

Discipleship: Following Jesus

THOMAS GOLDING



AUTHENTICITY
BOOK HOUSE

in partnership with

twelve21
GLOBAL

Discipleship: Following Jesus

Copyright © 2021 by Thomas Golding

Contributing Editors: Erin Ensinger, Fran Geiger Joslin, and Dianne L. Taylor

ISBN (4 x 6 English paperback): 13: 978-1-943004-42-3

ISBN (English eBook): 13: 978-1-943004-43-0

ISBN (4 x 6 Swahili paperback): ISBN: 978-1-943004-48-5

ISBN (Swahili eBook): ISBN: 978-1-943004-59-1

Authenticity Book House

Winterset, IA 50273

www.ABHBooks.com

abhinfo@abhbooks.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews without the prior permission of the publisher.

All scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, are translated from the original language by the author, Thomas Golding.

Scripture quotations used in the “Good News for You” portion of this book are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

Cover design and formatting: Schechner & Associates



in partnership with

twelve21
GLOBAL

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by Authenticity Book House

Printed in the United States of America by MiniBük

The Ministry of Authenticity Book House

Authenticity Book House (ABH) publishes **simplified pastoral training in bite-sized books**. We supply theologically sound books to pastors and church leaders who have little or no access to formal in-depth biblical training. ABH simplifies content to reach an appropriate reading level without watering down major truths needed for spiritual growth and leadership.

The small size of our books allows easy transport and more affordable publication. Since books often journey beyond their initial drop points, we include a clear gospel message in each manuscript. This allows the good news to spread as far as a book may travel.

Our team approach to publishing includes qualified theologians, professional editors, gifted writers, skilled translators, and cultural consultants. ABH strategically plans a full curriculum for educating pastors. We also publish materials to help supplement leaders' ministries to new believers and to those in the church and community who hurt.

Table of Contents

Introduction: What in the World Is God Doing?	1
Discipleship: God's Plan from the Beginning.	1
Discipleship: Filling the Earth with God's Image . . .	1
What Happened to God's Good Plan?	3
Jesus: The Perfect Image of God	6
Discipleship: Becoming Like Jesus	7
 Chapter 1: Who Is This Man?	
Introducing Jesus (Mark 1:1–8:21).	9
A Spirit-Empowered Messiah (1:1-15).	11
A Messiah Worth Following (1:16-20).	12
An Authoritative, Powerful Messiah (1:21-45)	13
A Rule-Breaking Messiah (2:1–3:6).	14
A Miracle-Working Messiah (3:7–6:6)	17
A Messiah Who Changes Hearts (6:7–8:21).	19
 Chapter 2: What Is He Doing?	
Jesus's Mission (Mark 8:22–10:52).	25
Beginning to See the Mission (Mark 8:22-30)	26
The Mission: Suffering Now, Glory Later (Mark 8:31–9:29).	27
The Mission: Serving with Humility (9:30–10:31)	29
The Mission: Serving by Giving Up Everything (10:32-45)	31
Seeing the Mission More Clearly (10:46-52)	32

Chapter 3: Disciples Remain Faithful	
through Suffering (Mark 11:1–16:8)	37
The Path of Suffering (11:1–13:37)	37
Two Choices: Save Yourself or	
Deny Yourself (13:37-16:8)	39
Jesus, the Only Faithful One	41
Relying on the Faithful One	42
Chapter 4: What’s Next? Some Practical	
Thoughts about Discipleship	47
A Warning for New Believers	48
Discovering More about Jesus and His Life	51
Prayer	54
Hands-On Involvement	54
Time and Patience	58
What Could You Do?	59
Conclusion	63
Good News for You	67
How to Accept the Gift of Salvation:	68
A Sample Prayer for Salvation:	69
Endnotes	71

Introduction

What in the World Is God Doing?

Discipleship: God's Plan from the Beginning

Jesus's parting words as he left this earth remain one of his best-known commands: "Therefore, go and *disciple all the nations*" (Matthew 28:19). But discipleship didn't begin with Jesus. From the very first chapter of the Bible, God expressed his heart for what we now call discipleship. Discipleship simply means following Jesus, becoming a student of the perfect teacher as we learn his way of life.

Discipleship: Filling the Earth with God's Image

At the very beginning of creation, the earth hung in space "formless and void," an unshaped and empty lump of matter (Genesis 1:2). For six days God worked to form and fill the lump, fashioning it into a suitable home for those he would ultimately place there. At the close of each day, the refrain "and God saw it was good" sounded, signaling the end of God's work.

God declared light good because it illuminated the darkness. He declared the separation of the dry land from the seas another good work. He also called good the trees and plants springing up to fill the earth. The sun, moon, and stars ruling over the day and night, creatures filling the seas, birds filling the skies, and animals multiplying on the land God also declared good. God declared all these acts of creation good.

God created a perfect world with everything in place for his final handiwork—humans! God created humans, both male and female, *in his own image*:

Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. And let him rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the beasts and over all the earth and over all the creeping things that creep upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26)

God must really want us to understand that we are created in his image, since verse 27 repeats this phrase twice more! God blessed both males and females, charging them:

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living creature that creeps upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

When God stepped back to consider all he had made, he pronounced it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). What a wonderful picture of a wonderful world! God clearly wants to bless humans and give them what is good. He wants them to rule over and care for the earth. He wants them to fill the earth with his image, which means to fill the earth with *people who look like him*.

What Happened to God’s Good Plan?

Clearly, the first humans did not keep God’s command. When they chose to sin, they ruined God’s perfect creation. Sin is not simply disobeying God’s commands. Even more basically, when we disobey, we show that we do not trust God to give us what is good. At creation, God provided and defined good, but then along came a serpent. The serpent suggested God was withholding something good from Adam and Eve because God wanted to control them. For the first time, someone

other than God defined “good.” Eve took the forbidden fruit and ate it, giving some to Adam to eat also.

We know the consequences all too well: a fractured relationship between God and humans, fractured relationships between humans, difficulty in work and childbirth, expulsion from the Garden of Eden, ever-deepening degrees of sin and brokenness, and ultimately physical death. We know this world because we inherited it from Adam and Eve. By the time we get to Genesis 6, humans filled the earth with something very different from God’s image—violence and corruption.

