

Experiencing Discipleship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 17:1–13; 18:1–4, 24; Mark 8:27–30; John 6:43–58.*

Memory Text: “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (*Mark 8:34*).

All through the Gospels, all through the stories of Jesus as recorded there, 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 have been changed by Jesus; we need to partake of Jesus and what He offers us.

Head knowledge is not enough; being able to recite Bible texts is not enough; knowing doctrines is not enough. To be a disciple of Christ, you must have had a personal experience with Him, one that has changed and is still changing your life.

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

The Week at a Glance: What does it mean to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ? What lessons about faith can we learn from the Transfiguration? Why does Jesus tell us we must become as little children? What does it mean to bear our cross for Jesus?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 23.*

The Bread of Life

Read John 6:43–58. What important spiritual lesson is Jesus giving here? Why is what Jesus says here so important for all would-be disciples? Why are the truths here so important for those who seek to disciple others?

It is no coincidence that Jesus expressed these words not long after the miracle of feeding the five thousand (*John 6:1–14*). The response of the people, however, showed that their hearts were still set on worldly things, that they saw Jesus as a worldly king, one who could meet their temporal needs. That is not why Jesus came; that was not His primary purpose.

What did the texts for today tell us the purpose of Jesus' coming was? See also *John 6:26, 27*.

“To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. It is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of His nature. What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge 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 assimilated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

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

Children and Discipleship

In Matthew 18:1, the disciples came to Jesus, wondering who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Why would they be asking such a question? Parallel accounts show that the disciples were, in fact, 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 not only showed insensitivity but demonstrated the disciples' poor understanding of the principles of humility and love, key elements of Jesus' kingdom.

How did Jesus answer them? *Matt. 18:1–4*. **What is it about children that make them such good examples of discipleship?**

Think about the importance of what Jesus is saying. Unless we are converted, unless we become as little children, we shall not enter His kingdom. In other words, we shall be lost!

There are a number of ways to look at what Jesus said. Perhaps the key word in these texts is *humble*. As disciples, we must be humble, like children. We must realize our total need and dependency on God our Father, just as children realize their need of their own parents. Children cannot survive on their own; we cannot survive without God. And it is so crucial that we recognize our need. Sin began on earth with Adam and Eve thinking that they could do things their own way, apart from God.

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, what the Lord tells us? If we have to have everything about Jesus and salvation explained to us fully before we will believe, we will never be saved, because we will never believe. We must have the conversion that Jesus talked about, and conversion involves becoming like children, believing in what we do not fully understand. Plus, if we fully understood, then where would be the role of faith?

The Transfiguration and Failure

One of the most amazing experiences recorded in the Gospels is what is called the Transfiguration, in which God manifested His presence in a remarkable way before the eyes of some of Christ's disciples.

Read Matthew 17:1–13. What three specific things happened that should have done much to strengthen the faith of the disciples?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Jesus never calls us to discipleship, to being a follower, without giving us reasons to believe. Not everything, of course, is answered, but we are given enough reasons to have faith, enough reasons to believe even in what we do not fully understand. And though we might not witness the kind of things that the three did on the mountain, as disciples of Christ we have been given enough for us to trust in the Lord and in His goodness. What we do with that faith, that gift (*John 1:9*, *Eph. 2:8*), will determine whether it grows, stagnates, or dies away.

The disciples had the great privilege of seeing things that most of us in this world never will. Still, what do the following texts reveal to us about them? *Matt. 26:56, 69–75; Mark 9:30–32; John 20:19*. What lessons can we draw from their experiences?

Sometimes we can get caught up in the attitude, “Oh, if only 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 for a disciple of Christ? Instead, what positive things can we do to build up and utilize the faith that we already have been given?

The Olivet Discourse

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus gives what has been called the Olivet discourse (because He gave it on the Mount of Olives). The disciples' action in pointing out the magnificence of Herod's temple formed the background to Jesus' words.

What are some of the major signs of the Advent that Jesus gave the disciples in the Olivet discourse?

Matt. 24:4, 5

vss. 9, 10

vss. 11–13

vss. 23–27

vss. 36–44

There are a number of important things about discipleship that we can take from here. Perhaps one of the most important is that, as disciples, we need to be aware of the spiritual dangers out there. We are in the midst of a great controversy, one between good and evil, one in which we will be subject to many deceptions, some so great that if it were possible even the elect would be deceived (*Matt. 24:24*). And, considering the context of Jesus' message, as we near the end of time, we must be even more vigilant regarding these deceptions.

