

Experiencing Discipleship¹



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 17:1–13; Matthew 18:1–4; 24; Mark 8:27–30; John 6:43–58.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples [followers]. He said, ‘If anyone wants to come after me, he must say no to himself. He must pick up his cross and follow me’ ” (Mark 8:34, NIV).

ALL THROUGH THE GOSPELS, all through the stories of Jesus, we can find material that will help us understand what it means to be a disciple.

As we read, one point should come through again and again: Discipleship is an experience. To be a true follower of Christ, we need to have an experience with Jesus. We need to know Jesus. We need to make Jesus a part of us and practice what He offers us.

Head knowledge is not enough. Repeating Bible verses is not enough. Knowing doctrines is not enough. To be a disciple of Christ, you must have a personal experience with Him. This is the kind of experience that has changed and is still changing your life.

This week's lesson will help us better understand what some of these experiences must involve.

THE WEEK'S LESSON IN BRIEF (SHORT): What does it mean to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ? What lessons about faith can we learn from the Transfiguration?² Why does Jesus tell us we must become as little children? What does it mean to bear (carry) our cross for Jesus?

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

2. Transfiguration—the scene where James, John, and Peter saw Jesus' body in glorious form. Read Matthew 17:1–6.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 17**THE BREAD OF LIFE
(John 6:43–58)**

What important spiritual lesson is Jesus giving in John 6:43–58? Why are Jesus' words so important for all would-be disciples? Why are the truths here so important for those who try to disciple others?

It is no surprise that Jesus spoke these words not long after the miracle of feeding the five thousand (John 6:1–14). But the answer of the people showed that their hearts were still set on worldly things. The people saw Jesus as a worldly king who could meet their worldly needs. But that is not why Jesus came. That was not His main purpose.



To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus means to receive Him as our Savior.

What do the verses for today tell us was the purpose of Jesus' coming? Read also John 6:26, 27.

“To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Savior. This also means that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. By beholding His love and by thinking about it, we are to become partners of God's nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot help us if we do not eat it. The food must become a part of our life. In the same way, Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Savior. Knowledge about Him by itself will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be received into the heart completely.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 389.

What has been your own experience in eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus? How do you do this? What changes has this brought to your life? Be prepared to talk about your answer in class.

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 18**CHILDREN AND DISCIPLESHIP
(Matthew 18:1–4)**

In Matthew 18:1, the disciples come to Jesus. They wonder, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Why would they be asking such a question? Other Gospel stories³ show that the disciples were fighting among themselves over which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of God (Mark 9:33, 34; Luke 9:46–48). This showed the disciples' thoughtlessness and misunderstanding over the principles (rules) of being humble and loving. They are important parts of Jesus' kingdom.

How did Jesus answer the disciples in Matthew 18:1–4? What is it about children that make them such good examples of discipleship?

Think how important Jesus' saying is. If we are not converted (born again) or become as little children, we shall not enter His kingdom. In other words, we shall be lost!

There are several ways to look at what Jesus said. Perhaps the key (important) word in these verses is humble. As disciples, we must be humble, the same as children. We must realize we need and depend completely on God our Father. It is the same way children understand that they need their own parents. Children cannot survive (live) on their own. We cannot survive without God. And it is so important that we recognize our need. Sin began on earth when Adam and Eve thought that they could do things their own way, without God.



Disciples must be humble, the same as children.

Children often believe, even without full understanding, what we tell them. In the same way, how often must we learn to believe and trust, without full understanding, of what the Lord tells us? If we have to know everything about Jesus and salvation before we believe, we will never be saved. This is because we will never believe. We must have the conversion⁴ that Jesus talked about. Conversion means becoming like children. We are to believe in what we do not fully understand. If we did fully understand, then what and where would faith be?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 19

THE TRANSFIGURATION AND FAILURE (Matthew 17:1–13)

One of the most wonderful experiences in the Gospels is what is called

3. Gospel stories—the stories about the life and teachings of Jesus found in the Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

4. conversion—the time when a person fully believes in Jesus, and decides to turn his or her life around, doing away with sinful habits completely.

the Transfiguration. There God (Jesus) showed His presence in a wonderful way in front of the eyes of some of Christ's disciples.

What three special things happened in Matthew 17:1–13 that should have done much to make the faith of the disciples stronger?

Jesus never calls us to be followers without giving us reasons to believe. Not all our questions are answered. But we are given enough reasons to have faith and to believe even in what we do not fully understand. We might not witness the kind of things that the three disciples (James, John, and Peter) did on the mountain. But we have been given enough for us to trust in the Lord and in His goodness. What we do with that faith (John 1:9; Ephesians 2:8) will decide if it grows or dies away.



Peter, James, and John saw Jesus glorified, but they still left Him later. Miracles alone cannot give us faith. Instead, we must ask God to strengthen the faith we already have.

