



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Welcome to the Disciple of Christ Bible Study!

We are delighted to be part of your life and help you grow healthier and stronger in your Christian walk. Sometimes it may seem like a difficult journey, but it is well worth any hardship or sacrifice. There is nothing greater in this life or the next that can compare to a vibrant and loving relationship with our triune God.

God loves you and has a great plan for your life, and we want to help you develop that plan and keep it at the forefront of your mind. God's intention is for you to live your life as a disciple of Christ—a born-again believer who submits to, follows, and obey Him. Additionally, a disciple is a student of Jesus who studies His teachings and acts accordingly to become more like Him. Jesus intentionally made disciples, and that is our goal as well. In fact, *the greatest legacy that you or I will leave behind is the disciples we have made in Jesus' name.*

Disciples are not perfect, nor do we have all the answers. However, we love God and strive to please and serve Him daily. If we waited for only perfect disciples, we would have an exceptionally long wait indeed! Keep this in mind as you continue or set out to disciple others. Our enemy, Satan, seeks to make us feel unworthy so that we do nothing. It is his old trick, but we are aware of his schemes.

We will learn from each other as we hold each other accountable. For example, God may give you a Bible verse or a word that your discipleship team needs to hear. We should never “be too holy” to receive a word from other followers of Christ. You have a bright future in God's kingdom, and we are blessed to be a small part of it.

Executive Director¹

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Lesson 1
Position in the Kingdom

Day One

Share in Jesus' Suffering

I was paying bills one day when I noticed a late charge on the statement. This was an error. Not only am I careful in paying bills on time, but I also keep a record of when it was paid. I called the credit card company and kindly explained the situation. No matter how I reasoned, the representative would not take the charge off our account.

I was angry and frustrated by the time our conversation ended. Anders, my husband, walks in about this time and asks, “what’s going on.” After telling him about the situation, he takes the bill and comes back a few minutes later with the news—the late fee had been removed from our bill. *How did he do that?*

Some people have a personality for getting what they want. As we will see in our lesson today, Zebedee’s sons, James and John, wanted something from Jesus. They wanted special positions in Jesus’ new kingdom. They were asking for the number 2 and number 3 positions after Jesus. It was a big and audacious (daring) request.

Known as the “sons of thunder,” they were not lacking in boldness. However, these high positions were not something to be demanded, but granted. Their request called for finesse (skill). Perhaps they did not think they had the relational graces to succeed. *But aha*, they may have thought, *Mother always gets her way—let’s get her to ask Jesus*.

Were James and John frustrated with their positions and influence among the other disciples? Since they were fishermen by trade, they would not have had an abundance of power and authority within their community. Perhaps now was their opportunity to make a change.

1. Share a time when you felt unnoticed and unappreciated.

2. Would you like to have a position of authority and respect? Yes No (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #1–2 with your discipleship team.

There have been times when I have felt like James and John, wanting power and respect. This *is* the way the world thinks. However, God views positions of authority and respect differently—opposite to the world’s view.

Definitions: *Worldview* is defined as the sum total of our attitudes and expectations about the world that directs our thoughts and actions. *Biblical worldview* is based on the belief and trust in God’s Word to direct our thoughts and actions. In the Bible, the *world* can refer to all that is under Satan’s power and opposed to God (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2).

Read Mark 10:32–34 and answer questions 3–6:

Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles,³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” Mark 10:32b–34

3. Where did Jesus tell the disciples they were going (v. 33a)?
4. Who was Jesus, the Son of Man, going to be delivered to (v. 33b)?
5. What would the chief priests and teachers of the law do to Jesus (vv. 33b–34)?
6. After Jesus was killed, what would happen three days later (v. 34b)?

After Jesus had told the disciples the horrific news of His persecution and death, James and John immediately began plotting for their positions in His kingdom, seeking honor and status. This was not the first time the disciples displayed their misunderstanding of Jesus’ mission—earlier, they had argued among themselves about who was the greatest. Though Jesus had just revealed the path of suffering He was about to walk, the disciples were still fixated on their own worldly status. While James and John openly asked for positions of prominence, the other disciples were likely harboring similar ambitions, though perhaps more quietly. Their minds were not set on the things of God, but on personal glory.

Read Matthew 20:20–23 and answer questions 7–11:

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.²¹ “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”²² “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered.²³ Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” Matthew 20:20–23 (cf. Mark 10:37–40)

7. What was the favor the mother of Zebedee’s sons asked Jesus (v. 21)?
8. When Jesus answered the mother’s request, to whom did He direct His answer (v. 22)?
9. Did the brothers understand what they were asking for (v. 22)? Yes No (Underline One)

10. To help in their understanding of the request to sit on Jesus' right and left, what question does Jesus ask of the brothers (v. 22b)?

11. Who grants permission to those who will sit on Jesus' left and right? (v. 23)?

12. Read Matthew 20:24. Why were the other ten disciples indignant with James and John? (Indignant is to be angry, annoyed, and displeased.)

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Matthew 20:24

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #7–12 with your discipleship team.

If the other ten disciples were not interested in having those high positions for themselves, they would not have become angry. They would have happily gone about their own business. Jesus recognized the worldly mindset and used the occasion to teach all the disciples that position equals service and sacrifice to each other.

The world and God's kingdom have different sets of values and attitudes. Our job is to learn kingdom values—it is in this way that our deepest and genuine needs are met. From Jesus' teaching we learn three principles about attaining position in God's kingdom. 1. Position in God's kingdom requires us to share in Jesus' suffering. 2. Position in God's kingdom is not about dominating others. 3. Position in God's kingdom calls for compassionate service to others.

