

Discipling Spiritual Leaders



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 6:12–16, John 16:7–14, Luke 6:20–49, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15, Acts 1.*

Memory Text: “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (*Luke 6:12, 13, NKJV*).

While Jesus was ever active in making disciples, He recognized that His earthly sojourn was short. Therefore He invested Himself in the training of disciples to continue the work after He left. He was both their Master Teacher and their Master Trainer. While teaching and training are obviously related, *teaching* usually connotes the impartation of knowledge, whereas *training* suggests formation or qualification through practice and discipline.

The disciples' preparation for leadership certainly involved the receiving of knowledge, but spiritual growth was uppermost. They needed an experience in the things of God, of faith, of hardship, of sanctification, and of self-sacrifice, along with an intellectual understanding of doctrine and theology. Knowledge alone was insufficient preparation for the rigorous challenges ahead. Jesus gave them both.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 15.

Leadership Starts Here

Christ's earthly sojourn was relatively brief. Therefore, the training of disciple-makers was imperative. Whom should He select? How many should He choose? Jesus' disciples doubtless numbered in the hundreds. Should everyone undergo mass education? Christ understood that leadership was cultivated effectively within small groups, not mass-produced through lectureships. Limited numbers would be chosen for Christ's initial graduating class.

Study Luke 6:12–16. What did Jesus do before He chose His disciples, and why was this so important?

Choosing effectively required advanced wisdom. Jesus approached His heavenly Father through prayer to acquire this wisdom. Likewise, prayer should precede the selection of leadership candidates in twenty-first-century disciple-making. Since Christ apparently believed that He needed extensive prayer in order to obtain the wisdom required, how much more should today's Christians petition for divine wisdom when choosing those charged with overseeing the progress of the Great Commission?

Having chosen twelve, Jesus designated them apostles—His commissioned representatives invested with spiritual authority. The larger group of disciples witnessed this ordaining or commissioning with no apparent jealousy or negative feelings. Later, Jesus would commission a larger group of seventy-two and, perhaps, others not recorded within Scripture. The twelve apostles, however, retained the identity of those most closely associated with Jesus; they shouldered the largest responsibilities and, therefore, required the most extensive training and commitment. This arrangement clearly implies intentional organizational structure among the earliest Christians. Christ spiritually invested the leaders within that organization with capabilities and education commensurate to their assigned tasks.

Think through the implications of how much time Jesus spent in prayer. What should this tell us about our own prayer lives? What does prayer do for you?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 1

Information was an irreplaceable component of Jesus' message. Information alone cannot transform, but every transformation includes information. Certainly, concepts possess no inherent power for initiating change; God's Spirit, however, working through human hearts, constitutes the irreplaceable element necessary for conversion.

Read John 16:7–14. What is Jesus saying here that helps us to understand how limited intellectual knowledge is, in and of itself, in the understanding and experiencing of true Christianity?

Biblical knowledge coupled together with God's Divine Spirit form the spiritual combination that transforms individuals and societies. The disciple-maker must strive for both of these in faith and study.

Christianity highly regards intelligence, thinking, and imagination. The existence of reasoned thought throughout Scripture, the tremendous respect afforded teachers within Judaism, and the priceless attention that scribes devoted to preserving ancient writings all testify to the importance of knowledge.

Christianity is not an irrational faith. Nevertheless, certain elements within Christianity have elevated emotion, feeling, and experience above knowledge. This mind-set declares that what people believe is relatively unimportant because experience alone is meaningful. Obedience and adherence to specific truths are deemed relatively unimportant; emotion and religious excitement become the measuring stick for spiritual genuineness.

Scripture's very existence counters this mindless fascination with experience. Experience without knowledge becomes a supercharged missile without direction. Conversely, knowledge without experience becomes lifeless and oftentimes legalistic. True Christian leaders understood the need to cultivate both of these elements, not only in themselves but in those they disciple.

Think through all the good reasons that you have for your faith. At the same time, what role has experience played? Why do we need both?

Knowledge and Experience: Part 2

Read Luke 6:20–49. In what ways are both knowledge and experience revealed in these texts? That is, how are they blended here in a way that shows why both are needed, not only in our own walk with the Lord but in disciple-making as well?

Spiritual knowledge is indispensable for spiritual transformation. Christ Himself was regarded as the Master Teacher. In open classrooms bordered by seashores, mountains, and God’s created wonders, Christ disseminated transformative knowledge. The Holy Spirit awakened previously seared consciences to accept these truths. Disciple-making is incomplete without experience, but experience must be directed by knowledge.

Twenty-first-century disciple-makers must thoroughly acquaint themselves with Scripture, the source of authentic spiritual information. Likewise, they should disseminate doctrine and teachings without regard to popularity or convenience. God expects seasoned believers to withhold nothing, patiently guiding infant converts into an ever-expanding understanding and appreciation for the wonderful, life-changing truths of Christianity—especially the present truth of the three angels’ messages.

In the context of making disciples, what does Jesus say in Luke 6:39 that everyone who seeks to make disciples must keep in mind? How can we be sure that we are not like that which Jesus is warning about here?

In the end, a combination of knowledge and experience that produces unselfish love will be the most potent force for any disciple-maker to possess.

The Early Leaders

It is of no small interest and importance that in choosing leaders, Jesus picked from among the humbler, less-educated class of people. Christ did not choose the learning or eloquence of the Sanhedrin. Passing by the self-righteous teachers, the Master Worker chose humble, unlearned men to proclaim the truths that were to move the world. These men He purposed to train and educate as the leaders of His church. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel message. “That they might have success in their work they were to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by human might or human wisdom was the gospel to be proclaimed, but by the power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 17.