Grieved at humanity’s sin, God decided to cleanse the earth with a flood and start over. He spared righteous Noah and his family, giving them the same basic command he gave to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). Once again, God demonstrated his desire to bless humans and commanded them to fill the earth with his image.

But like Adam and Eve, Noah’s descendants failed too. First, Noah’s son Ham committed sexual sin, and later, instead of spreading out to fill the earth, Noah’s family stopped at

Babylon. To make a name for themselves, they built a tower to reach heaven. God stepped in, confusing their speech, and humanity splintered off into many different languages and people groups.

Next, God chose Israel as his special people to follow his ways and bring blessing to the world. When the Israelites went to Egypt to avoid famine, they “were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7). Those now familiar terms of creation describe Israel: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” The assignment never changed—the Israelites should fill their land with people who look like God. But what happened next?

The history of Israel in the Old Testament makes for depressing reading. Rather than filling their land with the image of God, the Israelites piled up material wealth and invested in military might (Isaiah 2:7). Even worse, they worshipped idols, engaged in violence, and participated in adulterous relationships. Just as God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, God kicked the Israelites out of their Promised Land. Every generation acted

the same, failing to fill God’s creation with his image—until Jesus arrived as the Second Adam.

Jesus: The Perfect Image of God

Like no other man, Jesus looked like God! As John says, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (1:18). In other words, those who saw Jesus saw God. And not only that, they saw a perfect demonstration of what God intended for every human being who ever lived.

The apostle Paul compared Jesus to Adam, explaining that when the first Adam introduced sin to the world, death spread to all humanity. By contrast, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus delivers us from sin’s power on a day-to-day basis so that we “reign in life,” bearing God’s image instead of Adam’s (Romans 5:17). The Holy Spirit living inside us makes this victorious living possible.

Jesus did not come only to die for our sins; he came to restore all creation under the rule of God. Paul links Adam and Jesus when he quotes Psalm 8: “You have given [mankind] dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under his feet” (v. 6). Everything the first Adam failed to do—successfully rule over creation and fill the earth with the image of God—Jesus, the Second Adam, will successfully accomplish. Everything the first Adam introduced into our world—sin and suffering and death—the Second Adam will defeat.

After Jesus defeats every enemy, including death, he will make a new creation for his people to live in. The best part of this new creation will be the presence of God himself with his people. He will wipe away every tear from every eye. Death will be a thing of the past. No mourning. No crying. No pain ever again. Nothing unclean will ever enter the new creation. No one will ever commit any sin again (Revelation 21-22). Mission accomplished!

Discipleship: Becoming Like Jesus

The overall message of the Bible is clear: Jesus Christ will fix our broken world and fill it with the image of God. Since the day he created humans, God sought to fill the earth with people who think, act, and love like him. As Paul declares, “Those he foreknew, he also predestined to display the likeness of

his Son, that he might be firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). Discipleship, this process of being drawn to Christ until we think, act, and love as he did, is God’s will for your life in its most basic form! But how do we begin this journey of following Christ? What will we encounter on the way? And how do we help others follow Christ along with us? Read on to discover all the Father has in store for you on this marvelous journey.

Chapter 1

Who Is This Man? Introducing Jesus (Mark 1:1–8:21)

“**W**ould you be my disciple?” asked an older student at my university. He and the campus ministry director faced me from my dorm room couch. I guessed this meant committing to meet with him weekly for mentoring. Together we would work through a series of Bible study booklets. We would pray together, minister together, and share the gospel regularly. Though I eventually said no to his request, my personal journey into discipleship began here.

What should discipleship look like? Often in America, we jump into using someone else’s printed study materials or method before we properly identify the goal. As the previous chapter stated, disciples seek to learn Jesus’s way of life and to become like him. The apostle Paul couldn’t have put it more simply: “Be an imitator of me, just as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Since Jesus returned to the Father's right hand, we can choose to follow a person who seems to do a good job of following him. At the same time, we should open up the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) to repeatedly gaze upon Jesus. We should concern ourselves most with questions like "How did Jesus live?" and "Where did Jesus go?" and "What did he teach his followers?" The picture of Jesus in the gospels points us in the right direction.

Mark introduces us to the original twelve disciples, telling their story to illustrate how disciples learn to follow Jesus in three steps:

1. First, a disciple must recognize *who Jesus is*.
2. Jesus then challenges the disciple to *understand and accept his mission*.
3. Finally, a disciple must *remain faithful* as that mission leads unavoidably *through suffering*.¹

In Mark, everyone missed the point of Jesus the Messiah's ministry. In the end, only Jesus remained faithful!

Do we really believe we will follow Jesus better than the original twelve disciples? Mark leaves us pondering this question. Like them, we struggle to accept who Jesus really is. Like

them, we struggle to accept the nature of his ministry. And just like them, we struggle to remain faithful. Because no one except Jesus got it right, we clearly see our need to rely on him.

A Spirit-Empowered Messiah (1:1-15)

Before the disciples could follow Jesus, they had to *recognize who Jesus is*. The very first verse in Mark's gospel declares Jesus both the Messiah and the Son of God. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah declared that people would know the Messiah had come because they would see the Holy Spirit's presence in him. Isaiah wrote, "The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (11:2).

At Jesus's baptism, the skies split apart and the Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. The voice of God thundered, declaring Jesus his "beloved Son" in whom he was "well-pleased" (1:11). Later, to prove to his hometown that he was the Messiah, Jesus quoted Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to

the afflicted. He has sent me to bind up those with broken hearts, to call out [both a] release to those who have been taken captive and an open door for those who have been locked up” (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16-21).

After receiving the Spirit, Jesus endured forty days and nights in the wilderness. Here Satan tempted him to abandon his mission of saving the world. By remaining dependent on the Spirit, Jesus overcame temptation and began his ministry soon after.

A Messiah Worth Following (1:16-20)

Jesus sought out his first followers by the Sea of Galilee—two pairs of brothers, all fishermen. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to come after him, promising to make them fishers of men, he demonstrated the primary goal of discipleship: capturing people for Christ. In Luke’s version of this story, Jesus also did something amazing (Luke 5:1-11).

“Hey Peter, row a little farther and throw out your nets,” Jesus called. Peter obeyed, even though he knew nothing would come of it. Seconds later, he sensed a tug on the nets, then an even stronger pull. Peter and his friends hauled in so many fish their two boats nearly

sank! What a lesson—they caught nets full of fish with Jesus’s help after catching nothing the night before! Ordinary, sinful human beings, who on their own often fail, succeed when Jesus joins them. The two brothers immediately left their nets; in other words, they left their occupation and income and followed Jesus.

