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Adventist World

Week of Prayer

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Introduction

Some 2,000 years ago Jesus gave the invitation "Follow Me, and I will make you sh - ers of men" (Matt. 4:19) to a small group of shermen on the shores of Galilee. ey "immediately . . . left the boat and . . . followed Him" (verse 22). As they spent time with Jesus, their lives were transformed forever.

Today Jesus still calls people to be His disciples. Being a disciple begins by following Jesus—spend ing time with Him through Bible study and prayer, following where He leads. rough the pages of Scripture we too can sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His teach ings. We watch as He heals the blind and lame. We see His zeal as He cleanses the temple, and His tenderness as He blesses children. We watch as He reveals love for His enemies and guidance for His friends. Like the disciples of old, we are privy to His profound instruction. We watch in wonder during the closing scenes of His earthly life. Rejoicing at His resurrection, we can still walk with the disciples to Emmaus as Jesus, "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, . . . expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

When we "have been with Jesus" (see Acts 4:13), we are then ready to accept His call to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19, 20).

I invite you to spend special time with Jesus during this Week of Prayer, as we consider carefully what it means to follow Him.

Ted N. C. Wilson, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church

We believe in the power of prayer, and we welcome prayer requests that can be shared at our weekly staff worship every Wednesday morning. Send your requests to • • • • • , and pray for us as we work together to advance God's kingdom.

I Will Go Make Disciples

Discipleship and the Mission of the Church

BY TED N. C. WILSON

More than 2,000 years ago on a springtime mountainside in Galilee, the risen Christ met with His disciples, along with hundreds of His follow - ers, to give them important instruction in how to carry forward the mission He began in reaching souls for the kingdom of heaven. For many this would be the only time they would see and hear directly from their risen Lord.

"Of this meeting," we are told, "Christ Himself, before His death, had designated the time and place. e angel at the tomb reminded the disciples of His promise to meet them in Galilee. e promise was repeated to the believers who were gathered at Jerusalem during the Passover week, and through them it reached many lonely ones who were mourning the death of their Lord. With intense interest all looked forward to the interview." [1]

Image: Prixel Creative / Lightstock

"There is no higher calling than to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Simply put, the goal of every true disciple is to be like Jesus."

As the group gathered on a hillside in Galilee, Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. In awe they listened as He personally spoke the famous command recorded in Matthew 28:18-20—"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

THE START OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

About three years earlier another important event took place on a Galilean mountainside. Inspiration tells us, "It was at the ordination of the Twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on the earth. Of this ordination the record says, 'He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.' Mark 3:13, 14."[2]

These 12 disciples had the privilege of following Jesus daily, listening to His teachings, seeing Him in action, learning from His example. "For three years and a half the disciples were under the instruction of the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. By personal contact and association, Christ trained them for His service. Day by day they walked and talked with Him. . . . He did not command the disciples to do this or that, but said, 'Follow me.'"[3]

The disciples were then to go as Christ's witnesses, declaring what they had seen and heard from Him. They were to train and educate others, sending them out to share the gospel message. And to do this, they were given the power of the Holy Spirit.

A CALL FOR ALL BELIEVERS

And now, once again on the mountainside, the risen Christ was giving the gospel commission, not only to those He had designated leaders of His church,[4] but to all believers everywhere.

Lifting their sights heavenward, Christ declared that His work on earth had been accomplished and that He was returning to His Father in heaven. Assuring His followers that "all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," He articulated the mission of His church, outlined through the lens of discipleship, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20).

There is no higher calling than to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Simply put, the goal of every true disciple is to be like Jesus. "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher," said Jesus in His sermon on the mount (Luke 6:40).

And this call to discipleship, this mission of the church, is wide-reaching—encompassing all nations. While this must have been a startling revelation to the hundreds of followers sitting on that Galilean mountainside, Jesus had already shown while on earth that the gospel was for more than just the Jews alone. He had ministered to Samaritans, Romans, and other Gentiles such as the Syrophoenician woman and the Greeks who came seeking Him during the feast.

A SACRED WORK

After receiving Christ's commission, His followers set about witnessing first to those closest to them—relatives, friends, neighbors, expanding outward. One such dedicated disciple was Tabitha, also known as Dorcas.

"She had been a worthy disciple of Jesus Christ, and her life had been characterized by deeds of charity and kindness to the poor and sorrowful, and by zeal in the cause of truth. Her death was a great loss; the infant church could not well spare her noble efforts."[5] Her discipleship played such a vital role in the mission of the early church that when she died, God worked a miracle through the apostle Peter, restoring her to life (see Acts 9:36-42).

As the church continued to grow, Christ's followers began to realize just how broad their calling was, as revealed by Paul when addressing the men of Athens on Mars Hill: "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on

all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and nd Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26, 27).

Down through the ages God has been guiding His church as His message has been carried from disciple to disciple, sometimes at the cost of their very lives, making disciples by teaching God's Word, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and mentoring as Jesus did.

OUR PRIVILEGE

Today, what a privilege it is to be part of this Great Commission and nal loud cry to the world, sharing the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14! Ellen White links the Great Commission with the three angels' messages in a clear and powerful way:

"In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. ey have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the rst, second, and third angels' messages. ere is no other work of so great importance. ey are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.

" e most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world. e proclamation of these truths is to be our work. e world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them. . . .

"We are to be consecrated channels, through which the heavenly life is to ow to others. e Holy Spirit is to animate and pervade the whole church, purifying and cementing hearts. ose who have been buried with Christ in baptism are to rise to newness of life, giving a living representation of the life of Christ. Upon us is laid a sacred charge. . . . [We] are dedicated to the work of making known the gospel of salvation. Heaven's perfection is to be your power."[6]

DISCIPLE•MAKING: A PROCESS

Making disciples is a process. It is more than presenting a series of evangelistic meetings, as vital as they are. It is more than feeding the homeless, cleaning up a neighborhood, doing a health fair, or giving Bible studies, as important as these activities may be.

e rst step in the discipleship process is becoming disciples ourselves. "We must study the Pattern and become like Jesus, who was meek and lowly of heart, pure and unde led."[7] e way we do that is by spending time with Him each day—studying His Word, contemplating its meaning, communing with Him through prayer, and by His power, surrendering all to Him and obeying His commands. e grace of Christ is a transforming power, changing us from being hearers to doers of the Word of God.

e next step, as revealed in the life of the early disciples, is to share with others what we ourselves have experienced--what we have seen and heard through our walk with Jesus, inviting them to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8). And once they give their lives to Him in baptism, these new ones in the faith are still in need of discipling through mentorship by more experienced disciples in the faith.

An excellent resource in outlining the full discipleship and mentoring process has been produced by the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference. Titled Discipleship Handbook: A Resource for Seventh-day Adventist Church Members(available in 30 languages!), this practical and succinct book will be a tremendous blessing to new and longtime members alike.

Just as it was in New Testament times, carrying out the mission of the church involves everyone—not just the pastors, evangelists, and other leaders. God invites us all, through His power, to become disciples of Christ, then go and make disciples for Him. Jesus is coming. Get involved!