Three Principles about Attaining Position in God's Kingdom

(1) Position in God's kingdom requires us to share in Jesus' suffering.

Right after their mother knelt and made the request of position, Jesus replied to the sons—they were present and the ones behind the request (Matthew 20:22). In effect, Jesus is saying to the brothers, *You think you are asking for a royal and effortless position but that is not how it works.*

He then asks James and John, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" This Jewish expression meant to share someone's fate (destiny, future). Jesus had the cross in front of Him and would be suffering for the sins of the world.

However, Jesus did not mean they would die for the sins of world because He alone could redeem humanity. His position as the Son of God and Savior of humanity cannot be shared. Jesus *was* referring to His suffering, pain, and rejection at the hands of evil men.

13. Are you willing to suffer, experience pain, and be rejected by other people because of following Jesus? Yes No Maybe (Underline One)

14. Describe any suffering, pain, or rejection you have experienced because of following Jesus.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #13–14 with your discipleship team.

Jesus also asked if they were able to “be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with (Mark 10:38)?” Historically, the Jews defined the word baptism² as, “to go down” or “to perish.” The word later became identified with suffering and death. Jesus wanted to know if the brothers were willing to follow Him into death for God’s purposes.

James and John did not fully understand the fate that awaited Jesus, nor their own. Nevertheless, they replied in unison, “We can” (v. 39). At times, we can be like James and John, *eager to follow Jesus without knowing the depth of what that entails.*

Although we may not know what lies ahead when we commit to following Jesus, we can trust that God’s grace will sustain us through every challenge. Just as Jesus asked James and John if they were prepared to share in His suffering, we, too, are called to face the difficulties of life with faith and perseverance. While suffering is not something we seek out, it often becomes part of the journey when we walk in obedience to Christ.

This journey is symbolized in baptism, which represents our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. When we go under the water, we symbolically die to our old selves, and when we rise, we are resurrected to new life in Him. This act serves as a powerful reminder of our commitment to follow Jesus and the transformation He brings. (For more on the meaning of baptism, see the footnote below.)

In our own lives, the cup of suffering can take many forms—rejection, hardship, or even misunderstanding from others. In those moments, it’s easy to feel discouraged. Yet, in these trials, we have the opportunity to draw closer to Jesus and experience His strength. He knows what it is to suffer, and He walks with us in our pain, offering us comfort and encouragement.

The world tells us that success is defined by power and prestige, but in God’s kingdom, true greatness is found in service and sacrifice. Just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve, He invites us to follow in His footsteps by laying down our lives for others. This, then, is the path of Jesus’ disciples—not through earthly status, but through humble service.

As we close Day One, take a moment to reflect on the ways you may be called to share in Christ’s suffering. Are there areas in your life where God is asking you to surrender your desires for comfort or recognition? As we journey together, let us remember that whatever we face, we do not face it alone. Jesus is with us, and His Holy Spirit empowers us to endure and overcome.

—End Day One—

² Baptism has several meanings in the Bible, including trial and martyrdom. The English word, baptize, is translated from the Greek word, *baptizo* (βαπτίζω). It means to immerse, plunge, or dip. John the Baptist developed his practice of baptism as a symbol of repentance by drawing from the Jewish tradition of ritual purification, which involved washing with water to cleanse oneself from impurity. This practice was well-known in the Jewish culture and symbolized spiritual renewal and preparation for approaching God.

Day Two

Putting God's Plans First

Tara was from a very prominent, wealthy, and strict Pakistani family. When she was 12 years old, she saw an ad in the newspaper and sent off for something free. It turned out to be a Bible with correspondence lessons. The packages were delivered to the servants and then given to Tara. She did not see the harm in completing the Bible study lessons, but still had the sense not tell anyone about it. She hid the Bible and the lessons in her bedroom.³

When she was 16, because of her exceptional grades, she was invited to a special study class in Iran. Her brother accompanied her. While walking through the courtyard of her hotel, she came across a man looking into the sky and apparently talking with someone.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m talking to God.” he answered.

“You can’t talk to God,” Tara argued politely. “He will not come down to speak with you, and you cannot go up to Him unless you die.”

“I not only spoke with God, I got an answer.”

“You are not a prophet or an angel. How could you possibly get an answer from God?”

He invited her to come to a special location to learn more. She convinced her brother it was “religious” research and he allowed her to go—he waited outside. While she was there, a father brought his crippled daughter to the front of the gathering, and everyone started praying for God to heal the girl.

Tara couldn’t believe what she saw. The crippled girl’s legs slowly straightened, she stood and then walked down the center aisle of the church and looking into Tara’s eyes said, “Emmanuel.” Then she walked back to her father.

When Tara returned to Pakistan, she fervently studied the Bible to find answers. She found another Christian church, but she would learn that all Christians are not alike. The pastor of this church was more concerned for his own safety than for her salvation. Being responsible for someone converting to Christianity could mean a death sentence. So, he called Tara’s father and told him of her interest in Christianity.

Her father was furious and went into a rage. Even though she denied being a Christian, he struck her again and again and yelled at her, “You are no longer my daughter!” Her brother joined in the beating. They found the Bible and grew even more angry. They beat her with an electric cord and whatever else they could find.

³ The Voice of the Martyrs, *Hearts of Fire* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2003), 159–192. The following story of Tara is gleaned and quoted through the listed pages of this resource.