A little later, Jesus saw another pair of brothers. “Follow me,” he called to James and John. Like Peter and Andrew, these brothers saw something special in this man called Jesus. They not only left their boats and nets and an apparently thriving business (note the presence of “hired servants”), they also left their father. Kind of shocking really, even a bit shameful! What was this “something special” they saw in Jesus?

An Authoritative, Powerful Messiah (1:21-45)

People noticed two special things about Jesus when he taught at the synagogue in Capernaum. First, Jesus’s teaching seemed so different from what they normally heard because he taught with *authority*. Other rabbis constantly looked over their shoulders to make sure important people approved, but their

teaching failed to inspire. It was dull, lifeless, insignificant. No one ever accused Jesus of that.

Second, people noticed Jesus's *power*. When Jesus taught, the spirit world trembled! Demons feared him as if, somehow, they knew him. Most people feared demons, but Jesus commanded them boldly and they obeyed. Jesus also exercised power over sickness. A severe fever gripped Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus simply took her by the hand and the fever left immediately! All kinds of sick and demon-possessed people gathered around him, and he healed them all. He even healed lepers, outcasts of society suffering from a most dreaded condition.

What should potential disciples like Peter, Andrew, James, and John conclude about Jesus? He could be the Messiah. He could be the Son of God! He certainly stood out from every other person they had met.

A Rule-Breaking Messiah (2:1–3:6)

But not everyone accepted Jesus as Messiah or Son of God. Interestingly, while sinners flocked to Jesus for help and healing, conflicts often flared between Jesus and religious people.

Jesus experienced his first major conflict with religious people while he taught at Peter's house in Capernaum. A huge crowd gathered, so large that men bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus couldn't get in. No problem! Going up on the roof, they dug a hole to lower him down from above. When Jesus healed the man and forgave his sins, the religious leaders knew he was doing things only God can do. But instead of believing in Jesus as the Son of God, they accused him of lying.

Another time, Jesus called a tax collector named Levi to follow him. Jewish people of that time considered people like Levi the worst of the worst. The religious people complained about Jesus spending time with "tax collectors and sinners" (2:16). Jesus explained: "Those who are healthy have no need of a doctor, but those who are sick. I did not come to call righteous people, but sinners!" (2:17).

Religious people often get angry when people "break the rules." They pestered Jesus because his disciples didn't fast like John's disciples and the Pharisees. Jesus replied that his disciples didn't need to fast when he was right there with them.

Then the Pharisees caught Jesus's disciples walking through a field on the Sabbath, picking grain and eating it. This was not lawful; it was "harvesting"! The disciples, however, didn't break the spirit of the Sabbath law. They only broke the way the Pharisees practiced it. Jesus claimed to be "Lord of the Sabbath," free from man-made rules (2:28).

On another Sabbath, Jesus met a man with a defective hand at the synagogue. Everyone's eyes fixed on Jesus. Would he again break the rules by healing on the Sabbath? Jesus felt deeply distressed over these people who valued their rules more than others' needs. Commanding the man to stretch out his hand, Jesus healed him completely. From that moment, the Pharisees began plotting to kill Jesus.

Whoever Jesus was, he certainly didn't look like the religious leaders of Israel! He taught with authority. He commanded demons and they obeyed. He exercised power to heal. He *valued people over the rules* and traditions of men. Two groups began to form—some liked what they saw and followed Jesus, and others hated Jesus and began plotting to destroy him.

A Miracle-Working Messiah (3:7–6:6)

As the people chose sides, Jesus chose twelve men from the crowds to be his closest followers. He wanted this special group to “be with him,” since simply being with Jesus is one of the most important parts of discipleship (3:14). He gave them his mission of preaching the gospel so that they could continue his ministry when he no longer walked among them. He also gave them his authority to perform the amazing miracles he himself performed. For example, he cast out demons to prove God’s presence with the people.

Before long, Jesus tested whether the Twelve really understood who he is. After a long day of teaching, Jesus took them out on the sea away from the crowds where he promptly fell asleep in the boat. The wind came up. Waves rose and fell, splashing over the sides. The boat began to fill with water. “Teacher, are you not concerned that we are perishing?” they cried out (4:38). Jesus needed to speak only two words—“Be still!”—for the storm to utterly cease. After scolding the sea, Jesus scolded the Twelve. “Why are you cowardly? Do you not yet have faith?” (4:40). After witnessing so much of Jesus, they still didn’t fully believe that he is God. They

were making progress, though. Their amazed question proves they knew Jesus was no ordinary human being: “Who then is this one, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:41).

Jesus answered their question by showing them his power over more impossible situations. When they landed safely on the other side of the sea, a violent man possessed by many demons confronted Jesus. Naked, with a crazed look in his eyes and shattered fragments of chains dangling from his wrists, he fell down at Jesus’s feet. The demons inside recognized Jesus immediately, calling him “Jesus, Son of the Most High God!” (5:7). Jesus sent the demons into a herd of pigs. They squealed down the slope and drowned in the lake.

On his way to help Jairus, whose daughter lay dying, Jesus met a woman suffering from bleeding for twelve years. She had spent all her money on doctors but instead of getting better, she only grew worse. The woman believed if she only touched the hem of Jesus’s garment she would be healed. Marveling at her faith, Jesus healed her completely.

But while he spoke with the woman, messengers arrived to tell Jairus his daughter had died. Healing the sick is one thing. But

raising the dead? Even more unlikely! “Don’t be afraid; just believe,” Jesus encouraged Jairus (5:36). In faith, Jairus followed Jesus back to his house. Just like on the raging sea, Jesus spoke only two words: “Girl, arise,” and, of course, she did (5:41). When the disciples saw Jesus calming the sea, commanding demons, healing the sick and even raising the dead, they watched him *perform miracles* only God can accomplish.

A Messiah Who Changes Hearts (6:7–8:21)

After the disciples spent so much time with Jesus, he sent them out on their own to preach, to cast out demons, and to heal the sick. Jesus relied on God and his people to meet his needs, and he told the Twelve to do the same. “Take nothing but a walking stick—no food, no money, not even a change of clothes! Remain in the first home you enter,” Jesus instructed them. Though they didn’t yet fully recognize who Jesus is, they followed the path he walked ahead of them.