[1] Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 818.
[2] Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 9.
[3] Ibid, p. 17.
[4] Ibid, pp. 17, 19.
[5] Ellen G. White, The Spirit of Prophecy (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1878), vol. 3, p. 323.
[6] Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 189.
[7] Ellen G, White, Signs of the Times, Apr. 20, 1891.

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Questions for Reflection

1. How can I prioritize personal time with Christ so as to be familiar with His voice and instruction in my life?
2. Are you more like Dorcas and her quiet acts of service or Paul, boldly sharing principles of truth?
3. Is there someone in your local church to whom you can come close, providing support and nurture in their walk with Christ?

What Is a Disciple?

The Gospel of Mark records this well-known, yet unique, story: "They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.' Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly" (Mark 8:22-25, NIV).

In every other healing account, Jesus heals by one touch or one command. Why were two interactions needed before this man was healed?

Consider the sequencing of the stories in Mark 8. Prior to this narrative, Jesus had miraculously fed the 4,000; however, the Pharisees still wanted a sign. In response, Jesus warned His disciples regarding the "yeast" of the Pharisees, symbolically referring to their lack of faith (verses 1-21, NIV). Then, after restoring the blind man's sight, Jesus asked the disciples the ultimate question of faith: "Who do you say that I am?" (verse 29). Thus, the context of this story is faith. Note that it was others who brought the blind man to Jesus. It was these people, not the blind man, who had faith in Jesus.

As a 10-year-old boy, I was blind for a short time after watching welding, despite being told not to. I woke the next morning and couldn't see—it was frightening. I had to depend on my family to feed, wash, dress, and lead me. I had to trust them to be my eyes.

Similarly, as Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, the blind man began to trust Jesus to be his eyes. As Jesus put spit on the man's eyes and asked, "Do you see anything?" the man replied, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." His faith in Jesus increased. Finally, as Jesus placed His hands on the man's eyes and he saw clearly, his faith in Jesus as a person, healer, and life changer was complete. Through this process of developing trust, Jesus took a man with little or no faith and led him to a place of trust and faith, thereby restoring the man's life.

LEARNING TO BE A DISCIPLE

This is how Jesus works with each one of us. He knows where we are in our personal faith journey; even if we have only a little faith but are willing, Jesus can lead us and give the right evidence to develop trust and faith in Him, for the restoration of our life. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The word translated "disciple" in the New Testament is *matheteswhich* is derived from the Greek verb "to learn." Thus, a disciple of Jesus is a person who is learning to develop trust and faith in Him, and to be restored by Him.

This was the process Jesus' 12 special disciples followed. Jesus chose them to be with Him and then to send them out (Mark 3:13-15). As they spent time "with Jesus," they learned to trust Him. They saw how He related to others with dignity, compassion, and truth—children, foreigners, lepers, Scribes, women, those seeking help and those intent on harm. From their time "with Jesus," they were "sent out" to do what Jesus did and intervene, healing relationships,

"A disciple is a person who in every way is becoming more like Jesus."

disease, disability, and death.

ey were to teach forgiveness, self-sacri ce, and internal heart change rather than external rule following. ey, like Jesus, were to minister and lead with a heart for service rather than ego, focusing on the inherent value and potential of each person. Ultimately, because of Jesus' coaching and mentoring, all but one of these disciples became leaders of a multiplying disci-ple-making movement.

SPERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP IS A PROCESS

e process of discipleship is much the same for us today. As we intentionally spend time "with Jesus"—through intentional habits of reading and re ecting on Scripture, talking to, and listening to God, spending time in nature, resting on the Sabbath, cultivating gratitude. . .we are learning habits of thinking, believing, and doing that develop trust and faith in Jesus. As our relationship with Jesus grows and we internalize that God is love, we learn to love God, others, and ourselves (Mark 12:30-33). As Ellen White writes: "It is your privilege ever to grow in grace, advancing in the knowledge and love of God, if you maintain the sweet communion with Christ it is your privilege to enjoy." [1]

As with the original 12, our time "with Jesus" results in our being changed into His likeness. But while this work of God's grace may not be complete, we, too, are "sent out" to re ect the character of Jesus with empathy, truth, and courage. We live for Jesus in the home, school, workplace, and community, to bring about change there.

is story from Papua New Guinea illustrates the process. Two elders in the Madang Town church observed that a group of high school-educated, unemployed young men was growing, as was crime in the area. ey decided to provide these "Madang Street Boys" with food once a week. e church rallied with not only food but care. After a short time they asked the boys if they would like to join a Bible reading group. ey provided the Gospels of Mark and Luke and the book of Acts for the boys to read, along with some basic self-discovery questions. Over time, these interactions led to greater compassion and vision in the church people, less crime in the town, and some of the street boys becoming disciples of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

e South Paci c Division has a mantra: "A disciple is a person who in every way is becoming more like Jesus" (based on Eph. 4:15). We recognize that disciples of Jesus are all works in progress, because becoming like Him is a goal "that cannot be completed in this life, but that will be continued in the life to come."[2] Some have ongoing challenges with patience, tithing, language, healthful eating, attitude . . . However, we are not to judge each other; rather, we are to love, encourage, and build each other up (1 ess. 5:11) to become disci-ple-making disciples of Jesus.

[1] Ellen G. White, God's Amazing Grace (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1973), p. 292.
[2] Ellen G. White, Education0 R X Q W D L Q 9 L H Z & D O L I 3 D F L ‰ F 3 U H V V Assn., 1903), p. 19.

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Questions for Reflection

1. Describe an experience in your life in which Jesus helped you develop greater trust and faith in Him.
2. Which devotional habits have particularly helped you be "with Jesus"? Which devotional habits do you find more challenging and why?
3. What do you like about following Jesus? How would others know that you follow Jesus?
4. How have you experienced being "sent out"—in your home, school, workplace, community—to bless others?

Growing as a Disciple of Jesus

Experiencing His Presence

We learn from Scripture that growing in Jesus is essential. is happens through reading the Bible, praying, wor - shipping and praising God, fellowshipping with believers, reaching the world through ministry and evangelism, and by practicing God's presence (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-36).

GOD'S MOST FREQUENT PROMISE

roughout both the Old and New Testaments, God repeatedly says, "I am WITH you." is is His most frequent promise. In the beginning He was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:4-3:24). He gave us the weekly Sabbath because He wanted to spend a whole day exclusively with us (Gen. 2:1-3). Even after the Fall, He instructed Israel to build a sanctuary for Him as a symbol of His presence with them (Ex. 25:8).

e greatest reality of God's presence with us is Jesus. Even His name, Immanuel, proclaims that He is God with us (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14). Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus promised that He would be with us always, even to the very end (Matt. 28:20). He gave us the Holy Spirit to abide with, and in, us forever (John 14:16, 17). e climax of the ages is being with Jesus forever when He comes back the second time (Rev. 21:3).

God is with us all the time. We may not feel His presence, but that doesn't make it any less true. "And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:8). is is God's promise to us today.

What does it mean to experience God with us?

