in the morning. Christian parents have a particularly important discipleship role, while the wider Church also helps nurture younger believers.

92. WHAT DOES PERSEVERANCE MEAN?

Perseverance means continuing in faith rather than abandoning Christ. The New Testament repeatedly calls believers to endure. Read Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 10:35–39; Hebrews 12:1–3; James 1:2–4; Revelation 2–3. Christian life is not merely starting. It is continuing.

93. HOW DOES SOMEONE KEEP GOING FOR DECADES?

Not through enthusiasm alone. Emotions rise and fall. Circumstances change. Discipleship develops deep roots through abiding in Christ, Scripture, prayer, worship, Christian community, Communion, repentance, remembrance, service, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Long-term faithfulness is usually built through thousands of ordinary acts of trust.

94. WHAT IF SOMEONE GOES THROUGH A SPIRITUALLY DRY SEASON?

Dryness does not necessarily mean abandonment by God. The Psalms include seasons when God's presence feels distant. Faithfulness sometimes means continuing ordinary practices when they do not feel emotionally rewarding. Read Scripture. Pray honestly. Stay connected to healthy believers. Remember God's past faithfulness. Ask for help. Spiritual life should not be measured only by intensity of feeling.

95. WHAT IF SOMEONE HAS QUESTIONS OR DOUBTS?

Bring them into the light. Thomas doubted the resurrection testimony. John the Baptist, while imprisoned, sent messengers asking Jesus whether He truly was the expected One. The Psalms contain difficult questions. Questions are not automatically rebellion. They can become part of deeper discipleship when brought honestly to God and examined carefully through Scripture.

96. WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF DISCIPLESHIP?

Christlikeness. Romans 8:29 speaks of believers being conformed to the image of God's Son. 2 Corinthians 3:18 describes transformation into Christ's image. Ephesians 4:13 points toward maturity measured by Christ. The goal is not merely becoming more religious, more knowledgeable, more disciplined, or more active. The goal is becoming increasingly like Jesus.

97. WILL DISCIPLESHIP EVER BE FINISHED?

The process of growth continues throughout earthly life. But Scripture looks toward a future when God's people will finally be free from sin and fully restored. 1 John 3:2 says that when Christ appears, believers will be like Him because they will see Him as He is. Christian discipleship therefore lives between **“Follow Me”** and **“We shall be like Him.”**

THE DISCIPLESHIP PATH

A SIMPLE BIBLICAL PICTURE

JESUS CALLS

“Follow Me.” — Matthew 4:19

THE DISCIPLE BELIEVES

Receives God's grace through faith. — Ephesians 2:8–10

THE DISCIPLE IS BAPTIZED

Publicly identifies with Christ and His people. — Matthew 28:19 · Romans 6:1–4

THE DISCIPLE ABIDES

Remains dependent upon Christ. — John 15:1–17

THE DISCIPLE LEARNS

Continues in Jesus' Word. — John 8:31–32

THE DISCIPLE OBEYS

Learns to live under Jesus' lordship. — John 14:15

THE DISCIPLE IS FORMED WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

Worship, Communion, fellowship, prayer, and service shape Christian life. — Acts 2:42–47

THE DISCIPLE IS TRANSFORMED

The Holy Spirit produces Christlike fruit. — Galatians 5:16–25

THE DISCIPLE LOVES AND SERVES

Jesus' character becomes increasingly visible. — John 13:34–35

THE DISCIPLE PERSEVERES

Continues following through difficulty and failure. — Hebrews 12:1–3

THE DISCIPLE MAKES DISCIPLES

Helps others follow Jesus. — Matthew 28:18–20

THE DISCIPLE LOOKS TOWARD CHRIST

The final hope is complete transformation in His presence. — 1 John 3:2

MEMORY ANCHOR

**Called by Jesus. Saved by grace. Baptized into His name. Formed by the Spirit. Grounded in the Word.
Shaped in community. Sent to make disciples.**

JESUS' DISCIPLES WERE STILL LEARNING

PETER

Bold enough to step out of a boat. Impulsive enough to speak before understanding. Confident enough to promise loyalty. Afraid enough to deny Jesus. Humble enough to be restored. Faithful enough to spend the rest of his life proclaiming Christ.