Just like Jesus, the disciples cast out demons and healed the sick. But even while performing miracles, the disciples continued to struggle with fully believing that Jesus is God. They

watched him care like a shepherd for the crowds following him. He satisfied their spiritual hunger with his teaching and their physical hunger with bread in the wilderness. He fed 5,000 men with just five loaves and two fish. As the disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers, surely they began to understand that only God could perform such a miracle.

But even after all this, the disciples refused to fully trust in Jesus. Tired from his long day with the crowds, Jesus sent the Twelve out onto the sea while he slipped away to pray. Later, when Jesus walked across the water to join them, the disciples cried out in terror, “It’s a ghost!” Calming their fears, Jesus climbed into the boat with them.

Once again, the disciples watched Jesus ruling over nature. Only God controls nature. But instead of trusting in Jesus, “they were greatly amazed, for they did not understand concerning the loaves, but their hearts had been hardened” (6:51b-52). Discipleship—learning to follow Jesus—happens at a frustratingly slow pace. Even though these men continued to experience and understand more of Jesus, they still had far to go!

Before long, the disciples experienced another test at sea. Partway across the sea they realized they had forgotten to bring bread. They could have trusted Jesus to provide bread for them just like he had provided bread for the 5,000 in the wilderness. Instead, they worried and fought among themselves. Jesus said they should concern themselves with spiritual matters rather than worrying about bread to eat. But the disciples missed his point, figuring he was upset with them for forgetting to pack lunch. Instead, Jesus scolded them for their unbelief: “Guys, don’t worry about food. I thought we covered that already!”

We wonder, “How in the world could the disciples’ hearts stay so stubborn?” But then we look at ourselves and ask, “Is our faith really stronger than theirs?” Jesus gave the Twelve all the evidence they needed to draw a right conclusion. Jesus rebuked them for acting like the rest of their generation—deaf and blind to God’s work in the world. Gaining “ears to hear and eyes to see” would take time just as it does for us (8:18).

Questions from Chapter 1

1. Read Mark 1:1—8:21. Record any observations that seem important. What questions do you have?
2. What most attracts you to Jesus? What bothers you most?
3. What observations about the disciples trouble you? Do you recognize any of these characteristics in your own life and experience?

4. Jesus committed himself to fulfilling the Father's will, not to pleasing the people around him. He was willing to go against popular opinion in order to please the Father. How about you? What difficulties have you faced or might you face from other people if you follow Jesus?

5. In your own words, describe who Jesus is according to the gospel of Mark.

Chapter 2

What Is He Doing? Jesus's Mission (Mark 8:22–10:52)

Who is Jesus? We must answer this question before we can follow Jesus anywhere. He's the Son of God. He's the Messiah who came to save people from their sins, the one who performs miracles only God could do. Most importantly, he performs the miracle of changing people's hearts to believe in him.

But if Jesus was the Messiah, he didn't fit the people's expectations at all. His path went in a completely different direction from the religious people's path. As a result they opposed him. What should we expect as Jesus continues down this path? We can only expect even greater conflict!

Jesus upset not only the religious leaders, but the Twelve, who struggled to understand his mission on earth. Three times Jesus told them about his upcoming rejection, death, and resurrection. Three times! The disciples' failure to respond in faith proves they didn't

understand his purpose for coming to earth. We can almost hear their thoughts crying out, “What in the world have we signed up for?”

Beginning to See the Mission (Mark 8:22-30)

Once the disciples began to see who Jesus is, they needed to answer another question: “What is this Messiah’s mission?” Their view of Jesus came into focus ever so slowly, just like a blind man whom Jesus healed in stages. Oddly, Jesus spit into the blind man’s eyes and laid hands on him. Instead of receiving full sight, the man’s vision remained blurry. People looked like trees walking around. Then Jesus laid his hands on him again, and this time the man saw everything clearly.

On their way to another town after the healing, Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Without hesitation, Peter answered, “You are the Messiah” (8:29). Like the blind man, the disciples saw some of the truth about Jesus, but their understanding remained fuzzy. Discipleship takes time. We don’t become like Jesus all at once. Instead, we slowly grow in our understanding of who Jesus is and how to live like him.

The Mission: Suffering Now, Glory Later **(Mark 8:31–9:29)**

Peter shows how much the disciples still needed to learn. Immediately after his great declaration of faith in Jesus, he stumbled into doubt. Jesus began teaching the disciples that he would suffer many things, experience rejection by the religious leaders, die, and after three days rise from the grave. Like the religious people of their day, the disciples expected a conquering king. They expected someone who would kick the hated Romans out of their land. They wanted the Messiah's reign to bring them everlasting peace and prosperity. No one expected a rejected and suffering Messiah. Jesus said the Messiah would not only suffer, but he would actually die!

Know-it-all Peter scolded Jesus, "Never, Jesus! You won't suffer and die!" Jesus knew Satan was tempting him through Peter to avoid suffering and to become the kind of king for whom everyone hoped. He scolded Peter, "Go away from me, Satan, because you are not thinking the things of God but the things of men!"

The way of the disciple must mirror the way of the Master. Jesus told the crowd and his disciples:

If anyone desires to follow behind me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For if anyone desires to save his life, he will destroy it. But whoever destroys his life because of me and the gospel will save it. For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? For what may a person give as an exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (8:34-38)

Jesus offers two options for those who want to follow him. They can deny themselves and suffer loss now in order to receive glory later. On the other hand, they can strive for glory here on earth, only to experience shame and loss in eternity.

While the options feel sobering, Jesus offered his disciples an encouraging glimpse of the glory to come. Taking Peter, James, and John onto a mountain, Jesus suddenly began to glow with “dazzling light” (9:3). Moses and Elijah joined him. A cloud surrounded them and a

voice thundered, “This is my beloved Son, hear him” (9:7). Peter never forgot the experience and even wrote about it years later in 2 Peter. Seeing the glory to come gave him confidence to face the trials of his earthly life.

The Mission: Serving with Humility (9:30–10:31)

Jesus took his disciples away from the crowds to impress on them again how he would suffer, die, and rise again. For a second time, his disciples failed to understand. They were too afraid to ask Jesus what he meant. Instead, as they travelled down the road that led to Jesus’s cross, they argued about which disciple was greatest!

