

Discipleship Handbook

*A Resource for
Seventh-day Adventist
Church Members*



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To Be Like Jesus

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). This one short statement outlines the object of the Christian life. The goal of every true disciple is to be like Jesus.

When Jesus called the disciples, He said, “Follow Me”—not merely “Follow My teachings,” but “Follow Me.” We cannot truly follow His instruction apart from Him. A review of the earthly ministry of Jesus reveals that His disciples were with Him nearly everywhere He went. They learned to pray by listening to Jesus pray. They learned the importance of Scripture by seeing how Jesus depended on the Scriptures. They learned to love by seeing love in action in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). In other words: “When people see you acting like Me, they will know you are My disciples.”

Discipleship is the process of becoming like Jesus by spending time with Jesus. Discipleship classes alone won't do it. Religious forms won't do it. The personal relationship between disciple and Teacher is the heart of discipleship.

The Cost of Discipleship

While our relationship with Jesus brings us great joy, some of Christ's strongest statements emphasize the cost of following Him and of being His disciple. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25). "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

According to Jesus, discipleship involves self-denial and sacrifice. It is not for those seeking popularity or selfish pursuits. Jesus said that the gate is narrow and the way difficult for those who follow Him (see Matthew 7:14). He reminds us, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The true disciple will face opposition for standing out from the crowd.

Compelling Love

With such a cost, why would we want to follow Jesus? Quite simply, because we love Him! We surrender all to follow Jesus because we have found the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46). We have had our hearts changed by the unconditional love of a crucified Savior. "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The book *Steps to Christ* reminds us that "when . . . love springs up in the heart," it makes every burden light. "Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 59). Rather than following Jesus out of fear of loss or hope of gain, genuine Christians do so willingly and joyfully out of love for the One who, as Paul so beautifully stated, "loved me

and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). His great love far exceeds the attractions of this world.

When Jesus asked if the cost of discipleship was too high, Peter answered for every disciple down through the ages when he said, “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). And so He does. For He has promised that “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time

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. . . and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29, 30). The benefits of following Jesus far outweigh the cost, not merely because of golden streets or immortal bodies, but because of the unsurpassed peace and joy found in fellowship with Christ. As the Lord assured Abraham, so He now assures us, “I am . . . your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

Surrounded by the Spirit

Jesus taught that the “first and great commandment” of the law was found in Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Immediately after this instruction in Deuteronomy, we find the secret to a victorious Christian life: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. . . . You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It was not enough to avoid the idolatry and worldliness

of the surrounding nations. God's people were also to guard their hearts by surrounding themselves with the law of God.

Following Jesus in true discipleship requires more than just removing that which is sinful. It must also include adding to our lives that which is spiritual. "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). We can never be like Jesus if we spend our time focusing on the things of the world. Just as the disciples were with Jesus nearly all the time, we must surround ourselves with spiritual rather than earthly influences. We must add to our lives nonnegotiable spiritual activities that will keep our minds set on "things above." Because our sinful natures are so weak, disciples of Christ will carry these out by *faith*—even when they don't *feel* like it. Establishing these consistent spiritual habits is a vital secret to spiritual power.

Practical Application

Below is a list of eight spiritual habits that are essential for the disciple of Christ:

1. Daily personal prayer
2. Daily personal study of the Bible
3. Daily morning and evening family worship
4. Weekly Sabbath school attendance
5. Weekly church attendance
6. Weekly prayer meeting or midweek small-group Bible study attendance
7. Regular personal witnessing
8. Regular involvement in local church ministry

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). If you invest time with Jesus, His people, and His work, your heart will be intertwined with His heart. Then, and only then, can you begin to experience the goal of discipleship—to be like Jesus. As you continue in this *Discipleship Handbook*, you will learn many important things about the Christian life. But above all else, you will establish essential spiritual habits that will transform your life and guard your soul.

Take time to evaluate the list on the previous page. What obstacles do you face in establishing these as regular habits? What rearranging might you need to do to your schedule? What do you need to remove from your life in order to add these spiritual components of prayer, study, fellowship, and ministry that also characterized the life of Jesus?