Afterward, they removed everything from her bedroom, including furniture and clothing, and left her battered and bloody body in a heap on the floor. They decided to marry her off and have her retrained. In fact, her father's last words to her were: "Either you marry, or you die!"

She laid on the floor for three days and when she finally lifted her head, she found her hair was stuck to the floor in dried blood. Tara uttered her first prayer to the one and only true God. "God, I don't know what to do. Please show me and I will follow you."

Tara did not know what following God would mean. Nor did she know what He would ask her to do. Perhaps it would mean that her father would change his mind or show some interest in Christianity. She had seen God heal a crippled child so certainly He had the power to change a man's will.

15. What are your thoughts concerning Tara's suffering in her search for the truth?

Jesus explicitly taught three times about His suffering and rejection by the chief priests and teachers of the Law in the Gospels. On Day One, we discussed how the disciples argued about who was the greatest and how James and John sought prominent positions in the kingdom. After His first prediction of His death, Peter, displeased by what Jesus had said, took Him aside and rebuked Him. In response, Jesus sharply rebuked Peter, highlighting the seriousness of his misunderstanding.

Read Mark 8:33–34 and answer questions 16–18:

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Mark 8:33–34

Definitions: The phrase, "*Get behind me, Satan,*" can also be understood as "get away from me, Satan." It means that Satan, the adversary, is trying to tempt someone away from God's will, and must be resisted. In this context, Peter, though unintentionally, was being influenced by Satan to divert Jesus from His divine mission. The phrase "*take up your cross*" means to die to oneself through total surrender to Jesus. In the first century, the cross was a means of death and so in carrying it, one was carrying their own execution device. *Rebuke* means to strongly warn, scold, or correct someone with the intent of setting them back on the right path.

16. What did Jesus say to rebuke Peter (v. 33)?

17. What did Jesus say to the crowd and His disciples about wanting to be His disciple (v. 34)?

Peter, like the other apostles, eventually understood what it meant to take up the cross and follow Jesus. While Peter initially resisted the idea of Jesus' suffering, he ultimately embraced his call to discipleship, even facing martyrdom for his faith. The other apostles, though at times driven by personal ambitions—such as James and John seeking positions of honor beside Jesus—also came to realize that following Christ meant a life of sacrifice, suffering, and submission to God's will. Together, they serve as powerful examples of the true cost of discipleship and the full surrender required to follow Jesus.

Action Step

18. Memorize: *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23*

Accountability: Share your answers to #15–18 and memory verse #21 with your team.

The world speaks loud and clear regarding their opinion of who holds a high position and why. However, we must seek high positions according to how Jesus defines it. *It means putting God's plans first no matter the suffering and rejection.*

When we are faced with suffering and rejection, we may be tempted to feel sorry for ourselves. The life of humility is not an easy one—the flesh has a strong desire for recognition and popularity. Pride is a constant battle for most of us.

In the world's eyes, Tara had every reason to feel sorry for herself. After all, she had been betrayed by a pastor while seeking the truth, and she wasn't even a believer. Yet, she refused to walk down the path of self-pity.

Notice that she did not blame God either. Despite being beaten senseless by her own father and brother, she did not cry out, *God, You must not be real, or You must not love me because I was reading your Book and seeking after you and this is what you allowed to happen to me.* Instead, she prayed for God's will and direction.

After her prayer, Tara felt strangely peaceful and fell into a deep sleep. After a while she felt someone lifting her head and softly caressing her cheek. She heard a voice saying, "Emmanuel, Emmanuel."

In that moment, the presence of the Lord Jesus entered her room, offering comfort and assurance that He was with her. The name *Emmanuel*, which means "God with us," came alive for her in a deeply personal way. Just as Jesus had walked alongside His disciples on earth, guiding and comforting them, He was now present with her through His Holy Spirit—offering the same love, peace, and companionship that He extends to all who seek Him."

Even though Tara was not a Christian, she was following the direction the Lord was leading her. She had completed the Bible lessons, and she followed up leads about other Christians. Her obedience did not make her popular, safe, or powerful. She was brutally beaten and had been

given an ultimatum to marry or die. In her mind, marriage would mean her search for God would be over. She put truth first and obediently made plans to leave her home.

Tara searched her room and found only one thing her father and brother had missed: a small travel bag from her last trip to Iran. It had some clothes, money, and her passport. She changed out of her bloody clothes and slipped out her bedroom window.

Then Tara made her way to the bus station and bought a one-way ticket to a city several hours away. She had been to this city with her family and had noticed a church there. But her troubles were not over. Some of the women of the church were jealous of her youth and beauty. They started false rumors and soon she was not welcome. In addition, her father and brother had come into town making their intentions known—*They were going to kill her.*

Despite everything she had endured, she came to understand the true meaning of *Emmanuel*. She realized that Jesus had come to earth not only to save her from her sins but to make it possible for her to know God personally. A few months after leaving home, she placed her trust in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. With Christ now dwelling in her heart, she set off for a fresh start in a new town, walking in the assurance of His presence.

Putting God and His plans first *does not* mean that we will be free of difficult, even tragic, circumstances in our lives. It *does* mean that He is working in us to shape our character and make us like Jesus. But even in the hard times, God will take care of us and provide our needs. Plus, Jesus has prepared a place for us in heaven where all pain and hardships are forgotten, and joy is constant.

19. Read Matthew 6:31–33. What does God promise to provide when we seek Him first?

*So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’*³² *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*³³ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew 6:31–33

Tara kept thinking about God and what He wanted. In the new city, she finally found a pastor who had her best interests at heart. She was able to live with his family for four and a half years and work as the church’s secretary. Tara also started a literacy program and a children’s ministry at the church. She brought in many new members as she shared the good news of Jesus Christ.