Can you hear Jesus sighing? He warned them, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of all.” Then he set a child before them. If the disciples truly wanted to be great, they shouldn’t serve the rich, powerful, clever, and beautiful. Instead, they should care for the weak, humble, insignificant, and little children.

Jesus barely said the words before the disciples showed again how little they understood him. Parents brought their children

for Jesus to bless, but the disciples tried to send them away. This time, patient Jesus grew angry. “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these,” he declared (10:14). After all Jesus taught them, the disciples still acted like the prideful religious leaders of their day instead of like Jesus. What incredibly slow learners!

As Jesus and the disciples headed down the road again, a rich young man ran up to them. He really wanted to follow Jesus—until he learned the price. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me,” Jesus urged him (10:21). The man walked away sad, thinking, “I’d follow you, Jesus, if it didn’t mean changing my life too much. But give up everything? That’s too high a price!”

For once, Peter made a helpful observation: “We have left everything to follow you!” (10:28). And Jesus promised:

Truly I say to you, there is no one who has let go of house or brother or sister or mother or father or children or fields because of me and because of the gospel,

except he should receive one hundred times as much now at this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life. (10:29-30)

We marvel at the disciples' lack of understanding, but at least they got one very hard part right. Without hesitation, they left behind everything dear to them in order to follow Jesus.

The Mission: Serving by Giving Up Everything (10:32-45)

For the third and final time Jesus predicted where his way would lead him: "See, we are going up into Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles" (10:33-34). And for the third time, his disciples responded from a human, rather than godly, perspective.

James and John approached Jesus with a request. "Jesus, when we arrive in Jerusalem and the people crown you king, can we fill the most powerful positions in your kingdom?"

Once again, Jesus patiently corrected them:

You know that those recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant, and whoever desires to be first among you will be servant of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. (42-45)

Here we find another important teaching about discipleship. Jesus is not like all the other kings of the world. His kingdom doesn't operate like all the other kingdoms of the world either. His way of living stands above—and in contrast to—every other way to live. Those who follow him must accept the difference.

Seeing the Mission More Clearly (10:46-52)

Before Jesus predicted his death for the first time, he healed a blind man in stages. Now after predicting his death for the third time, he healed another blind man. This time the healing took place all at once. Both blind men

show us how discipleship works. Jesus's followers began to see, and one day they would fully gain their spiritual sight. After regaining his sight, the blind man followed Jesus "in the way" just as any good disciple should (10:52). As the Twelve saw more clearly, they would follow Jesus more closely in the way, too.

Questions from Chapter 2

1. Read Mark 8:22 through 10:52. Record any observations that seem important. What questions do you have?

2. Think about how leadership works in your culture. Describe how a leader typically acts in your part of the world.

3. Think about the three times Jesus predicted his rejection, death, and resurrection. The disciples' responses illustrate the wrong ways we often think. And each time, Jesus taught them about the nature of true discipleship.

- In 8:31-38 Peter objected to Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection. In response, Jesus taught us to give up our life and follow him. We will experience suffering now but glory later.
- In 9:27-31 the disciples argued about who was greatest among them. In response, Jesus taught us that we find true greatness by humbly serving others, even the smallest and least significant.
- In 10:32-45 James and John sought positions of power. In response, Jesus again taught us to give up everything and to serve others.

Which of these teachings do you struggle with most? Why?

4. When the disciples first started following Jesus, they didn't know they would all die for him in the end. Scholars believe only John died of natural causes. Think back on your own experience. How has following and serving Jesus caused you to suffer personally?

Chapter 3

Disciples Remain Faithful through Suffering (Mark 11:1–16:8)

Would the twelve disciples remain faithful when Jesus's way led through suffering? They recognized who Jesus is—the Messiah, God's Son. But they expected a Messiah whose mission on earth included ruling their nation and bringing them everlasting peace. Instead, they discovered his mission included his rejection, suffering, and death. When Jesus's mission grew too rough, the disciples scattered, leaving Jesus to face death alone.

The Path of Suffering (11:1–13:37)

While teaching the disciples and healing the sick, Jesus walked steadily toward Jerusalem, the place where he would die. Just before entering the city, he borrowed a donkey to ride through the gates. Crowds gathered crying, “Hosanna! Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed be the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the

highest!” Jesus rode into Jerusalem like the kind of Messiah the disciples expected. He appeared as the king adored by his welcoming subjects.

But Jesus continued to disappoint their expectations. When he ate the Passover supper with the Twelve, he shocked them by saying, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me” (14:18). One by one, the disciples sadly asked, “Surely you don’t mean me?” Everyone watched, dismayed, as Judas took the piece of bread Jesus dipped for him. In Jesus’s day, close friends dipped bread together in a shared bowl. Judas turned this intimate ceremony into an act of betrayal.

After supper they walked in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus shocked them again, saying, “You will all fall away.” Peter argued, “Never! Even if everyone else leaves you, I won’t! Even if I have to die, I’ll stay with you.” Moments later, when Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to stay with him while he prayed, they fell asleep. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” (14:37) Three times the disciples fell asleep while Jesus prayed. Later that night Peter denied three times even knowing Jesus. After all this time with Jesus, Peter stumbled

again over the very first step of discipleship—admitting who Jesus is.

Two Choices: Save Yourself or Deny Yourself (13:37-16:8)

Judas illustrates the kind of disciple who completely turns away from following Jesus. He even becomes an enemy. Peter illustrates another kind of disciple—the kind who fails but finds forgiveness. He eventually returned to following Jesus. This time he recognized his weakness and how much he needed God’s help.

When a mob arrived to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, all the disciples ran away except Peter. Peter continued to follow Jesus for a while but stayed at a distance. When they arrived at the home of the high priest where Jesus’s trial began, Peter stayed in the courtyard. A servant girl approached as he warmed his hands by the fire. Peering closely at him, she declared, “You also were *with* that Nazarene Jesus” (14:67, emphasis added). Remember when Jesus first chose the Twelve to be his disciples, he chose them so they could “*be with him.*” Now Peter hastily denied any association with Jesus: “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” (14:68). Peter moved

farther away to the courtyard's entrance. The persistent servant girl followed him, declaring, "This fellow is one of them" (14:69). Again, Peter denied her words. Others standing around joined in, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean" (14:70). Denying Jesus for the third time, Peter cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about" (13:71).