THOMAS

Asked questions. Struggled to believe the resurrection testimony. Encountered the risen Jesus. Responded: **"My Lord and my God!"**

JOHN

Once wanted judgment called down on a Samaritan village. Later became known for repeatedly emphasizing love.

THE TWELVE

Argued about greatness. Misunderstood Jesus' mission. Fell asleep when He asked them to pray. Fled when He was arrested. And after the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, they became courageous witnesses.

THE POINT

Jesus did not choose finished disciples. **He formed disciples.** That is still what He does.

HARD QUESTIONS — QUICK REVIEW

Is discipleship how someone earns salvation?

No.

Does grace make obedience optional?

No.

Must disciples follow Jesus perfectly?

No.

Does failure mean discipleship is over?

No. Repent and return to Jesus.

Does following Jesus cost something?

Yes.

Does "deny yourself" mean a person has no value?

No.

Does "take up your cross" mean tolerating abuse?

No.

Does loving enemies mean approving evil?

No.

Does forgiveness eliminate boundaries or justice?

No.

Do spiritual disciplines earn God's favor?

No.

Can spiritual disciplines help believers grow?

Yes.

Did Jesus command baptism?

Yes.

Do Christians agree on exactly how baptism relates to salvation?

No.

Why does the Church share Communion?

To remember and proclaim Christ's saving work and share in the life of His people.

Do Christian traditions agree on every detail of baptism and Communion?

No.

Does every disciple need Christian community and corporate worship?

Yes.

Is church attendance by itself discipleship?

No.

Does every Christian have the same ministry?

No.

Does every disciple participate in Jesus' mission?

Yes.

Is making disciples only for pastors or missionaries?

No.

Does a disciple-maker need all the answers?

No.

Can Christians ask difficult questions?

Yes.

Does digital life belong under Jesus' lordship?

Yes.

Who produces spiritual fruit?

The Holy Spirit works within believers as they abide in Christ.

What is the goal?

Increasing Christlikeness.

KEY TERMS

A QUICK GLOSSARY

Abide

To remain or continue. John 15 uses this language for ongoing dependence upon and relationship with Christ.

Apostle

Someone sent with a commission. The Twelve and Paul have a distinctive foundational apostolic role in the New Testament.

Baptism

The Christian practice commanded by Jesus that visibly identifies a person with Christ and His people. Christian traditions differ over who should be baptized, the mode of baptism, and its precise relationship to regeneration, covenant membership, and salvation.

Communion / Lord's Supper / Eucharist

The meal Jesus gave His followers to remember and proclaim His saving death, share in fellowship, examine themselves, give thanks, and look toward His return.

Disciple

A learner or follower. A disciple of Jesus belongs to Him, learns from Him, follows Him, and is being formed by Him.

Disciple-Making

Helping others become and grow as followers of Jesus through Gospel witness, baptism, teaching, example, encouragement, and shared life.

Grace

God's undeserved favor and generous action toward people who cannot earn salvation.

Great Commission

Jesus' post-resurrection command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey His commands.

Perseverance

Continuing in faith and following Christ through difficulty, temptation, suffering, and time.

Repentance

Turning from sin toward God. Repentance begins with conversion and remains part of a disciple's ongoing life.

Sanctification

God's work of setting believers apart and progressively transforming them toward holiness and Christlikeness.

Spiritual Disciplines

Intentional practices such as Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, worship, generosity, fellowship, service, solitude, and rest that help believers attend to God and respond to His grace.

Spiritual Fruit

Visible results of God's transforming work in a believer's character and life, especially associated with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23.

KEY PASSAGES TO READ SLOWLY

MATTHEW 4:18–22

Notice Jesus' invitation. What does He ask? What changes when the disciples respond?

LUKE 9:18–26

Notice the movement from Peter identifying Jesus to Jesus explaining the cross and then calling His followers to take up their own crosses. Why must discipleship be understood in light of who Jesus is?