One day, a family member recognized Tara, and once again, she was forced to flee. For 15 years now, she has lived a hidden life—enduring imprisonment and deceit. She had even been betrayed several more times by “church members.” Yet, through it all, she clings to Jesus, continually seeking God’s will, and pursuing His presence. May Tara’s story inspire us to keep clinging to Jesus, seeking God’s will, and pursuing His presence in our own lives.

—End Day Two—

Day Three

Service to Others

As we saw in Tara's story, God may not always answer our prayers in ways that make our lives easier, but He is always good and desires the best for us. While Tara's *great* reward will be in heaven, God has also blessed her on earth. She has felt His presence and witnessed miracles that few experience. God has also given her a wonderful Christian husband, and together, they have a baby son.

So far, we have been examining the first of three principles about position in God's kingdom—that true *position requires us to share in Jesus' suffering*. This theme of suffering may bring to mind Unit One, Lesson 4, *God Is Sovereign*—a reminder that God is the Supreme Ruler who orchestrates all circumstances for His purposes.

Consider Jesus, who, though falsely accused, stood firmly before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Even in that moment, Jesus understood that His suffering was not determined by Pilate but was part of God's sovereign plan. Whether suffering was involved or not, Jesus always put His Father's will first.

20. Read John 19:10 and 19:11a. Who truly held the power over Jesus' fate—Pilate or God? Explain in your own words.

"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" John 19:10

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." John 19:11a

Action Step

21. Memorize John 19:11a above.

Accountability: Share your memory verse #21 with your discipleship team.

We must also recognize that, at times, we create our own heartaches. When we act in ways that contradict God's will, the resulting suffering is different from suffering with Christ. It is important not to confuse the consequences of our own wrongdoing with the suffering we are called to endure for His sake.

For instance, seeking to dominate or control others is a form of wrongdoing. Jesus, who knew the hearts of His disciples, recognized their desire for power as they competed for positions of authority in His kingdom. They may have viewed these roles as opportunities to exert control over others. Although we do not know the specifics of their inner thoughts, we do know that Jesus directly confronted and corrected this mindset.

This brings us to the second principle regarding position in God's kingdom:

(2) Position in God's kingdom is not about dominating others.

Dominate is a verb meaning to have control, power, or authority over somebody or something. It is also defined as having a commanding influence over someone.

Read Matthew 20:25–26a and answer questions 22–24:

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Matthew 20:25–26a (cf. Mark 10:42–43a)

Definition and Note: In the Bible, the term *Gentile* generally refers to anyone who is not of Jewish descent. In the Old Testament, *Gentiles* were often seen as outside of God's chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, some Gentiles, like Rahab and Ruth, interacted positively with Israel or converted to worship the God of Israel.

In the New Testament, especially after Christ's resurrection, the term *Gentile* takes on a broader significance as the gospel is extended to all nations. Through Jesus, both Jews and *Gentiles* can be part of God's covenant family, as seen in passages like Romans 1:16 and Galatians 3:28. The term shifts from being one of exclusion to reflecting the inclusivity of the gospel for all people.

22. Who did Jesus direct His teaching to about greatness, position, and service (v. 25a)?

23. How did the rulers of the Gentiles and their high officials lead? (v. 25)?

24. Why was Jesus bringing up the rulers of the Gentiles and high officials (vv. 25–26a))?

Jesus uses the phrase “lord it over,” meaning to act in a domineering or oppressive way, as lords did in that time. These rulers took advantage of their positions, often ignoring the needs, feelings, and welfare of those under them.

By using the example of the Gentile rulers, Jesus painted a vivid picture for His disciples of oppressive, prideful leadership. They could easily envision a man in a commanding position, full of arrogance and power. Jesus made it clear that this kind of behavior had no place among His followers: “Not so with you.”

Dominating or oppressing others is an ongoing issue that can have long-term, detrimental effects. After I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I eagerly shared the good news with everyone I knew. One day, while having a pleasant lunch with a friend named Joanne, I began talking about Jesus. Suddenly, she threw her fork down on her plate and told me she didn't want to hear it!

Visibly angry and irritated, she told me that she “grew up” in the church, where her father was an elder. They would go to church every week acting like everything was wonderful while in their home, her father was abusing her and her mother.

Eventually, her mother found the courage to seek help from the pastor. Shockingly, the pastor told her that the husband was the ruler of the home and she just had to live with that. Joanne, bitter and hurt, said she would *never* darken the door of any church, especially not one from the denomination her family had attended.

Both the husband and the pastor were attempting to establish false, dominating positions that have no place among believers. In God’s kingdom, position is never about control or dominance—and certainly not about criminally abusing others. A domineering spirit is rooted in pride and arrogance, declaring, *I want my way and I don’t care how it affects you.*

God hates pride and warns us throughout the Bible. For example, we are told, *The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.* Proverbs 16:5

25. If you were the pastor when Joanne’s mother had asked for help, how would *you* have handled the situation as a disciple of Christ?

26. Prayerfully consider and answer: Do you have a dominating or domineering spirit?
Yes No Sometimes (Underline One)

27. Read Ephesians 4:2. What will you do to develop a more humble, modest, and gentle spirit?

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2

Accountability: Share your answers to #25–27 with your discipleship team.