Peter denied the truth to save his own life. Meanwhile, Jesus denied himself, took up his cross, and gave up his life to fulfill God's mission for him on earth. The disciples remain noticeably absent throughout the crucifixion story. Where should they be? They should be following Jesus, of course! But since the Twelve all disappeared, other "disciples" filled in, demonstrating how to follow Jesus into suffering. When Jesus stumbled under the weight of his cross, a man named Simon of Cyrene carried it for him to the place of execution. Earlier, James and John asked to sit in places of power and honor at Jesus's right and left hand. At Jesus's death, two criminals hung on crosses at his right and left. This is where the disciples should have been—taking up their own crosses and following him, not seeking positions of power and prestige.

A small group of women followed Jesus all the way to the cross, standing beneath it while Jesus died. Women often serve as positive examples of discipleship in Mark's gospel. We hope then, unlike the Twelve, for them to remain faithful. After Jesus's death and burial, the women came to the tomb with spices to anoint his body. Instead of finding his body, they found an angel sitting in the empty tomb. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here" (16:6). But when the angel commanded them to tell the Twelve, they disobeyed. "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid" (16:8). With this, the Gospel of Mark abruptly ends.²

Jesus, the Only Faithful One

When suffering came, all Jesus's closest followers failed; only Jesus remained faithful. This teaches us something important. Only Jesus is faithful, and we remain faithful only by staying connected to him. Jesus lived his entire life by the power of the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, the heavens opened and the

Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Throughout his ministry, Jesus regularly withdrew from the crowds to spend time alone in prayer, relying on God for strength and wisdom. When Jesus “breathed his last,” he literally “out-spirited” (15:37). With that, his Spirit-empowered ministry came to an end.

Through the power of the Spirit, Jesus faithfully accomplished the mission God gave him. In the book of Acts, the disciples received the Spirit’s indwelling. Then they too began to heal the sick, cast out demons, and lead people to saving faith. On their own, the disciples failed miserably. With the Spirit’s empowerment, they accomplished miracles.

Relying on the Faithful One

Discipleship begins when we recognize that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Like the Twelve, we encounter suffering when we follow Jesus. We must remain faithful as opportunities arise to stand with Jesus or deny him on our way through suffering to glory.

We look on, perhaps, with a sense of discouragement, as the disciples stumbled and fell. If they failed, how can we possibly avoid failure? Where can we find hope? After Jesus’s

resurrection, the disciples received the Holy Spirit. As a result, they transformed into completely different people who brought the gospel to the nations.

Faithful disciples keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, remaining vitally connected to him. C. S. Lewis said, “The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself.”³ Left to ourselves, we fail. But we are not on our own. We have exactly the help we need!

Questions from Chapter 3

1. Read through Mark 11:1-16:8. Record any observations that seem important. What questions do you have?

2. A famous chorus declares, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. Though none go with me, still I will follow.” In the end, the disciples all failed to follow Jesus until they received the Holy Spirit.

When have you failed to follow Jesus?

When have you succeeded in following Jesus?

How do you remain connected to Jesus?

3. The Holy Spirit energized Jesus's life and ministry from beginning to end. As we see so clearly in Mark's gospel, disciples fail when they rely on their own strength. We rely on God through prayer and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. Describe your success or failure in relying on prayer and the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4

What's Next? Some Practical Thoughts about Discipleship

How exciting to meet new believers in your village! You or someone else sowed the seeds of the gospel. New life stirred in their hearts. Then, like tiny plants, the new believers began to grow.

In Mark 4, Jesus tells a story about a farmer who went out to plant seeds. Some of his seeds bounced onto the hard, beaten path. The birds said, “Thank you very much,” and enjoyed a nice meal. Other seeds fell onto ground where a thin layer of topsoil covered a stony patch. They sprang up quickly, but they died just as quickly because their roots failed to go down deep. A third batch of seeds landed in soil that also contained weed seeds. Both grew up together. Unlike the seeds sown in rocky soil, these plants didn’t die, but they also never produced fruit. Eventually the weeds took over, choking them out, and they became unfruitful. What is the goal of farming? Fruitfulness. Not just making plants, but making plants that bear fruit.

Jesus illustrates this goal with a final group of seeds that fell onto good soil. They sprang to life and went on to produce a bountiful harvest in varying amounts. Likewise, we sow the gospel in order to produce *fruitful* followers of Jesus, not just new believers. So what's next with these new baby believers who have come alive in your village?

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus leaves the Church with the job of *making disciples* (see Matthew 28:19). He says we make disciples by baptizing those who believe and by teaching them to obey all he commanded. Baptism, a picture of the gospel, allows disciples to publicly declare their faith in Jesus. In going under the water, we identify with his death. The old sinful person we used to be died and a new person like Jesus came to life. Coming out of the water represents our desire to become students of his life and his ways.

A Warning for New Believers

Jesus doesn't simply want to populate heaven with people who pray a prayer of repentance and then continue on their way unchanged. Remember at the beginning of this book we discussed how God intended to fill the earth

with people who look like him. Jesus will do what the first Adam failed to do.

Disciples must expect opposition. The last thing Satan wants is more people who look like Jesus. Since the day God first placed people on earth, the Enemy has worked to make them reflect his own image, not God's. Satan urges people to reject God's plan and to decide for themselves what is good and evil.

If Satan can't keep people from hearing and believing the gospel, he will bring hardship into their lives. Hardship can destroy fruitfulness and even our faith. New believers, especially those with pasts of idolatry and spirit worship, need to watch out for Satan's tricks.

Satan wants us to view worship as nothing more than a business arrangement. In the book of Job, Satan asks God, "Does Job fear God *for no reason?*" (1:9). Satan tricks us into thinking, "No one loves and serves God without receiving a reward for it. If I do good deeds for God, he will do good deeds for me in return. How can I get God to give me what I want?" If life becomes difficult, this person might think, "Perhaps I did something God doesn't like." This is the heart of idolatry or spirit worship: manipulating the gods or spirits to give me

what I want or to keep me from getting what I don't want. Sadly, many people who accept Christ never give up this way of thinking about God!

People who put their trust in Jesus need to understand that Christianity is not just a "better deal" among other possible "deals." Hard times will come. Life will still hurt badly at times. The one true God can't be controlled by either an ordinary person or a witch doctor. God expects us to love and follow him even if it doesn't make sense or pay off in the short term. When someone turns to Jesus, we must expose this false way of approaching God and replace it with the teaching of Jesus.