What do the following texts tell us about why Christ chose the ones He did to lead His church, as opposed to those whom many might deem as having the qualities needed for leadership? *Zeph. 2:3, Matt. 11:29, Jer. 50:31, Isa. 57:15.*

We must be careful, though, to not make wrong assumptions about why Jesus chose the ones that He did. Jesus was not against the educated or learned class; He Himself displayed, at a young age (*Luke 2:46, 47*), a great deal of knowledge. It’s just that so often those with the most education, wealth, or power aren’t ready to humble themselves in the way that people, especially leaders, need to in order for the Lord to be able to use them. This is not always the case, of course; the Lord did use such men (think of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea; see also *Acts 6:7*). It just means that so often these types tend not to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Philippians 2:3. What traits are expressed here, and why are these traits so crucial, not just for a leader but for anyone who professes the name of Christ? How can we learn to possess these traits in our own lives?

What Jesus Left

Future generations testify regarding the success of previous efforts. Whenever those efforts generate lasting results, the principles underlying those accomplishments should be studied and replicated. Did Christ's disciple-making methodology produce significant outcomes?

Of course it did. It changed the world. None of us, in fact, would be reading this Bible study guide more than two thousand years later, were it not for Christ's success in His training of the early church leaders.

Read Acts 1. What does this first chapter in the formation of the early church show us about the need for God-ordained leaders? What were they looking for in a leader? (See vs. 22.) What can we take away from this need for ourselves as we seek the right leaders?

Jesus established His kingdom and exemplified the principles that would perpetuate its growth. Pioneering the pathway through darkness to sunrise, Christ selected leaders whose weaknesses were overshadowed by His strength because they completely depended upon Him. Although lightly esteemed by the religious leaders and academically deficient, they outshined the Pharisees where it counted: transparency, humility, dependence, and authenticity. How crucial that all of us, whatever our positions in the church, display such characteristics. Over time, those who possessed a substantial formal education and an elevated social standing became part of the church.

“As Christ's representatives the apostles were to make a decided impression on the world. The fact that they were humble men would not diminish their influence, but increase it; for the minds of their hearers would be carried from them to the Saviour, who, though unseen, was still working with them. The wonderful teaching of the apostles, their words of courage and trust, would assure all that it was not in their own power that they worked, but in the power of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 22, 23.

What do you look for in church leaders? Why? What are the top three things that you want to see in them? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath and compare answers.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358; “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pp. 488–496; and “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*. “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; and “The Seven Deacons,” pp. 87–96, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“All over the field of Christ’s labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for truth. The time had come to send the tidings of His love to these longing hearts. To all these the disciples were to go as His representatives. The believers would be led to look upon them as divinely appointed teachers, and when the Saviour should thus be taken from them they would not be left without instructors.

“On this first tour the disciples were to go only where Jesus had been before them, and had made friends. Their preparation for the journey was to be of the simplest kind. Nothing must be allowed to divert their minds from their great work, or in any way excite opposition and close the door for further labor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 351.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss your answer to Thursday’s final question. What can you learn from each other’s answers?
- 2 Read Acts 6:1–6. Why does the incident here reveal one of the reasons as to why the church needs good leaders?
- 3 Dwell more on this idea of a balance between experience and knowledge in the Christian life. Is it possible that different people will need different balances; that is, some people will put more of an emphasis on experience than they do on knowledge, while others will focus more on knowledge than they do experience? If so, how can we learn to be sensitive to these differences in our efforts to make disciples? How can we learn that perhaps what we need isn’t exactly what others will need? Also, look at this text: “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (*1 Cor. 1:22*). How does this text reveal the differences between knowledge and experience?

Mission Possible

Sister Xiang was riding on the train when a woman had a health emergency. Another woman hurried to help the sick woman, praying over her and crying, “You should believe in God.” The woman’s words remained with Sister Xiang, even after she left the train.

She searched for a Christian church and found a house church. There she met Jesus and found a peace and a joy she’d never known. But the house church was far from her home, so she organized a house church closer to home and invited people to worship there. She became passionate about sharing God’s love with others.

Then she met some Seventh-day Adventists who showed her from the Bible that the Sabbath was not Sunday, but Saturday. She read the Bible texts again and again until she was convinced that the Sabbath was indeed God’s holy day.

Sister Xiang eagerly told her fellow believers and friends what she had discovered. One by one, they joined her in worshiping on Sabbath. Sister Xiang begged the Adventist church in the nearby city to send them a teacher. The church sent a layman to study with them. They had few Bibles and no hymnals, so they copied Bible texts and songs to use.

The small group of believers quickly grew to more than the house could hold. They divided and continued to grow. In three years, they established five churches and several house churches, all led by Sister Xiang.

The government ordered Sister Xiang to stop the religious meetings. Day after day, Sister Xiang and another believer went to the government office of religion and prayed silently for permission to worship together. Finally, the governor allowed the Adventists to build a church.

The believers in the area swarmed to help build the church, which was completed in three months. Several daughter house churches continued to meet. Within two years, the believers had built five more churches with congregations from 50 to 500 people.

Sister Xiang attended lay training classes held in the mother church in the area. Today, with nine churches, nine house churches, and 800 members, she says that the greatest need continues to be for trained lay leaders and lay evangelists to help reach the people in neighboring communities and introduce them to Jesus. “It’s how we grow,” she says. “They are hungry, but they don’t know that Jesus can fill their every need. We must tell them.”

Please pray for the believers in China and around the world; and continue giving your mission offerings that make mission outreach possible.

XIANG shares God’s love with people in northern China.