1. WE ARE LOVED

On a recent ight from Houston to Chicago, I was seated next to an executive for an information technology company. He ew all over the world and was often gone from home. He missed his family immensely and had a phone number exclusively for their use. Normally his calls were screened, but his family could call him at any time, and they knew he would answer. "No voices sound sweeter to me than those of my wife and children," he told me. "I will stop everything to answer the phone and connect with them."

Our conversation reminded me that I also have a direct line to my heavenly Father. " e Lord is near to all who call upon Him" (Ps. 145:18). He never feels like I am interrupting Him when I reach out in prayer. When I am sick or discouraged, He reaches down to comfort me, or direct others to com- fort me on His behalf. When I am excited, I can call out to Him. I have a one-to-one connection to God.

For Ellen White, the ultimate reality of the love of God is His

presence with us. “Since Jesus came to dwell with us, we know that God is acquainted with our trials, and sympathizes with our griefs. Every son and daughter of Adam may understand that our Creator is the friend of sinners. For in every doctrine of grace, every promise of joy, every deed of love, every divine attraction presented in the Saviour’s life on earth, we see ‘God with us.’”[1]

2. WE ARE NEVER ALONE

God’s presence manifests in whatever manner we need. For the orphan, He is the everlasting Father (Isa. 9:6). For the newborn baby, He is the compassionate Mother (Isa. 49:15). For the lonely, He is the omnipotent Companion that is with us always (Ps. 68:6; 69:33). For the sick, for the deserted, for those going through the valley of death, He promises, “I will be with you” (Isa. 43:2).

One of the most exciting things about God’s presence is the joy it brings. “In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand are pleasures forever” (Ps. 16:11, NASB).[2] I know that no matter what I am experiencing, no matter where I am, God is always with me, helping me to face life with con dence and hope.

3. MAKING GOD’S PRESENCE A REALITY IN YOUR LIFE

God is constantly seeking to reveal Himself to us in every aspect of our lives. He urges us to seek Him wholeheartedly. He tells us how in Jeremiah 29:12-14: “ en you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and nd Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord.” Notice there are two conditions: calling and seeking

4. CALL ON ME

We distance ourselves from God when we are distracted by such things as work commitments and a busy lifestyle. e problem is not on His end—it’s on ours. We can profess the nearness of God, but not really live in the assurance of it. Talk to Him every day about the issues in your life. Share your life with Him. Let Him guide and bless you.

A few weeks ago, I was having a hard time sleeping. A frustrating situation was replaying in my mind. Restless, I got up and tried watching TV, but I kept hearing a voice softly saying, “Call on Me.” I opened my Bible to Acts 2:25, 26: “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. erefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope” (NIV). A sense of peace and calm came over me. I took my situation to God in prayer. His presence brought joy and hope to me (Acts 2:28), and I soon fell asleep.

5. SEEK ME

We are to diligently seek God every day. If I saw my wife or wanted to spend time with her only every few weeks, we would not have much of a marriage. I want my wife to know I am thinking of her. I intentionally schedule time for us to be together. Even though we have been married for more than 40 years, I am still excited to be with her and learn more about her. Likewise, we are to be intentional about seeking God. When we set aside our distractions and take time to seek God, we will be blessed by knowing Him. We will be transformed by “the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

Determine to seek God’s presence every day. He is never farther than a prayer away.

[1] Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, California, Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 24.
[2] Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

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Questions for Reflection

1. Think of an incident in which you felt God’s presence in a compelling way.
2. What can you do to be intentional about recognizing God’s presence in your day-to-day life?
3. Chart the highs and lows of your life. How did you experience God’s presence in each one of them?

Living as a Disciple

We have been called to live as Christ's disciples at home, work, school, in the marketplace, and beyond. He is the light of the world (John 1:4). If He lives in you, it will be evident to those around you. Your knowledge of God cannot be hidden. It cannot be private, known between you and God alone. It has to bless others. "Like their master, the followers of Christ in every age were to be the light of the world."*

Sometime ago I attended a funeral of an elder in Kenya. His wife and teenage children testi ed about his life in a manner that touched every mourner. "At our wedding," she said, "he vowed to love me, and he genuinely loved me until his death." e children a rmed this as true. As a Christian and church elder, he truly exempli ed the love of God to his spouse and children. is is living as a disciple!

DISCIPLES DEFINED

In common English a disciple is a personal follower of a teacher. In Hebrew a disciple is one who actively imitates both the teaching and life of the master—one who applies what has been learned.e big question for a follower of Christ is: What would Jesus do if He were in my situation? en that is what I must do! (Phil. 3:10, 11).

It is always a challenge to live what you claim to be! People around you want con rmation that you are genuine . e Bible is full of examples of people who lived as genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. ey imitated both His teachings and life.

Paul encouraged the believers: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, KJV). Joshua declared before all the leaders of Israel, "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day

Your knowledge of God cannot be private. It has to bless others.

whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

A BIBLICAL DIRECTIVE

Scripture calls spouses to live as genuine disciples at home. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. . . . Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body" (Eph. 5:25-30, NIV).

"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1, 2, NIV).

If you are a parent, your discipleship is revealed in the way you interact with your children. "Fathers [or parents], do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, NIV).

As a child, living as a disciple requires that you obey your parents, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth'" (verses 1-3, NIV).

Paul admonished the youth to confirm their discipleship through their characters. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12, NIV).

The apostle Peter challenged pastors and church leaders to live as genuine disciples: "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder. . . . Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:1-4, NIV).

A CRITICAL NEED

Living as a genuine disciple is critical. In these last days the devil and his angels are working tirelessly to keep believers comfortable in a lukewarm state. "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people" (2 Tim. 3:1-5, NIV).

Like Paul, let your consuming desire be to know Christ and be like Him: "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:10-14, NIV).

* Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets (Mountain View, Calif.: 3DFL‰F 3UHVV 3XE $VVQ S

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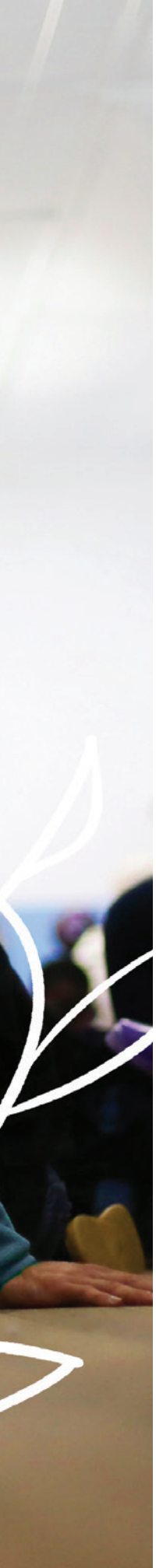
Questions for Reflection

1. When does one become a disciple of Jesus Christ?
2. Is it possible to share your light to those far away and fail to share it with those close to you?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in discipleship?