Satan, however, is not easily discouraged. If he can't destroy a new believer's faith with hardship, he'll send distractions. We can imagine him saying, "Let the church build large buildings with great sound systems. Let it hold conferences that attract huge crowds. Let it make music that excites the emotions and gets the body moving. Let it do good deeds like feed the poor. Let it stay busy with projects and programs as long as it isn't making disciples!" The last thing Satan wants is to see the earth filled with people who live and love like Jesus.

Jesus mentions “the worries of the world and the deceptiveness of riches and the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19). Some people want more than anything to show off their great body and cover it with expensive clothes. Others will sacrifice everything to get a good education that leads to a good job. Can we call these things wrong? No. But they may distract us from the most important thing. They may cause unnecessary concern and steal our energy from following Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns disciples not to worry about our physical needs like food, drink, and clothing (Matthew 6:25-34). Instead of worrying we can trust God because God relates to us like a father to his children. He promises to give us whatever we need when we seek his kingdom and put righteousness first in our lives.

Discovering More about Jesus and His Life

How should you begin to teach new believers about following Jesus?

You could start by regularly visiting them. Begin by reading through one of the gospels with them and their family. Amazing things happen when people hold the mirror of God’s

Word up to their faces and when they hold the sharp sword of the Spirit in their hands! Important issues arise naturally as you read through the Bible little by little. Mark, the shortest gospel, is a good place to begin. Don't worry about getting through a certain amount of material each time you read together. Don't worry about preparing lots of material ahead of time. Simply read a passage together and ask three simple questions:

- What do I learn about God?
- What do I learn about the wrong way people live?
- What do I learn about how a person should live and follow Jesus?

Take Mark 2:1-12 as an example. Jesus heals a paralyzed man after his friends made a hole in the roof to lower him down. What do we learn about God in this story? We learn that only God forgives sins. Jesus claims to have the authority to forgive sins and he backs up his claim by doing the impossible. He heals a paralytic! Only God can heal people and forgive their sins, so Jesus must be God!

What can I learn about the wrong way people live in this story? The Jewish religious experts accuse Jesus of saying something terrible about God. They reject the clear truth that Jesus is God. He holds the power to heal and the authority to forgive sins. Many people likewise reject Jesus today.

What do I learn about how a person should live and follow Jesus in this story? We should believe Jesus is the Messiah. He was sent from God and he can forgive our sins. We should never lose our wonder and amazement over this incredible man who revealed God's power on earth.

Other questions will arise as you read the Bible together. That's okay. In fact, it's great! Answer them, if you can, as they come up. If you don't know an answer, admit it honestly and tell your friend you'll try to find the answer.

While reading the Bible together, choose verses to memorize. If you come across an important passage like Mark 8:34b-35 in your reading, why not memorize it together? Jesus says,

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (ESV)

Over time, reading and memorizing the Bible transforms our thinking.

Prayer

We express our need for God by returning to him again and again in prayer. Jesus modeled prayer to the disciples throughout his time on earth. Even when people demanded more and more of him, he still took time to pray. No doubt, Jesus spent some of this time praying for the men who followed him. In Luke's gospel, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John [the Baptist] also taught his disciples to pray" (Luke 11:1). Jesus taught them many things, but he specifically taught them to pray. And because of this, we can experience what Jesus taught them in what we call The Lord's Prayer (vv. 2-4; see also Matthew 6:9-13).

Hands-On Involvement

A key to discipleship is involvement. "Follow after me, and I will make you to become

fishers of men!” Jesus called out to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (Mark 1:17). They obeyed. At first, they were simply “with him” (Mark 3:14). But as time went on, Jesus gave them opportunities to heal the sick and cast out demons. The time would come when he would return to God the Father, leaving the job entirely in their hands.

When you visit people to read the Bible or to share the gospel, don’t go alone. Take someone with you. Let them watch you teach, pray, and minister to the people you visit. Let them teach, pray, and minister as well.

My former professor once told his students, “You can impress from a distance, but you can only impact up close.” If we really want to make disciples, we must allow our followers to get close enough to see who we really are and how we live. We must weigh our own motives. Do we want to gather a crowd of devoted fans who will give money to the church? Or are we truly seeking to develop more people who look and live like Jesus, to involve more people in the task of “fishing for men”? We enable disciples to make more disciples only as we allow them to participate in our ministry. We must pass on meaningful tasks and authority

(and maybe even applause?) to our followers. We should share ministry responsibilities gradually, giving bigger tasks only after disciples successfully complete smaller ones.

From time to time, disciple-makers may experience a conflict of values. Several years ago, I served both as an elder in our church and a teacher of young preachers at the local Bible college. Our church clearly stated several values, including “inspiring worship” and “empowering leadership.” Good preaching helps make worship inspiring. Leaders who empower intentionally give younger, less-experienced individuals the opportunities, training, and authority they need to lead. But when we allow less-experienced people to preach, the quality of the preaching usually decreases for a while. In a conflict of values like this, which value wins? Putting it another way, what is more important? Would you rather put on a good “show” each Sunday or develop disciples?

We gave one student named Simon opportunities to preach. He was a clearly gifted communicator and continued to grow. Today he heads up an international mission organization in Australia. We gave other

students opportunities to minister on smaller platforms, such as working with youth and leading small group Bible studies.

Nelson and Van took my Bible study methods class in their first year at Bible college. The following year they traveled with me to the Philippines and helped teach recovering drug addicts how to study the Bible. In their third year, they helped me redesign notes for a seven-week class on how to study the Bible. We then taught the class together in various churches. Both now serve in their own churches. Jesus could always do a better job by himself than by using flawed human beings, but he chose to train others and pass this method on to us.

Disciples need “coaching” as they learn to serve in ministry. Otherwise, they may assume they know best when they don’t. They may also become discouraged and give up. Many Tanzanian kids love to play football. We often see them playing with homemade “footballs” and without shoes. If they work with a coach, some of these children will mature as their coach teaches them about the game, gently points out their mistakes, shows them better ways to play, and trains them physically. The

same is true with discipleship. Disciples need a capable “coach” who will teach them about ministry, gently point out their mistakes, show them better ways to serve, and believe in them.