Having a prideful or dominating spirit must be dealt with immediately. We all have this tendency, and we must acknowledge it and confess it before God. Take a moment and pray: *O God, change my heart so that I have no desire to rule over anyone but to humbly accept the place and position that You have ordained and chosen for me. Amen.*

We have learned two key principles about attaining position in God’s kingdom. *First*, it requires us to share in Jesus’ suffering. *Second*, it is *not* about dominating others. The *third* principle that Jesus teaches makes it abundantly clear that His approach is entirely different from that of worldly leaders—He for compassionate service to others.

(3) Position in God’s kingdom calls for compassionate service to others.

Read Matthew 20:26–28 and answer questions 28–33:

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:26–28 (cf. Mark 10:43–45)

28. What did Jesus tell His disciples about becoming great and being first (vv. 26–27)?

29. What was the reason Jesus gave for disciples to become servants and slaves (v. 28)?

30. How did the Son of Man give His life as a ransom (v. 28)? (See also Hebrews 2:14–15.)

Jesus turns everything upside down! If you want to become great, serve others to the point of acting like their slave! He is not saying it is wrong to want to be a leader or even a great leader, but the rules for prominence (importance, status) in God’s kingdom will be in serving others.

31. Why or why is it not difficult for you to put your own needs aside and serve others?

32. Explain why or why not you think it was difficult for Jesus to put aside His earthly needs and serve others?

Action Step

33. Put your own interests aside and serve someone in love today. Write the circumstances of your service and what you learned.

Accountability: Share your answers to #28–33 with your discipleship team.

Jesus came down from the highest position of the universe. Remember the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, and therefore hold the identical preeminent position in heaven and on earth. They created and ruled together in perfect peace, love, and harmony. They have never lacked anything—past, present, or future. Yet, Jesus came to earth to live in a human body and die for our sins. There is no greater act of compassionate service to others.

When we love Jesus and abide in Him, we are empowered to compassionately serve others. He enables us through His Holy Spirit. Without Jesus, we are naturally inclined to be selfish, self-centered, and self-serving. After all, who would truly desire to be a servant—to everyone, or even anyone, for that matter?

On December 21, 1948, Mother Teresa began the *Missionaries of Charity* on the streets of Calcutta, India. God alone was with her as she rounded up five puzzled children from nearby hovels (shacks). Using a stick in the dirt, she began teaching them the alphabet. She also taught them how to keep clean and healthy.

By 1997, just before her death, 4,000 sisters had joined her order and over 400,000 co-workers. The *Missionaries of Charity* were in 120 Countries, feeding 500,000 families, teaching 20,000 children, treating 90,000 lepers, abused people, prostitutes, and AIDS patients.

Mother Teresa might not be of the same Christian denomination as you and me and we would disagree on certain theological issues, but oh, how she loved and followed Jesus. She instructed her sisters from Matthew 25:40, *“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”*

After a novice (trainee) had ministered to one of the destitute, one so repulsive that normal people could not bear to look, let alone smell such a person, Mother Teresa would take the novice’s hand, palm out. One by one she folded the novice’s finger and thumb back into the palm as she said these five words, *“You did it to Me.”*⁴

If you are interested in a better position in God’s kingdom, use Mother Teresa as an example—serve others for Christ. She willingly gave her life to the dying and destitute of Calcutta as she followed her Lord. She never married, owned a house, or went on vacations. She simply served God full-time the best she knew how—all her adult life.

Jesus wanted to make sure His disciples, then and now, understand greatness and service. Before James and John had asked to sit on Jesus’ right and left, Jesus had taught on this subject. The disciples had been arguing, but when Jesus asked them what they were arguing about they got noticeably quiet.

But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”* Mark 9:34–35

The only way to have the strength and humility to be the very last and servant of all is to dwell or remain in Jesus. Ask Him for the power and compassion to live a life of loving service.

Pray: *Lord Jesus, Help me to remain in You and please give me the power, strength, humility, and compassion through Your Holy Spirit to live a life of loving service to others. Thank you. Amen.*

—End Day Three—

⁴ < <https://www.faithandculture.com/home/2020/8/21/matthew-2540-with-st-teresa-of-calcutta>>(accessed 10/12/2024)

Day Four
Making Disciples

Discipleship, when empowered by Christ, transforms both us and those we serve. However, if we serve without relying on Jesus, our service can become legalistic—merely a task, duty, or discipline, detached from God’s grace. When service is driven by outward compliance rather than heartfelt devotion, it risks becoming the kind of work that may not be rewarded in eternity (1 Corinthians 3:12–15).

Definition: *Legalism* is an excessive focus on rules and discipline, often accompanied by pride and a lack of depth. It emphasizes the letter of the law over its spirit, neglecting mercy and the grace of God.

34. In Galatians 2:16, how does the apostle Paul address the problem of legalism?

... know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:16

35. How will *you* guard against a legalistic attitude in *your* service to others?

Legalism not only hinders our service but also obstructs our call to die to ourselves. True discipleship requires letting go of self-centered desires and embracing the life that Christ calls us to. Without dying to self, even our best efforts can be reduced to mere rule-following, lacking the life-giving grace that transforms both us and others.

Read Matthew 10:39 and answer questions 36–37:

Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my [Jesus] sake will find it. Matthew 10:39

36. What does Jesus mean by the statement *whoever finds their life, will lose it*?

37. How do *you* lose your life for the sake of Jesus, and yet find it?

Jesus’ statement seems paradoxical—how can one lose their life and yet find it? He is speaking of a spiritual truth: by preserving our physical lives or prioritizing our own interests at the cost of denying Christ, we risk losing eternal life. But those who surrender themselves to Jesus, even at the expense of personal comfort or safety, will gain true life.