LUKE 14:25–33

Read Jesus' difficult statements slowly. What does Jesus appear to be confronting? Why does He tell potential followers to count the cost?

JOHN 13:1–17, 34–35

Watch Jesus serve. Then notice what He commands His disciples to do. How does Jesus redefine greatness?

JOHN 15:1–17

Circle words connected with abiding, fruit, love, obedience, joy, and friendship. What happens when these ideas are read together rather than separately?

ACTS 2:37–47

Notice how conversion, baptism, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, generosity, worship, and shared life appear together. What does this passage teach about discipleship as both personal and communal?

GALATIANS 5:13–26

Contrast the flesh, love, walking by the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit. What kind of person is the Spirit forming?

MATTHEW 28:16–20

Notice Jesus' authority, Jesus' mission, baptism, teaching obedience, and Jesus' promised presence. Disciple-making depends upon all of them.

PERSONAL STUDY AND APPLICATION

1. FOLLOW

Ask honestly: What area of life is hardest to place under Jesus' leadership? Money? Relationships? Time? Plans? Habits? Comfort? Reputation? Digital life? Forgiveness? Future? Bring that area specifically to God.

2. ABIDE

Choose a realistic rhythm for Scripture and prayer. Not an impressive rhythm. A sustainable one. The goal is not completing a religious quota. The goal is remaining attentive to Jesus.

3. REPENT

Ask: Is there something Scripture has already made clear that is being resisted? Do not wait for a new spiritual insight while ignoring an existing act of obedience. Bring the issue honestly before God.

4. WORSHIP WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

Ask: Is gathered worship becoming merely a routine? Is Scripture being heard? Is Christ being remembered? Is Communion being received thoughtfully? Are relationships with other believers being cultivated? Discipleship is personal. It is never meant to remain private.

5. LOVE

Identify one person who is difficult to love. Pray for that person. Ask God for wisdom about what Christlike love actually requires. Remember: Love may involve kindness. Love may involve forgiveness. Love may involve truth. Love may involve boundaries.

6. SERVE

Ask: What has God already placed nearby? A person? A need? A church ministry? A neighbor? A family responsibility? A lonely person? A practical task? Discipleship often begins with the opportunity already in front of someone.

7. MAKE A DISCIPLE

Think of one person who might benefit from reading Scripture together, prayer, encouragement, a conversation about Jesus, or simply seeing faithful Christian life up close. Disciple-making does not require having every answer. It requires pointing people toward Jesus.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a disciple?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Follow Me"?
3. How is discipleship related to salvation?
4. Why must grace come before obedience?
5. What does it mean to deny oneself?
6. What does taking up the cross mean?
7. Why does Jesus tell disciples to count the cost?
8. Why is Scripture essential to discipleship?
9. What does it mean to abide in Christ?
10. What kind of fruit should discipleship produce?
11. What role does the Holy Spirit play?
12. Why does repentance remain part of Christian life?
13. What does Peter's failure teach about discipleship?
14. How is conviction different from condemnation?
15. Why is love a mark of discipleship?
16. Does forgiveness eliminate justice or boundaries?
17. Why do disciples need Christian community?
18. Why is corporate worship distinct from simple fellowship?
19. What role does baptism play in discipleship?

20. Why do Christians disagree about how baptism relates to salvation?
21. Why do Christians share the Lord's Supper?
22. Why do faithful Christian traditions disagree about some details of baptism and Communion?
23. Why is service central to following Jesus?
24. What do possessions reveal about discipleship?
25. What are spiritual disciplines?
26. Why don't spiritual disciplines earn God's favor?
27. What is sanctification?
28. How do Christians differ in describing sanctification?
29. How do grace and effort work together?
30. How should Christians understand suffering?
31. Why must "take up your cross" never be used to excuse abuse?
32. How does discipleship apply to digital life and attention?
33. What is healthy disciple-making?
34. What makes discipleship unhealthy or controlling?
35. What does the Great Commission command?
36. Why is Christian mission global?
37. What is perseverance?
38. How should a disciple respond to spiritual dryness?
39. Can disciples have doubts or questions?
40. What is the ultimate goal of discipleship?