Making Disciples

A Deep Calling



BY TARA VINCROSS

The Christian life is a life based on practice. One preacher shared an analogy I nd helpful. Imagine wanting to be more healthy. You may want to start exercising, build muscle, or become more exible, so you go to your local gym and sign up for a membership. Each week you go, and they direct you to an auditorium where you listen to a lecture. ey tell you how to position your body when lifting weights, how to get the best cardio workout, how to stretch at the end to increase your range of motion. Each week you go to the gym to sit and listen, then return home. You're never invited to the exercise oor.

Would you see change in your body? Would you start to feel stronger? No, you wouldn't. It's not until you practice what you are learning that you will start to see a change. We cannot simply know information about health, we must practice it: warming up our muscles, stretching, playing, running, lifting—whatever it may be.

e truth is simple to see, but more di cult to put into prac - tice. Following Jesus is not just about belief—it's about practice. It's practicing our faith that puts our beliefs into action.

As you look back over this past year or two, what have your rhythms of life looked like? How have you been intentional about practicing your faith? Perhaps you've been juggling kids in distance learning while working full-time. Perhaps you've lost someone close to you. Perhaps you've been dealing with signi cant uncertainty or anxiety in this season.

I want to acknowledge what you—what we—have been through. God has faithfully carried us, yet it has still been hard. Perhaps you've lost some of your former practices. I'm not sure where you're coming from right now, but this I know: God wants to meet you right where you are on your journey.

I believe God is inviting us to practice discipleship, putting our faith into action. Our calling as believers is to join God in reaching the world. As we focus on putting our faith into practice, it's so important for us to understand a wholistic approach to discipleship.

Wholistic discipleship involves knowing (head), being (heart), and doing (hands). We engage in growth; then we must put it into action, sharing the experience we have with our Lord. at's what it means to make disciples. Revelation 12:11 says that we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. e word of your testimony is an act of disciple-mak - ing. Sharing the story of how God has worked in your life.

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

is term is hard for us because people interpret it in di er - ent ways. Usually when someone says the word "discipleship," they mean one of two things: (1) my own journey of following Jesus, or (2) my actions that help others grow in their journey with Jesus. Discipleship, as evidenced in the Scriptures, includes both elements: being a disciple and making disci- ples. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you shers of people" (Matt. 4:19, NASB).1 Being a disciple is a lifelong process of growth in Christ. Part of disciple- ship is how God uses our lives to grow other disciples.

To be a disciple is to live in a posture of learning. is growth is done in the context of community. As Jim Moon, pastor for worship at the Collegedale church in Tennesee puts it: "Living out communion with God and commission to the world must be done in community with others."

WHY TALK ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP?

I believe deep in my bones that the church makes the invisible God visible. at the people of God show what love looks like because God is incarnate in what we do and how we do it. Ellen White highlights the special work of God through the church, saying, "Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts."[2] Just think of it: God shows grace, love and transforming power to the world through you and me. Your actions and my actions matter.

I care deeply about discipleship because the space that I take with God, the community God has nur- tured in my life, and the purpose God has given me in joining Jesus' mission are lifesaving for me. I am a fellow disciple on the journey with you and sharing from the painful and hopeful place where life and ministry happen.

I have the blessing of serving the Azure Hills church as senior pastor. In my region there live more than 4 million people that we are praying come into deeper connection with the saving love of Jesus. I serve with some incredible pastors and local leaders, where we join in the mission

Image: Ryan Klintworth / Lightstock

"As disciples, we are called to make space for transformation, the work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives."

of God together. As disciples we are called to be transformed, changed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

You must start with yourself. You cannot o er what you are not experiencing. As Ellen White poignantly shares: " e minister [or disciple] cannot give to others that which [he or she] . . . does not possess . . . . Many are able to talk upon doctrinal points, but they are ignorant of the lessons of Christ. Such [men or women] cannot be a blessing either in the pulpit or at the reside." [3]

What do you need to stay anchored and abiding as a disciple of Jesus? Without this, you will not be e ective in making disciples.

DEEP CALLING

For the past 12 years I have used a curriculum I wrote titled Deep Calling: On Being and Growing Disciples (AdventSource, 2020). Each year I've had a group of 12-16 people that I have journeyed with through this Deep Calling process. ese intergenerational groups have involved all ages in being and making disciples. In the space set aside for connection with God, He has moved and worked in remarkable ways. It isn't about a certi cate of completion that you hang on your wall and you're done. Being a disciple and making disciples is a lifelong journey.

Deep Calling is a 12-week discipleship curriculum designed to be implemented in community. It's structured around how to discover and put into practice eight calls of God: devotion, prayer, rest, community, healing, witness, serving, and blessing. e act of being a disciple cannot be separated from making disciples. If my own prayer life is deepening, it is going to be experienced by those around me in the way I witness.

e practices demonstrated in the eight calls o er a structure to develop spiritually. rough a growing love for Jesus, catalyzed by time in the Scriptures, prayer, service, and blessing, transformation is ongoing. Deep Calling utilizes teaching time, spiritual companions, small groups, community building, hands-on service, and retreats—all with the goal to make space for God to work in the lives of the participants.

FAITH IN ACTION

An elder at one of my churches has been an Adventist for most of his life. As he went through the Deep Calling discipleship journey, however, he found God inviting him into new territory. rough his time in prayer and devotion, God led him into making disciples.

He was always a friendly person, getting to know his neighbors and helping them out when he could. But as he spent more time with those around him and listened more deeply to their needs, he found himself o ering to open up the Bible with them. His testimony and prayer with them led to weekly time spent together in the Scriptures.

It was my great joy to stand in the waters of baptism with him as we baptized his neighbors, the very couple God led to faith by studying the Bible with him! As he said, "I never could have dreamed that God would do this through me!" God brought this couple into the family of faith, and the community enriched their lives. e beautiful thing is that this couple then reached out to others and brought them into fellowship!

On average, human beings live 27,350 days. e question is What will we do with these days? Will we join the greatest adventure we could imagine, uniting with Jesus and making disciples? We desperately need to make space for the practice of our faith. As we do, I know we will witness the transforming work of God.

May you be held in love as you experience the transforming work of God in your life. May you know the delight of joining God in the mission of sharing the love of Jesus to reach the world.

[1] Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.
[2] Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, Calif.: 3DFL‰F 3UHVV 3XE $VVQ S
[3] Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, Sept. 2, 1890.

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Questions for Reflection

1. In what way has personally experiencing Jesus' love impacted how you view His disciple-making mission?
2. What are the things that most make you come alive?
3. Who are the people you are most burdened for?

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"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44).

HUMAN ARGUMENTS

Being a disciple of Jesus is beautiful, but it's not free. Some may ask: Why does following Jesus need to cost anything? What exactly do we need to pay to become His followers? Is not God rich enough to provide for us and allow us to follow Him free of charge? He owns everything (Ps. 50:10); therefore He should understand our situation and accept us as we are. Other people would bargain, "I pay, and you provide." In this situation, God would obey them because they dictate the rules.