The three disciples were given a great honor. They saw things that most of us in this world never will. But, still, what do the following verses Matthew 26:56; 69–75; Mark 9:30–32; John 20:19 show us about the disciples? What lessons can we learn from their experiences?

Sometimes we can have this attitude, “Oh, if God would do this for me, then my faith would be stronger. Or if God did that for me. . . .” What are the dangers of such an attitude (feeling) for a disciple of Christ? Instead, what positive things can we do to make better use of the faith that we already have been given?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 20

THE OLIVET SPEECH (Matthew 24:4–44)

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus gives what has been called the Olivet speech. This is because He gave it on the Mount of Olives. The disciples were proud of the glory of Herod's temple. This led to Jesus' words.

What are some of the important signs of the Advent (Second Coming) that Jesus gave the disciples in the Olivet speech?

There are several important things about discipleship that we can learn. Perhaps one of the most important is that we need to know of the spiritual

dangers out there. We are in the middle of a great controversy (war) between good and evil. In this war we will face many of Satan's tricks. Some are so great that if it were possible even the elect (chosen) would be deceived (Matthew 24:24). And, thinking about Jesus' end-of-time message, we must be even more watchful about these tricks.



We must not forget that we are in the middle of a war between good and evil for this world.

So, we must be sure that we know very well what we believe and why we believe it. And when we bring in new members, we must warn them as new members of these tricks.

Of course, the best way always is to know the truth. To know very well

what is right is the surest way to know what is error (wrong). As we come close to the second coming of Jesus, this is very important that we seriously try to help all members know the signs of the times and dangers we can face in these times.

A false christ might be shown as someone coming and claiming to be Jesus. What are other ways we can be led astray by modern idols that steal Jesus' place in our hearts?

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 21

BEARING THE CROSS (Mark 8:27–30)

In Mark 8:27–30, Jesus asks the disciples about how others think of Him. After getting an answer from them, He asks who they think He is. Peter is the one who announces Jesus as the Christ. But Jesus tells them not to tell others. Why would He say that? Should He not make clear to people that He was the Christ?

Why do you think Jesus told the disciples what He did in Mark 8:27–30? Could this be the lesson about waiting for the right time before we act? Read also John 4:25–30.

Notice what follows next in Mark. Jesus' answer to Peter should have told them that He was the Messiah. Imagine what must have gone through their minds when He started telling them what would happen to Him

(Mark 8:31). Notice, too, it is again Peter who answers. It is the same Peter, who just a few verses earlier, announced Jesus as the Messiah (verse 32).

Read Jesus' answer to Peter in Mark 8:33–38. What important message is Jesus giving for all who would be His disciples?

Verse 34 makes an important point. It says that Jesus called the people along with His disciples. Then Jesus began to give them these powerful words about what it means to be a follower (a disciple) of Christ. At that time, there were several things only a chosen few were honored to know. But this message about death to self, about bearing (carrying) a cross, and about losing everything for the sake of the gospel was a message every disciple needed to hear.

Ask yourself this question: When was the last time you carried a cross for Christ? What does your answer tell you about the kind of disciple you truly are? What changes would you need to make? And how can you make them?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 22

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 746–750, 973, 974; Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” pages 383–394; “The Foreshadowing of the

Cross,” pages 410–418; “He Was Transfigured,” pages 419–425; “Ministry,” pages 426–431; “Who Is the Greatest?” pages 432–442; “Blessing the Children,” pages 511–517, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Our Lord has said, ‘You must eat the Son of Man’s body and drink his blood. If you do not, you have no life in you. . . . My body is real food. My blood is real drink.’ [John 6:53–55, NIV.] This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat means His broken body. The water we drink means His spilled blood. Everyone, saint or sinner, eats his daily food. Everyone is fed by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross is represented by every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing [choosing] the symbols [bread and water] of His great sacrifice. The light shining from the Last Supper’s service in the upper room makes holy the food for our daily life. The family food becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a holy time.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 660.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ In class, discuss what it means to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus.
- ❷ Think more about the idea that we need to be like children. What other

things do we find in children that make them such good examples? How can we be more childlike in our faith? At the same time, in what ways can we go too far with this “like a child” example?

③ The lesson this week talked about Satan’s different tricks that we will have to face as disciples of Christ. What are some of these tricks that the church is facing in your area of the world? How are they shown? What kind of false appearances (fronts) do they come in? How easily influenced by⁵ them are our members? As a

church, what can you do to help protect all members from these spiritual traps?

④ What are all the reasons we have been given for faith? In other words, why are we believers? What evidence do we have for our faith? Dwell on your reasons for belief and then as a class discuss your responses.

⑤ Summarize what you understand to be the experience of discipleship. What has that experience been for you? What does it encompass? In class, share your experiences.

5. influenced by—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.