This teaching calls us to die to ourselves daily. We lose our lives by setting aside our comforts, desires, and plans for the sake of Christ. In contrast, when we focus on self-preservation or

seeking our own satisfaction, we invite spiritual death. Jesus promises abundant and eternal life to those who surrender fully to Him. This is how we truly find life, now and forever.

When we put others ahead of ourselves and serve them, we will end up having our real needs met. We will please and honor the most powerful “Person” of the universe—God. Knowing we are doing everything God asks of us, we become more conscious of His guiding hand and our place in His kingdom. This is what gives us our purpose and significance.

Our simplest act of kindness, like helping someone clean up a spilled drink, will not go unnoticed and unrewarded in heaven (Mark 9:41). Our position of authority comes from serving others. The more we serve with love through Christ, the greater our position becomes.

Considering this lesson, take a moment to review the three principles we studied from Jesus’ teaching as recorded in Matthew 20:25–28: (1) Position in God’s kingdom requires sharing in Jesus’ suffering (v. 28c), (2) it is not about dominating others (vv. 25–26a), and (3) it calls for compassionate service to others (vv. 26b–27).

As we reflect on these principles, recognize that human nature wants to put itself first—we want to feel good about ourselves. This inclination can lead us to fall into the trap of adopting worldly principles, even within a church or ministry setting. Satan skillfully lures us toward ungodly power, position, and pleasure, tempting us to take our “felt” needs into our own hands instead of waiting on God. We must remember that our feelings do not always reflect reality—true fulfillment comes solely from God.

These principles lay a solid foundation for understanding discipleship and leadership in God’s kingdom. Jesus lived as He taught, and He wants us to do the same. To begin living and teaching these basic discipleship principles, memorize the Master’s words.

Action Step

38. Memorize: *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” Matthew 20:26–28

In serving others, remember to give the credit (praise, recognition) to God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit will lead you in acknowledging God both publicly and privately. Christ did not keep it a secret that He was serving God the Father. He suffered for truth, and we may also. But we will be suffering with and in Christ—following in His steps.

39. Reflecting on the difference between legalistic service and faith-based service, what steps can you take to surrender more of your life to Christ and serve others with a heart of humility and love?

Accountability: Share your answers to #34–37, 39 and your memory verses, #37 with your discipleship team.

Jesus wants us to make disciples who clearly understand and practice His teaching on “position in God’s kingdom.” When you and I leave this earth, the greatest legacy that we, or anyone else will leave behind is the disciples we have made or encouraged in Christ. Our family might be our first mission field, but it cannot be our only one. Even if we are the only Christian in our families and are ministering to them, we still need to reach out to others at the same time. Christ’s mandate (command) is to *make disciples of all nations*.

Read Matthew 28:18–20 and answer questions 40–45:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18–20

- 40. To whom was Jesus talking? (See vv. 16–17 in your Bible)?
- 41. Why is Jesus’ command also directed to believers today?
- 42. What would have happened if the first disciples had not obeyed and acted on this directive?
- 43. What will happen if you and I do not obey and act on Jesus’ order?
- 44. What gives *you* confidence to carry out Jesus’ command (vv. 18, 20)?

Accountability: Share your answers #40–44 with your discipleship team.

Action Step

- 45. Memorize Matthew 28:18–20 for Day Five. Plan to recite this verse the week after you share the memory verse from Action Step #38.

The command to make disciples is directed to all believers, not just the original disciples, because Jesus’ mission extends beyond the first century. His promise to be with us “to the end of the age” ensures that this call applies to every generation. Today, whether at home or abroad, we each have a unique role in making disciples. By embracing our calling and helping others do the same, we participate in fulfilling Jesus’ command to reach all nations.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Doctrine of Prayer

In our approach to discipleship, we will take key doctrines and teachings from the Bible, put them into practice, and help others do the same. Our goal is to be transformed in order “to be” rather than “to seem to be” a follower of Christ.⁵ From our very being, our very essence, let us serve Christ with undivided and pure hearts, fulfilling the purpose for which we were born—to glorify God.

Definition: Christian *doctrine* is a principle, policy, or rule of faith that is derived from the pages of the Bible. Sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ is important to life and discipleship (1 Timothy 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13–14).

Prayer is simply personal communication—talking with God. It is foundational because our lives begin and end with our relationship with Him, and there is nothing apart from God. Even before the written Word, prayer existed as humanity’s way to connect with Him.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had direct communication with God. However, after they sinned, they experienced separation from Him due to their disobedience. Even so, before they were cast out of the Garden, God demonstrated His mercy by promising a Savior through Eve’s lineage (Genesis 3:15), who would restore humanity to Himself.

The next recorded instance of God’s direct communication with humanity is in Genesis 4:6–7, when He warned one of Adam and Eve’s sons, Cain, about the dangers of sin. Despite this warning, Cain killed his brother Abel. In response, God provided Adam and Eve with another son, Seth, to carry forward the promise of a Savior and the future of humanity. However, there seems to be a period of silence regarding humanity’s communication with God after this point.

It was during the time of Seth’s son, Enosh, that a turning point occurred: people began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). This marked the beginning of prayer as a defining practice of God’s people. From this time forward, calling on the name of the Lord became a way to seek God’s presence, guidance, and help.

God not only delights in our prayers but also expects us to call on Him. He invites us to ask in faith, trusting that He will answer. As you read your Bible, pay attention to the moments when people called on the name of the Lord and consider their reasons for doing so. For examples, see 1 Kings 18:24; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; 1 Corinthians 1:2).