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

START WITH SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 · Psalm 1 · Matthew 4:18–22 · Matthew 5–7 · Matthew 10 · Matthew 28:16–20 · Mark 8:27–38 · Mark 10:35–45 · Luke 9 · Luke 14:25–33 · John 13–17 · Acts 1–2 · Acts 8–11 · Acts 13–20 · Romans 6 · Romans 8 · Romans 12 · 1 Corinthians 10–12 · Galatians 5 · Ephesians 4–6 · Philippians 2–3 · Colossians 3 · Hebrews 10–12 · 1 Peter · 1 John

RELATED 3NAILS STUDIES

#86 — What Is Salvation?

#87 — Repentance, Faith, and New Life

#88 — What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

These should be read alongside this study when questions arise about conversion, assurance, repentance, and the beginning of Christian life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BibleProject — The Way of Jesus / Sermon on the Mount resources

Useful visual studies for understanding Jesus' teaching within the larger biblical story.

Robert Coleman — The Master Plan of Evangelism

A classic study of how Jesus invested in people and prepared disciples to participate in His mission.

Dallas Willard — The Great Omission

A widely read work emphasizing that Jesus' Great Commission calls Christians to make disciples rather than merely seek professions of belief. As with any resource outside Scripture, individual theological conclusions should be evaluated carefully.

RESOURCE SAFEGUARD

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every theological position, methodology, interpretation, publication, or conclusion it contains. **Compare sources carefully and continually return to Scripture.**

FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

MEMORY ANCHOR

Discipleship is not working for salvation. It is learning to live from salvation.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Grace is not permission to ignore Jesus. Grace makes following Jesus possible.

MEMORY ANCHOR

A disciple does not produce spiritual life independently. The branch must remain connected to the Vine.

MEMORY ANCHOR

A disciple is not someone who never stumbles. A disciple keeps returning to Jesus and learning to walk with Him.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Baptism identifies disciples with Jesus. Communion repeatedly brings disciples back to Jesus.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Spiritual disciplines are tools for relationship and formation—not currency used to purchase God's favor.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Healthy discipleship produces greater dependence on Jesus—not unhealthy dependence on a human leader.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Disciples follow Jesus—and help others follow Jesus.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Called by Jesus. Saved by grace. Baptized into His name. Formed by the Spirit. Grounded in the Word. Shaped in community. Sent to make disciples.

FINAL REFLECTION

Jesus' first disciples did not begin as spiritual giants. They were ordinary people. They misunderstood. They competed. They doubted. They became afraid. They asked questions. They failed. And they kept following Jesus.

Over time, being with Jesus changed them. They heard His words. They watched His life. They experienced His correction. They received His forgiveness. They witnessed His cross. They encountered Him risen from the dead. They were baptized into His mission. They broke bread together. They worshiped. They received the Holy Spirit. And eventually, the people who once argued about which of them was greatest carried the Gospel into the world.

That is discipleship. Not instant perfection. Not religious performance. Not earning God's favor. Not merely accumulating Bible information. It is the lifelong work of grace in which a person who belongs to Jesus learns to live increasingly under His loving lordship.

The disciple opens Scripture because Jesus' words matter. The disciple prays because relationship with God matters. The disciple repents because holiness matters. The disciple worships because God is worthy. The disciple gathers with God's people because Christian life is shared life. The disciple remembers the Gospel at the Lord's Table. The disciple loves

because Jesus loves. The disciple serves because Jesus serves. The disciple forgives because Jesus forgives. The disciple uses time, attention, work, money, relationships, and technology under Jesus' lordship. The disciple perseveres because Jesus is worth following. The disciple tells others because the Gospel is good news. And the disciple helps others follow because Jesus said: **"Make disciples."**

One day, the process that now feels slow and unfinished will reach its destination. Faith will become sight. Sin will be gone. Christ's people will see Him as He is. Until then, the invitation remains the same one Jesus gave beside the Sea of Galilee: **Follow Me.**

And the life of discipleship is the daily answer: Yes, Lord.