Thus, we must be sure that we, ourselves, are firmly grounded in what we believe and why we believe it, and that as we bring in new members, discipling must include making new members aware of these deceptions.

Of course, the best way always is to know the truth; to be grounded in what is right is the surest way to know what is error. Especially as we near the second coming of Jesus, how crucial that we make an earnest effort to help all members, especially new ones, to be aware of the signs of the times and dangers we can face in these times.

False christs might not necessarily be manifested as someone coming and claiming to be Jesus. What are other ways we can be led astray by anything that usurps the place that Christ alone deserves in our hearts?

Bearing the Cross

In Mark 8:27–30, Jesus asks the disciples about how He is perceived by others. After getting an answer from them, He asks who they think He is. Of them all, Peter is recorded as confessing Jesus as the Christ. Jesus, though, then tells them basically not to tell others. Why would He say that? Wasn't the whole point of everything He did to get the people to know that He was the Christ?

Why do you think Jesus told them what He did? Could there be a lesson here for us, as disciples, about how time and circumstances must be considered before we act? *See also John 4:25–30.*

Notice what follows next in Mark. Jesus' response to Peter should have basically affirmed for 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 responds, the same Peter who just a few verses earlier professed Jesus as the Messiah (*vs. 32*).

Read Jesus' response to Peter (*Mark 8:33–38*). What crucial message is Jesus giving for all who would be His disciples?

Verse 34 brings in an important element. It says that when Jesus called *the people* along with His disciples, He then began to give them these powerful words about what it means to be a follower, a disciple, of Christ. Though at that time there were certain things only a select few were privileged to know, this message here, about death to self, about bearing a cross, about losing everything for the sake of the gospel, was one everyone who wanted to follow Him needed to hear.

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

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 746–750, 973, 974; Ellen G. White, “The Crisis in Galilee,” pp. 383–394; “The Foreshadowing of the Cross,” pp. 410–418; “He Was Transfigured,” pp. 419–425; “Ministry,” pp. 426–431; “Who Is the Greatest?” pp. 432–442; “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Our Lord has said, ‘Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. . . . For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.’ John 6:53-55. This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss what it means to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus.
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that we need to be like children. What other traits 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 take the child analogy too far?
- 3 The lesson this week talked about various deceptions that we will have to face as disciples of Christ. What are some of these deceptions that the church is facing in your area of the world? How are they manifested? What kind of guises do they come in? How easily are our members swayed by them? As a church, what can you do to help protect all members from whatever spiritual traps might come their way?
- 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.

Hope Meets Hopelessness: Part 2

by CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN

Santosh was playing cricket with the pastor's children on the roof of the apartment building when he lost his balance and fell backward off the roof. "Lord, save me!" he cried as he tumbled toward some high voltage wires. The instant he hit the wires the transformer burst, cutting off all current. The wires broke his fall, and he landed on the ground.

He struggled to get up but couldn't. A crowd gathered, wondering aloud that this boy could have fallen three floors, hit the high voltage wires and the hard ground, and survived. "How did you survive that fall?" someone asked.

"I prayed, 'Lord, save me!'" Santosh said.

The pastor rushed to Santosh's side. He took the boy to the hospital, where he needed surgery to set his broken leg. His parents rushed to his bedside.

Family members learned of Santosh's fall and blamed the family's interest in Christianity. But Santosh strongly disagreed. "God saved me from worse injury because I prayed," he told them.

Santosh's parents worried about his injury, his medical bills, and what may have caused the fall, but Santosh encouraged them to trust God in spite of what the family said. During his two-week stay in the hospital, and afterward as he recuperated at home, Santosh shared his love for Jesus with those who visited him.

Santosh has recovered from his injuries. He and his parents have given their lives to Jesus and have thrown out their idols. Santosh's grandparents, who once opposed Christianity, now attend church with Santosh and his parents. He urges them to trust in Jesus.



Santosh is bright and enjoys studying the Bible with several of his relatives. One aunt has been baptized, though she must sneak to church against her husband's will. Two uncles, another aunt, and his other grandmother attend church because of Santosh's testimony, and several other relatives are studying the Bible.

Your mission offerings help families around the world find the Savior.

SANTOSH (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission* and "Inside Stories."