It does not matter what your arguments are regarding the cost of following Jesus; the fact is, He does not need your money. What He needs is you giving Him your sin-polluted heart because it is your most precious possession. Jesus wants "to purify, to cleanse [it] by His own blood, and to save [you] by His matchless love. And yet men think it is hard to give up all!"[1]

JESUS' TEACHINGS

Jesus' ministry on this earth was characterized by touching people's hearts with the gospel and changing them according to the standards of God's kingdom. The purpose of the parables was to disclose the heavenly realities in an earthly language so that even ordinary people could grasp some glimpse of eternal value. Thus, in His illustrative teachings, Jesus expounded that if you want to follow Him and be His disciple, you will have to pay the price.

Among the seven parables in Matthew 13, two specifically reveal the cost of discipleship. In the parable of the hidden treasure (verse 44) and the parable of the pearl of great price (verses 45, 46), Christ presented the value of the kingdom of God that is available to those who wish to be a part of it. When we find something valuable, we sell everything we own and spare nothing to obtain it. When we discover that God loves us beyond measure and that the eternal life He gives can be ours, we leave behind everything to obtain that life with Him.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

The 12 disciples left behind their livelihood and families to follow their Master. To Peter's inquiry about the benefits of such a great sacrifice, Jesus responded by saying, "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:29). While the cost is great, Christ does not demand to despise your family members, though you may find yourself at odds with them. The

The Cost of Being a Disciple

By nding the hidden treasure or pearl of great value, you can nd what your inner being desires the most—a renewed heart that becomes loyal to God.

accent here is on priorities. His disciples should love Him more than relatives, possessions, business, or anything else. Nothing should shadow our love for God.

Peter's choice of following the Lord and inviting others to do the same reveals not only his love and dedication to God (John 21:17) but also his sacri ce for Christ's sake (Acts 5:40, 41; 12:4), which culminated in his cruci xion upside down. He had many bright moments in life, however, such as his wife's total support (1 Cor. 9:5), seeing others turning to God (Acts 2:38, 41), and the promise of eternal life (1 Peter 1:3-9).

e Samaritan woman at the well's decision to follow Christ cost her public exposure of the dark side of her reputation (John 4). Having had ve husbands and living with another male partner was enough to avoid unnecessary meetings with women at the well when they fetched water. is could be the reason she was there alone at the hottest hour of the day. But it was an opportune time for Jesus to meet her and change her life for good. After conversing with the Savior, the woman who had been hiding from her countrymen ran to them, proclaiming, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (verse 29).

e encounter with Christ revealed eternal truth to the hungry soul and gave "a new expression on her face, a change in her whole appearance.[2] e cost of giving up a life of sin was never regretted. She became a newborn follower of Jesus and a missionary. is woman's conversion opened a door for Christ to minister to the Samaritans (verses 39-42). True discipleship is costly because it condemns sin; it is bene cial because it justi es the sinner.

Luke presents a similar story about Zacchaeus' conversion (Luke 19). Everyone hated this chief tax collector, who cheated people and accumulated wealth from his countrymen. Hearing of Jesus and His miraculous power, Zacchaeus went to listen to Him. Jesus' love convicted Zacchaeus as he sat, hidden in a sycamore tree. He was overwhelmed by a sense of his own unworthiness.

e Holy Spirit's in uence converted his soul and made him discard his dishonest practices. While it cost Zacchaeus his earthly riches, it was a joy for him to open his heart to the Christ's love. e man's genuine repentance led to a complete reformation of his life. us, by losing earthly values, he gained peace, his family, and eternity (verse 9). Ellen White says that "it is when Christ is received as a personal Saviour that salva tion comes to the soul."[3] Is there anything else that can be more valuable than this?

CONCLUSION

By nding the hidden treasure or pearl of great value, you can nd what your inner being desires the most—a renewed heart that becomes loyal to God. erefore, Solomon reminds you, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). e cost of discipleship is entirely reasonable considering the gift of abundant life here with su erings for Christ's sake (Phil. 1:29), and life in eternity through Him. ere is no better deal than this. Choose to pay the cost; choose God.

[1] Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ (Mountain View, California: Pacific Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 46.
[2] Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 191.
[3] Ibid, p. 556.

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Questions for Reflection

1. What is your greatest treasure?
2. What is it that still stands between you and God?
3. How can you allow the Holy Spirit to transform your life?
4. What does the cost of discipleship mean to you?

The Joy of Being a Disciple

It was Peter, the brash, self-con dent disciple, who asked perhaps one of the best questions in all of Scripture. In the verses preceding Peter's query, Jesus responded to a wealthy young man who asked, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16).

After Jesus recited a list of commandments for the young ruler to consider, He identi ed a deeper spiritual weakness: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (verse 21). Verse 22 then captures what has to be one of the saddest epitaphs ever written for a stillborn disciple: "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Ellen White's haunting commentary on this fateful decision is worth a careful read:

"If he had realized the value of the o ered gift, quickly would he have enrolled himself as one of Christ's followers. He was a member of the honored council of the Jews, and Satan was tempting him with attering prospects of the future. He wanted the heavenly treasure, but he wanted also the temporal advantages his riches would bring him. He was sorry that such conditions existed; he desired eternal life, but he was not willing to make the sacri ce. e cost of eternal life seemed too great." [1]

As the sorrowful young ruler backed away, Jesus turned to the disciples and said something that still shocks us two-plus millennia later: "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (verses 23, 24). "Who then can be saved?" the disciples gasped (verse 25). It was then that a red-faced Peter asked what no other disciple dared ask: "See, we have left all and followed you. erefore what shall we have?" (verse 27).

WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

Can we blame Peter for asking this question? Jesus often spoke of the cost of discipleship, as He did in Matthew 16:24 when He stated, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." We know discipleship costs, but does it pay? e answer is YES! Here are ve precious joys awaiting those willing to dive into discipleship with Jesus—"the process of becoming like Jesus by spending time with Jesus."[2]

THE JOY OF A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

In Matthew 16:25 Jesus makes a bold prediction concerning all dis - ciples who choose to follow Him: "For whoever desires to save his life

"We know discipleship costs, but does it pay?"

will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will nd it." Is there a greater sorrow in life than never nding the purpose for which you were created? Here Jesus promises that all who give their lives in service to Him will nd the life they were meant to live, one part of which is to become " shers of men" (Matt. 4:19). A purpose- lled life is a life of joy!

THE JOY OF UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

One of the things I love most about my parents is their willing - ness to accept and love me, even when I disappoint them. As great as they are, their acceptance of me cannot compare to that of Jesus. Jesus declared, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Have you felt the come-as-you-are joy of Jesus' unconditional acceptance? Discipleship with Jesus will change you, but not before He unconditionally accepts you.

THE JOY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST AND GOD

When we walk in relationship with Jesus, we enter into friendship with the God of the universe, and this friendship comes with bene ts: "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). All the wisdom and power of the universe is at the disposal of every disciple who enters into friendship with Jesus! is is a joy that brings peace to many a careworn disciple!

THE JOY OF HEALING REST AND RESTORATION

In a world of pandemics and peril, this joy alone is worth the price of walking with Jesus. Right now He bids us, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Jesus o ers us the yoke of His will for the backbreaking yoke of sin. He promises, "You will nd rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (verses 28, 29).