Time and Patience

When we read Mark’s gospel, it shocks us to see how slow and even thickheaded the first disciples were. After three years, they still failed to understand Jesus’s mission and what it means to follow him. Jesus repeated the same things over and over, and even then, the message didn’t sink in until much later. Ultimately, they failed to follow Jesus when he needed them most.

Instead of criticizing these men, let’s use them as a mirror to see what we look like. If we’re honest, we also find ourselves slow to learn. We also stumble and fall. Those we seek to develop as Jesus-followers will likewise stumble and fall. Growth takes time. Disciple-making requires patience. We must remember not everyone who responds to the gospel goes on to produce fruit. Remember the parable of the sower? Some fall away when difficulties come. Others get distracted by desires for other things. People fell away and got distracted even when Jesus taught!

What Could You Do?

I know a church that takes discipleship very seriously. Every year the pastor takes on a new group of young men to train for nine months. They meet each week for an hour-and-a-half on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings beginning at 6:00 am. They also come together every Thursday night for two hours. Over the nine months, they read through the entire Bible and discuss theology. They also attend four weekend retreats throughout the year to study specific topics in-depth. Over the years, several hundred men completed the program and launched out into ministry.

Could you consider something like this in your church? You might begin with only a few men or women, or maybe even just one at first. Without neglecting the many people who need pastoral care, could you reach out specifically to a few who seem ready to step up in following Jesus? Potentially, we might stay busy with all kinds of activities in the church, but Christ commanded us to make disciples. He promised he would be with us along the way (see Matthew 28:18-20).

Questions from Chapter 4

1. After reading this chapter, what should you do next? Using the questions below, form a plan for teaching others to follow Jesus.

- Begin with prayer. Ask God to go before you and lead you. Ask him to give you wisdom and courage and fruitfulness. Thank him for the future harvest he will bring through your efforts.
- Are there parts of your village where you need to “sow more seeds”? When and where will you accomplish this? Who could you take with you? Can you and those you take with you explain the gospel?
- Who are the new believers you need to follow up with? What do they most need to know about following Jesus? Again, who could you take with you when you visit the new believers?

2. Start or continue to study the other gospels regularly. Jesus said to make disciples we must teach people to obey all his commands (Matthew 28:28-29). A study of Matthew reveals five other important teachings about following Jesus.

- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- The Sending of the Twelve (Matthew 10)
- Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1-52)
- Life in the Church (Matthew 18)
- Teaching on the Mount of Olives about the Future (Matthew 24-25)

Each time you study, ask these three questions about the passage:

- What do I learn about God?
- What do I learn about the wrong way people live?
- What do I learn about how a person should live and follow Jesus?

Conclusion

If you've made it to this point, you're probably serious about discipleship. We began this book on that couch in my dorm room so many years ago. Since then I have seen Jesus—on the pages of the gospels, in the lives of mentors, in church members' living rooms, in family members, friends, co-workers, and even occasionally in a somewhat dim reflection in my own mirror. One of the Church's main reasons for existence is to teach people to follow Jesus. When God restores creation in the future, the world will abound with people who think, act, and love like God himself.

After these things I looked, and behold—a great crowd that no one was able to count, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, having put on white robes and palm branches in their hands. And they cry out with a great voice saying, “Salvation be to our God, to the one who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!”
(Revelation 7:9-10)

Jesus called people—often confused and seriously flawed people—to follow him. But honestly, is there any other kind? Over time, these first men Jesus called came to recognize who he is. They accepted his mission, and finally, they followed him, even though the path led through suffering. Improbable as it seems, the plan worked! Here we sit some two thousand years later. The kingdom of God spreads out before us like a massive plant providing shade for every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. Like yeast in a lump of dough, it has worked its way through most of the earth. Just as Jesus predicted, the kingdom has grown.

But the job is not finished. If it were, Jesus would have returned by now. Our mission remains the same—make disciples. The method remains the same—baptize and teach people to keep the Lord’s commands. Potential disciples are no more or less promising than they’ve ever been. Some will drop out. Those who continue will develop at a painfully slow rate. But as we go about this sometimes discouraging task of making disciples, Jesus provided all the encouragement

we need. After commanding his disciples to make disciples, Jesus gave them this promise: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Good News for You

written by ABH staff

This book encourages us to follow Jesus by learning his way of life. Then we can show others how to follow him too. We also learned how sin destroys our relationship with God and prevents us from following Jesus. Before we can follow Jesus, we must deal with our sin.

What is the solution to our sin problem? The Bible tells us to “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31 NIV). What exactly does this mean? Let’s review other Scriptures to understand this verse more fully:

- The Bible teaches us that in the beginning God created a perfect world which he declared to be “very good” (Gen. 1:1, 31).
- The humans God created and placed in the world disobeyed him. In that instant, sin entered the world and separated us from God (Gen. 2:4-3:24).
- God desires a relationship with his creation and loves each of us. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only

Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

- To come to God, we first need to recognize we live separated from him. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).
- Here’s the good news of the gospel: God sent his son Jesus to die on a cross and pay the price for our sins. He was buried and rose from the dead on the third day, defeating death and sin. “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ [Jesus] died for us” (Rom. 5:8).
- We can accept the payment for our sins that Jesus made for us. We can trust him to save us from our sin and bring us into relationship with God. “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” (Eph. 2:8-9).

How to Accept the Gift of Salvation:

The only requirement to receiving this gift is to believe these truths:

1. God created us and loves us.
2. Each one of us was born with sin and we continue to sin throughout our lives.
3. Jesus died and paid the price for our sins.
4. Jesus, through his death and resurrection, offers us the gift of forgiveness.
5. When we turn away from sin and turn to God to rescue us, we become part of God's family forever.

A Sample Prayer for Salvation:

Dear God, thank you for loving me and sending your Son to die on the cross for me. I realize I am a sinner and I need forgiveness for my sins. I accept your Son's payment for my sins on the cross. Thank you that Jesus won over death and rose from the dead. Thank you for accepting me into your family and giving me life with you forever. Please help me follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit while I live here on earth.

Endnotes

- 1 This book will follow this outline for looking at Mark. Bible scholar Abraham Kuruvilla's commentary, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* has been helpful for understanding the structure of Mark.
- 2 Most scholars view vv. 9-20 as a later addition to the original, shorter version of Mark.
- 3 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York City: Harper Collins, 1952), Kindle edition.