46. Why do you or why do you not regularly call on the name of the Lord in faith?

⁵ *Esse quam videri* is the well-known Latin phrase that is translated *to be rather than to seem to be*. North Carolina adopted this saying as their state motto in 1893. It has also been a popular motto for schools.

47. Read 1 Chronicles 5:20. Why did God answer the prayers of the three tribes of Israel?

They [Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh] were helped in fighting them, and God delivered the Hagarites and all their allies into their hands, because they cried out to him during the battle. He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him. 1 Chronicles 5:20

To call on the Lord in faith is to trust Him completely with the outcome, knowing that He wants us to rely on Him. When we fail to do this and instead turn to other sources—or rely on ourselves—the consequences, as in Saul’s life, can be severe.

48. Read 1 Chronicles 10:13–14. Why did Saul die?

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance,¹⁴ and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse. 1 Chronicles 10:13–14

49. Are there any areas of your life where you have been unfaithful to the Lord? If so, what will you do about it?

Just as unfaithfulness to God leads to separation from Him, failing to trust and remain faithful to Him in our family relationships can result in pain and brokenness. Trusting the Lord with our families means submitting them to His guidance, seeking His wisdom, and relying on His grace to restore and heal. When we fail to seek God’s will or act out of selfishness, we risk damaging the very relationships God calls us to steward with love and faithfulness.

Family relationships, like our walk with the Lord, require faith, patience, and dependence on Him. We long for unconditional love and unity within our families, but sin, misunderstandings, and unmet expectations can cause deep wounds. If we do not seek God’s healing and guidance, these wounds can fester, leading to resentment, anger, or estrangement (separation). Trusting the Lord for and in our families is key to experiencing His redemptive work and restoring unity.

50. Please list and pray for any family relationships that are strained, estranged, or compromised.

Accountability: Share your answers #46–49 with your discipleship team and pray for those family members listed in #50.

Calling on the Lord in faith is foundational to Christianity. It begins with calling on the name of the Lord for salvation and restoring our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we are saved from God’s wrath and the penalty of sin. This act of faith is the starting point of discipleship, and prayer becomes the ongoing practice that deepens our connection with God and strengthens our walk with Him.

Read Romans 10:9–15 and answer questions 51–52:

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” Romans 10:9–15

51. If for any reason you are not sure you have called on the Lord for salvation and restoration, pray to God from your heart, professing Jesus as your Lord who died for your sins and was raised from the dead.

If you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior after praying above, please let us know so we can rejoice with you. You may either email us at kathleen.skaar7@gmail.com with the month, day, and year of your decision or go to our website, injesussteps.org and locate: “New Decision to Follow Jesus” on the Homepage. Click on “Share With Us” and fill out the form.

Make sure you share with the other disciples in your group. They will also rejoice with you! No matter what age or how many years you have been attending church, this is exciting news that causes much rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:10).

52. What will you do to make sure you have beautiful feet who bring the good news of Jesus Christ (v. 15)?

The Bible provides wonderful examples of Jesus praying, with His longest recorded prayer found in John 17:1–25. Jesus prayed this just before He and His disciples left the Passover meal and entered the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1–3) on the night before His crucifixion. His intention was to shape the disciples’ prayers for success in their world-changing mission. In doing so, Jesus was setting the course for both them and us.

Read John 17:1–25 from your Bible and answer questions 53–55:

53. How did Christ pray for Himself (vv. 1–5)?

54. How did Christ pray for His twelve disciples (vv. 9–17)?

55. How did Christ pray for all disciples, including future ones (vv. 20–26)?

After Adam and Eve sinned, humanity’s relationship with God was broken. Christ’s prayer seeks the restoration of this relationship, aiming to re-establish and bring us back to God. Our mission aligns with His purpose; while Christ accomplished humanity’s salvation, we are called to make Him known as the Restorer—our Redeemer, Savior, Rescuer, and High Priest. We also proclaim Christ as the key to maintaining a healthy, unified, and joyful relationship with God.

Jesus promised us—*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). We are not required to do anything alone or on our own. We call on and trust in the name of the Lord. He will keep us on the straight and narrow path that takes us ever closer and closer to Almighty God until at the end—we see Him face to face.

56. The following are answers to questions 54–55. Please use them as a prayer guide and pray for your discipleship team in your personal prayer time and when together.

I have prayed for my discipleship team. Yes | No (Underline One)

How Christ Prayed for His Twelve Disciples

(1) **Acknowledgement:** Jesus acknowledges His disciples before God and lifts them up in prayer (v. 9).

(2) **Protection:** He prays for their protection, asking that they remain in God’s will, love, and purpose (v. 11c). He also specifically asks for protection from the evil one and his schemes to tempt them into sin (v. 15).

(3) **Joy:** Jesus prays that His disciples may experience the full measure of His joy within them (v. 13).

(4) **Sanctification:** He asks that they be set apart to know and obey God’s Word (v. 17).

(5) **Consecration for Mission:** Jesus consecrates Himself as High Priest and consecrates His disciples for their mission, reminding us that we are saved to be set apart and commissioned for God’s service (v. 17). (Consecrate is to separate oneself from things that are unclean, especially anything that would contaminate one’s relationship with God.)

How Christ Prayed for All Disciples (Including Future Ones)

(1) **Unity with God:** Jesus prays for His disciples to experience unity with God, allowing the world to witness God’s redemptive plan through Christ (vv. 21–23a).