Of this beautiful promise Ellen White wrote, " e Lord never makes a false estimate concerning His heritage. He measures the men with whom He is working. When they submit to His yoke, when they give up the struggle that has been unpro table for themselves and for the cause of God, they will nd peace and rest. When they become sensible of their own weakness, their own de ciencies, they will delight to do God's will."[3]

THE JOY OF ETERNAL LIFE AND SO MUCH MORE

Jesus did answer Peter's ques tion, and His answer represents perhaps the greatest joy of all. Let me assure you, said Jesus, "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:28, 29). One day soon all true disciples will reign forever with He who has transformed us into His very image. at will be joy unspeakable and full of glory! (1 Peter 1:8).

[1] Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn, 1898, 1940). p. 520.
[2] Discipleship Handbook: A Resource for Seventh-day Adventist Members (Silver Spring, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2018), p. 3.
[3] Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, Oct. 23, 1900.

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Questions for Reflection

1. In what way can you identify with the rich young ruler?
2. Have you ever made a sacri- fice for Jesus and experienced blessing as a result?
3. Have you ever considered self-denial a joyful experience?

The Evidence of True Discipleship

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

Herein is my Father glori ed,' said Jesus, 'that ye bear much fruit.' God desires to manifest through you the holiness, the benevolence, the compas- sion, of His own character. Yet the Saviour does not bid the disciples labor to bear fruit. He tells them to abide in Him. 'If ye abide in me,' He says, 'and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' It is through the Word that Christ abides in His followers.

" is is the same vital union that is represented by eating His esh and drinking His blood. e words of Christ are spirit and life. Receiving them, you receive the life of the Vine. You live 'by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Matt. 4:4. e life of Christ in you produces the same fruits as in Him. Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, sup- ported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ.

"In this last meeting with His disciples, the great desire which Christ expressed for them was that they might love one another as He had loved them. Again and again He spoke of this. ' ese things I command you,' He said repeatedly, 'that ye love one another.' His very rst injunction when alone with them in the upper chamber was, 'A new com- mandment I give unto you, at ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.'

"To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. He saw that new ideas and impulses must control them; that new principles must be practiced by them; through His life and death they were to receive a new conception of love. e command to love one another had a new meaning in the light of His self-sacri ce. e whole work of grace is one continual service of love, of self-denying, self-sacri cing e ort. During every hour of Christ's sojourn upon the earth, the love of God was owing from Him in irrepressible streams. All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. e very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another.

LOVE IS THE PROOF

" is love is the evidence of their discipleship. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,' said Jesus, 'if ye have love one to another.' When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an in uence that is above every human in uence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the sel shness inherent in the natural heart.

" is love, manifested in the church, will surely stir the wrath of Satan. Christ did not mark out for His disciples an easy path. 'If the world hate you,' He said, 'ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.' e gospel is to be carried forward by aggressive warfare, in the midst of opposition, peril, loss, and su ering. But those who do this work are only following in their Master's steps.

POWER TO DEFEAT SATAN

"As the world's Redeemer, Christ was constantly confronted with apparent failure. He, the messenger of mercy to our world, seemed to do little of the work He longed to do in uplifting and saving. Satanic in uences were constantly working to oppose His way. But He would not be discouraged. rough the prophecy of Isaiah He declares, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. . . . ough Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.'

"It is to Christ that the promise is given, ' us saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth. . . . us saith the Lord: . . . I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show

Image: Nicholas Safran

"When men are bound . . . by love, they show the working of an in-uence that is above every human in-uence."

yourselves. . . ey shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.' Isa. 49:4, 5, 7-10.

"Upon this word Jesus rested, and He gave Satan no advantage. When the last steps of Christ's humiliation were to be taken, when the deepest sorrow was closing about His soul, He said to His disciples, ' e prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.' ' e prince of this world is judged.' Now shall he be cast out. John 14:30; 16:11; 12:31.

"With prophetic eye Christ traced the scenes to take place in His last great con ict. He knew that when He should exclaim, 'It is nished,' all heaven would triumph. His ear caught the distant music and the shouts of victory in the heavenly courts. He knew that the knell of Satan's empire would then be sounded, and the name of Christ would be heralded from world to world throughout the universe.

"Christ rejoiced that He could do more for His followers than they could ask or think. He spoke with assurance, knowing that an almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that truth, armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would conquer in the contest with evil; and that the bloodstained banner would wave triumphantly over His followers. He knew that the life of His trusting disciples would be like His, a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter.

A FAITH LIKE HIS

"' ese things I have spoken unto you,' He said, 'that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' Christ did not fail, neither was He discouraged, and His followers are to manifest a faith of the same enduring nature. ey are to live as He lived, and work as He worked, because they depend on Him as the great Master Worker. Courage, energy, and persever ance they must possess. ough apparent impossibilities obstruct their way, by His grace they are to go forward.

"Instead of deploring di culties, they are called upon to surmount them. ey are to despair of nothing, and to hope for everything. With the golden chain of His matchless love Christ has bound them to the throne of God. It is His purpose that the highest in uence in the universe, emanating from the source of all power, shall be theirs. ey are to have power to resist evil, power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master, power that will enable them to overcome as Christ overcame.

"Christ designs that heaven's order, heaven's plan of government, heaven's divine harmony, shall be represented in His church on earth. us in His people He is glori ed. rough them the Sun of Righ - teousness will shine in undimmed luster to the world. Christ has given to His church ample facilities, that He may receive a large revenue of glory from His redeemed, pur- chased possession.

"He has bestowed upon His people capabilities and blessings that they may represent His own su ciency. e church, endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depositary, in which the riches of His mercy, His grace, and His love are to appear in full and nal display. Christ looks upon His peo- ple in their purity and perfection, as the reward of His humiliation, and the supplement of His glory—Christ, the great Center, from whom radiates all glory.

"With strong, hopeful words the Saviour ended His instruction. en He poured out the burden of His soul in prayer for His disciples. Lifting His eyes to heaven, He said, 'Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all esh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom ou hast sent.' "

This article is excerpted from The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), pp. 677-680. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do we represent Christ's character to the world?
2. Discuss the idea of "living as He lived, working as He worked." How did Christ's purpose affect the way He lived and worked?
3. What are some weapons we can use to combat discouragement and fear when faced with temptation?

I Will Go

BY: CHARLES MILLS

The author of this year's children's readings is Charles Mills .

Illustrations: Xuan Le

All the World

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).[1]

Sarah watched the traffic move slowly past the window of her dad's truck. How is it possible? she thought with a frown. There are so many people, and I'm just one little girl.

Dad opened the driver-side door of the pickup truck and dropped a bag of groceries onto the seat beside her. Then he climbed in and buckled his seat belt. "Are you hungry for vegetable stew?" he asked with a smile lighting his work-tanned face. "Your mom asked me to pick up lots of yummy carrots, peas, and broccoli at the store, so I'm thinking delicious vegetable stew with freshly baked bread for supper. I even bought some apples and bananas for dessert."

He started the engine and eased the vehicle into the stream of traffic. Sarah smiled. "Yes, I like stew," she said quietly, then turned back to the cars and people slipping past the window.