(2) **Unity Among Disciples:** He prays for complete unity among all His followers, so that through Christ, the world will come to know God’s love (v. 23b), as affirmed in John 3:16. This truth emphasizes our responsibility to share Christ’s story.

(3) **Eternal Glory:** Jesus asks that His disciples may see His glory and be with Him in eternity (v. 24).

(4) **Ongoing Revelation:** Jesus prays that He will continue to make the Father known to His disciples, so that the love of God for Jesus may be in them, and that Jesus Himself may dwell in them (v. 26).

Jesus modeled prayer in several key ways: through praise (worship), thanksgiving (gratitude), confession (plainly telling our wrongs), listening ((attuning⁶ ourselves to God's voice), petition (personal requests) and intercession (praying for others). These are all important ways that we relate to God and should all be part of our ongoing communication with Him.

Incorporating praise, thanksgiving, confession, listening, petition, and intercession enables us to fully experience the power of Jesus' promises. One of His most profound promises is that He will answer any request His disciples make. Not only does Jesus promise to answer, but He also assures us that God the Father will answer as well. These promises were not just for the disciples 2,000 years ago—they extend to every generation of believers.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus reiterates five times that His disciples should ask—and they will receive. This amazing promise invites us to consider our own prayer habits. Are we fully trusting God's assurance by bringing our requests to Him? When we neglect to pray, we miss the opportunity to witness His faithfulness in action. Today, we are going to focus on understanding and utilizing Jesus' promise to its fullest potential.

Jesus did not merely promise to answer prayers; He also provided guidance on how to ask correctly and for the right reasons. Like many of God's promises, the promise of answered prayer comes with specific conditions. These include praying in faith (Matthew 21:22), the Father is glorified in the Son (John 14:13–14), praying according to God's will (1 John 5:14), maintaining a pure heart (Psalm 66:18; James 4:3), forgiving others (Mark 11:25), remaining in Christ and His Word (John 15:7), praying with perseverance (Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12), praying with gratitude (Philippians 4:6), and approaching God with humility (James 4:10).

These conditions help us align our prayers with God's will, making them powerful and effective. Today, we will explore two of these key conditions—glorifying God and remaining in Jesus.

57. Read John 14:13–14. What is one key condition or reason Jesus gives for answering a disciple's prayer in His name?

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. John 14:13–14

⁶ Being attuned to God's voice means that we are in a harmonious or responsive relationship.

58. What are the ways God the Son brings glory to God the Father? (See John 11:4, 14:10–11, 15:8, 17:4–5; Romans 16:25–27; 1 Peter 4:11.)

Read John 15:7–8 and answer questions 59–61:

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. John 15:7–8

59. What is another key condition Jesus gives for granting a disciple's request? (v. 7)?

60. How are *you* remaining in Jesus and how are His words remaining in you?

61. Bearing much fruit brings God the Father glory and shows that we are disciples of Christ (v. 8). With this knowledge, what will *you* ask God for in Jesus' name?

Read John 15:16 and answer questions 61–62:

You did not choose me, but I [Jesus] chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. John 15:16 (See also: John 16:23–24, 26–27)

62. Who chose you and appointed you to go and bear lasting fruit?

63. When we are bearing lasting fruit in Jesus, what will the Father do when we pray?

Prayer is essential for followers of Christ. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's people continually reached out to Him in praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition, and intercession. By studying these prayers, we not only deepen our understanding of God but also discover ways to live in a manner that honors and pleases Him.

Action Step

Studying the prayers of the Bible helps us become stronger disciples and confident of our position in God's kingdom. Read the following Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments, reflecting on the purpose and significance of each prayer. Consider why they were recorded for us and how they demonstrate God's response. Then, answer questions 64–65.

Old Testament: Ezra—Ezra 9:6–15, Solomon—2 Chronicles 6:4–11, 14–42, Jehoshaphat—2, Chronicles 20:5–12, Daniel—Daniel 2:20–23

New Testament: Acts 9:11–20, 11:5–30, 12:12–17, 16:25–40, 22:17–30

64. What are the two most meaningful things you learned by studying the above prayers? List the book(s) and verse(s) where you received these meaningful insights.

65. Give two ways that you will incorporate these meaningful insights into your prayer life.

Accountability: Pray for your team per #56 and share your answers #51–65 with your team.

God works in response to our calling upon Him in prayer. We call on God for many reasons—asking Him to save us from sin, enemies, sickness, trouble, and heartache. We also seek His help in glorifying Him, making disciples, and doing good works. God desires for us to call on Him for everything, and He wants to answer our prayers. Jesus instructed us five times to ask in His name. Nevertheless, sometimes our prayers are not answered in the way we expect or desire. We will explore those reasons in the next lesson.

—End of Day Five and Lesson 1—

Next—Lesson 2: Prayer and Grace, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Disciple of Christ Bible Study Lessons:

Lesson 1: Position in the Kingdom
Lesson 2: Prayer and Grace
Lesson 3: Identity in Christ
Lesson 4: The First Covenants
Lesson 5: Davidic Covenant
Lesson 6: The New Covenant
Lesson 7: Forgiving Others
Lesson 8: Forgiving Yourself; Refusing to Blame God
Lesson 9: Worship in Christ
Lesson 10: Holy Power
Lesson 11: Refresh—Sharing Christ
Lesson 12: Why the Bible is Trustworthy
Lesson 13: Overcoming Emotional Suffering
Lesson 14: Fear the Lord
Lesson 15: The Word of God
Lesson 16: Faith and Confession
Lesson 17: Love

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