"You OK?" her dad asked, glancing in her direction. "You look serious. You're not your usual talkative self."

Sarah shook her head. "I'm fine. I just don't understand."

"Understand what?"

The girl looked over at her father. "The preacher at church last Sabbath said that we should take God's love to everyone in all the world. Remember? He said, 'Go to all the world!'" She paused. "But I'm just one little girl. I'm just me. How am I supposed to do what the preacher said?"

Dad nodded slowly. "Good point," he stated. "The world is a pretty big place, with millions and millions of people in it. Everyone is busy going here and there, working hard, trying to stay alive, fighting diseases, protecting themselves and their families from harm. How are we supposed to help that?"

Suddenly Dad steered the truck to the curb. "I'll be right back," he said. Sarah watched him grab a sack of apples from the grocery bag and hurry away to a man standing by the road with a sign that read, "I'm hungry. Please help."

A few minutes later Dad stopped the truck again and jumped out. He hurried to a woman in a wheelchair waiting to cross the street. He guided her from one side to the other, making sure she arrived safely.

Then he waved and smiled at a man sitting on a park bench with a sad look on his face. The man smiled back with a wave.

When Dad returned to the truck, Sarah grinned, "OK, OK, I get it," she said. "The world includes the people all around us, right? I can help the people just beyond my window."

Dad smiled. "And you know what goes good with loving service?"

Father and daughter spoke together with smiles lighting their faces. "Vegetable stew!"

Fishing for People

"Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you shers of men' " (Matthew 4:19).

"I want to be a disciple," Sarah announced at the supper table.

Mom's and Dad's spoons paused halfway between their bowls and their lips.

"OK," Dad responded.

"That's nice," Mom said with a smile.

The scent of freshly baked bread and steaming vegetable stew filled the kitchen as the little family enjoyed their meal together. Both Mom and Dad knew that when their daughter made an announcement such as this, she'd given it much thought, and something important was about to happen. "Can you start being a disciple after supper?" Mom suggested. "I don't want your soup to get cold."

Sarah grinned. "OK," she said, taking another big bite of her warm slice of freshly baked whole-wheat bread. "But I'm kind of excited about it."

Dad winked at his wife and nodded. "My daughter the disciple," he said with a grin. "I like that!"

Later that evening Mom found her little girl curled up on her bed, reading a chapter from a picture book filled with Bible stories. Just a few years back she'd read those same stories to Sarah. Now the girl was reading for herself, thanks to the patient work of her teachers at school.

"So," Mom said, seating herself on the edge of the bed. "What do disciples do?"

Sarah grinned. "Oh, it's very exciting," she enthused. "First, they learn all they can about Jesus. Then they go and show other people what Jesus was like."

"That does sound exciting," Mom responded.

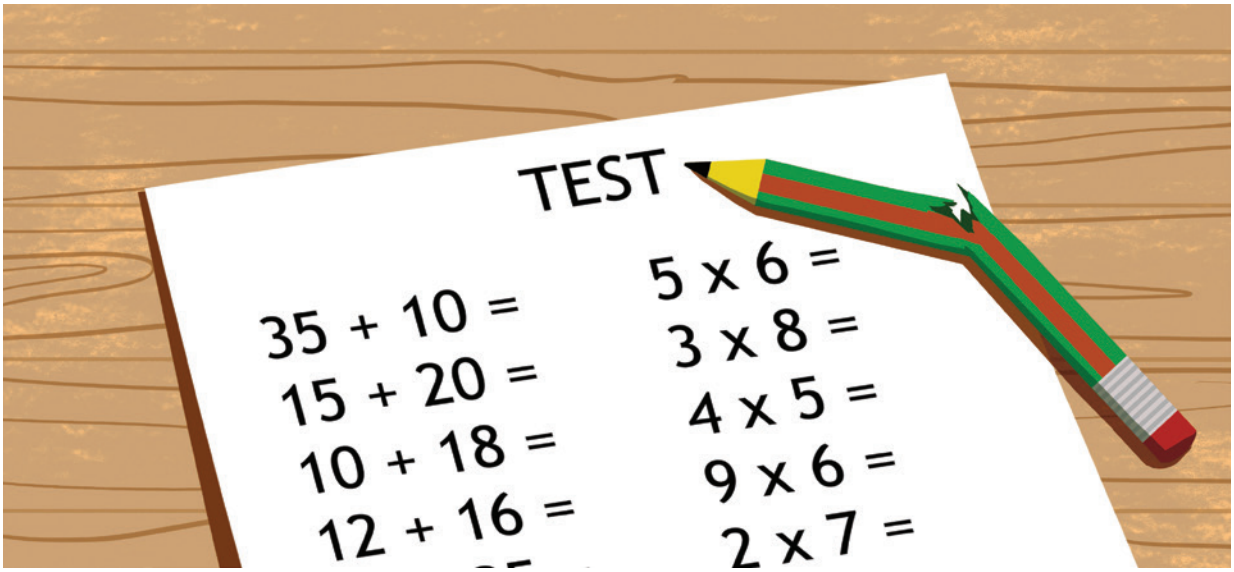
"And they tell stories from the Bible—like these." Sarah held up the book. "And they help people who are afraid and worried. Sometimes they travel here and there to make sure that poor people have food to eat and sick people have doctors to care for them. They even sing songs about Jesus. I know at least three great Jesus songs." The girl paused. "Oh, and they cast out demons."

"They what?" Mother gasped.

"Don't worry," Sarah giggled. "It's not as scary as you think. I learned in Sabbath School that when you pray for a person, any demons that happen to be hanging around will leave in a hurry. Teacher said prayer also chases away the demons of anger, sadness, and shame. Powerful stuff!"

Mother reached out and touched the girl's face. "Wow. My daughter the disciple. I think Jesus will help you every step of the way, Sarah. He'll go wherever you go and teach you what to say and do. When we partner with Jesus, we're in good hands."

Sarah nodded. "That's why I'm reading this book again. If I'm going to work together with Him, I need to know all I can about my Partner."



They Hate Me

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

Sarah climbed into the pickup truck and leaned her head against the headrest as a heavy sigh escaped her lips. Dad studied her for a long moment. "What happened?" he asked softly. "Did you fail a test? Did your baseball team lose at recess? Did someone say something mean to you?"

Sarah watched the students hurrying by, heading for the school buses. "No, no, and . . . yes," she said.

"You want to talk about it?"

"I just want to be a good disciple."

"I know."

"I just want to share God's love."

"I know."

"So how come when I told my classmate Peter that he shouldn't cheat on the math test and instead I would help him learn how to multiply numbers by nine, he said, 'Leave me alone. Just go away! I don't need your help!' Then he called me a bad name." Sarah paused. "He hates me. He just hates me."

Dad blinked. "Wow. That had to hurt."

"And some of the other kids said I was only trying to impress Peter with my math skills. Now they hate me,too." Sarah shook her head. "Being a disciple is the pits!"

Sarah's father steered the truck out of the parking lot and headed toward home. "May I share a Bible text with you?" he asked.

"Sure, why not," Sarah said without emotion.

"John 15:18: 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first' [NIV]."[2]

Sarah frowned. "Who said that?"

"Jesus."

"Really?"

"Yup. In the very next verse He said, 'If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you' [NIV]. Some people hated Jesus when He wanted to help them."

"Why?"

"Well, some folk don't trust God's love. They think it's like earthly love, where you need to pay it back. They think that if you're kind to them, then you must want something in return, and whatever it is, they don't want to do it."

"Oh, that's silly," Sarah breathed. "I just wanted to help Peter pass the test and not get into trouble."

"That's because you're demonstrating God's love, not earthly love. Jesus cared for others simply because He loved them and wanted them to do what was right. But some people didn't want to do what was right, so they rejected Jesus. And they hated Him."

Sarah closed her eyes. "I have so much to learn about being a disciple."

"Oh, I don't know," her dad said with a grin. "Sounds like God is teaching you wonderful lessons already. He's helping you grow and mature. We can thank Him for that."

And they did.

The Light

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14).

"Why didn't you get mad?"

Sarah looked up from her science textbook to find her classmate Justin Wilcox standing beside her. His face was streaked with sweat, and his dark, curly hair held the imprint of his baseball cap. "What did you say?" she asked.

"When Terry said that you punched him in the arm and you didn't, and then Teacher made you come inside for the rest of recess and you just came inside without saying anything, why didn't you get mad?"

Sarah leaned back in her desk chair. "I asked my mom why Terry is mean to me. She said he's angry because his dad left and probably won't be coming back. So he goes around saying angry things because he feels sad inside. I guess he wants other people to feel sad too."

Justin frowned. "So you lost your recess because you didn't want to cause a problem for the guy who made you lose your recess?"

Sarah shrugged. "I guess so."

"You should have punched him right in the arm," Justin admitted. "Hey, he already said you did."

Sarah laughed. "That's not what a disciple does."

"A disciple? What are you talking about?"

Sarah sighed. "I learned at my church that I should be a disciple for Jesus. Sometimes being a disciple means you have to think of others first—even when they tell lies about you. Terry is sad and angry, and I guess I don't blame him. If I argued with him or told on him, he'd just feel worse. I didn't want that to happen."

Justin shook his head and headed for the door. "You're weird, Sarah," he called. "Good luck with the disciple thing."

Sarah chuckled. "Thanks, Justin. I'll need it."

A couple of minutes later Sarah felt the presence of someone standing beside her, and looked up into the face of Terry. "I'm sorry," the boy said. "I told Teacher what I did, and she said that I should come inside for the rest of recess. She said you can go back out if you want."

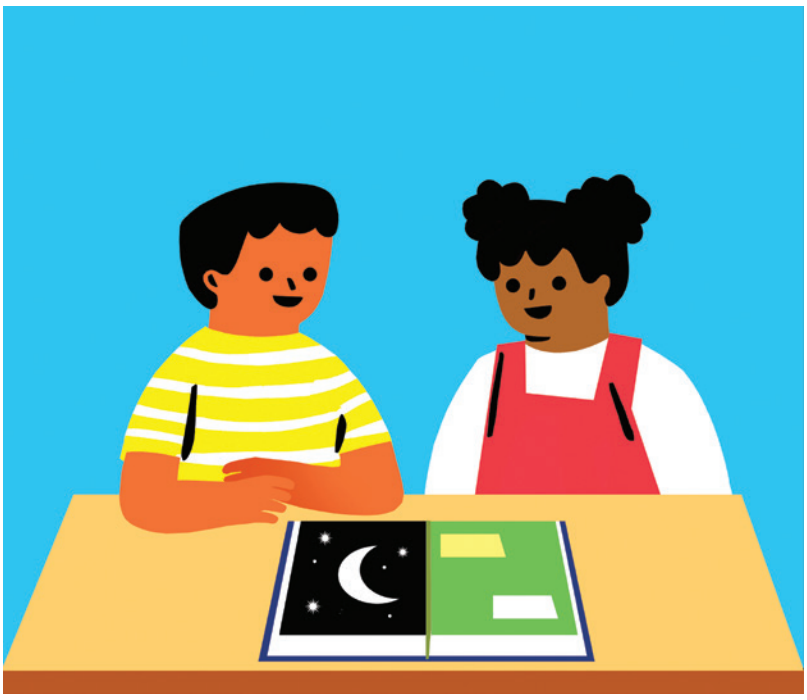
Sarah thought for a moment. "What do you know about the moon?"

Terry frowned. "The moon?"

"Yes. I'm reading about the moon, and I don't understand how it can make the ocean tides go up and down. You seem to know a lot about science in class. Can you explain it to me?"

Terry grinned. "I love the moon," he said excitedly, seating himself next to Sarah. "You see, there's this thing called gravity ."

While their classmates played outside, the sad boy and the disciple talked about the secrets of the solar system.



School of Love

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but€what is good for necessary edi cation, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephe - sians 4:29).

Pastor Miller looked up from his computer to see a visitor standing in the doorway of his church office. "Well, hello, Sarah," he called. "What brings you to our beautiful church on a Tuesday?"

Sarah dropped her book bag by the big leather chair next to the window and sat down with a sigh. "Is there a school for disciples?" she asked. "I think I need to take a class or two."

"On what?"

"On how to be a better disciple! Sometimes I do pretty well. Other times I get confused and mess up. Jesus is probably embarrassed by me."

"Oh," Pastor Wilson responded with a knowing nod. "Sounds like you need to attend the School of Love."

"The what?"

"The School of Love. It's where all disciples in training go for help."

Sarah leaned forward in her chair. "Where is this place?"

"Well, it can be in church or Sabbath School or at home. I've even attended the School of Love in a prison."

"A prison?" Sarah gasped. "I don't understand."

The man grinned. "The School of Love isn't a place, Sarah. It's an attitude. Disciples have a lot of love in their hearts, and they're always looking for ways to use that love. They want to know how they can better serve their family, their friends, their classmates, even their country."

"So," Sarah said, "what do they do at this school?"

"They study their Bible, learn from each other, develop personal talents that will help them share God's love even more—you know, like a singer who plays his or her guitar or an artist or photographer who creates beautiful images. I order encouraging books online to give to inmates at our local penitentiary. They appreciate it.

"You see, we learn more about God's love when we share God's love. All that training and studying and developing our talents makes us better at what we do. If we get confused or mess up, Jesus is happy to help us fix the problem."

"So," Sarah responded thoughtfully, "Jesus isn't embarrassed. He's just thinking, Hey, that disciple needs a little more training ."

"Absolutely!" Pastor Wilson said. "So my advice to you is to spend time with people, offer encouraging words on social media, take an active role in church services, and develop your talents. That's all part of attending the School of Love."

Sarah grinned broadly as she headed for the door. "Thank you, Pastor Wilson," she called. "I'll enroll today!"

"See you in class," the man responded with a wave.

assignments. Circle the ones you want to complete this week.

Read one chapter in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) each day for a week.

Spend an hour in nature, asking God to show you something incredible.

Practice one of your talents until you're better at it. Then share it with someone.

Illustration: Xuan Le

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