

# Lessons From Would-be Disciples<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—JANUARY 19

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 8:19–22; Matthew 19:16–26; Mark 10:17–23; Luke 4:16–30; Luke 18:18–30; John 3:1–21.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Still another man said, ‘I will follow you, Lord. But first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘Suppose you start to plow and then look back. If you do, you are not fit for service in God’s kingdom’ ” (Luke 9:61, 62, NIV).

**LIFE COMES FILLED WITH MYSTERIES<sup>2</sup> AT EVERY LEVEL.** From the subatomic particles<sup>3</sup> to space and time, there is so much that we cannot understand.

Of all mysterious things that are hard to understand, nothing equals the mystery of how the human<sup>4</sup> heart works. For example, for unknown reasons, people quickly make decisions (choices), either good or bad, that can influence<sup>5</sup> their lives for all eternity.<sup>6</sup> It is no surprise that the Bible says, “Who can know it [the heart]?” (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV).

This week we will look at some would-be disciples and the decision of their hearts.

**THIS WEEK'S LESSON IN BRIEF (SHORT):** What do the Gospels<sup>7</sup> say about would-be disciples? What lessons may we learn from their experiences that can improve our discipleship and make our faith stronger?

1. would-be disciples—people who were very close to becoming disciples of Jesus but failed because of their weakness or failure to obey.

2. mysteries—things that cannot be fully understood or explained.

3. subatomic particles—having to do with the inner part of an atom or any particle smaller than an atom. An atom is any tiny particle that makes up any of the chemical elements.

4. human—relating to man, woman, or child.

5. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

6. eternity—forever; for all time; life without end.

7. Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

**SUNDAY—JANUARY 20****THE SCRIBE (Matthew 8:19, 20)**

**What is the lesson of the story in Matthew 8:19, 20? (Read also Luke 9:57, 58.) What message is here for us? What principles (rules) can we take from it?**

Here is a case of someone who volunteered (chose) instead of being called by Jesus. Notice, too, just how strong his claim was. *He would follow the Lord anywhere.* It is easy to make all kinds of claims about being faithful (Luke 22:33). But it is not so easy to follow up on them (Luke 22:55–61).

**When was the last time you made some bold promise of faithfulness to God that you later broke? What lesson did you learn from that experience?**



The scribe promised to follow Jesus anywhere. It is easy to make promises, but it is harder to keep them.

What is interesting is that the per-

son who came to Jesus was a scribe. This means he was one of the best educated men in Israel. Scribes were men of “culture, education, and station [position] in life.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 365. Few scribes wanted to belong to Jesus. They felt too “educated” to be with Jesus. They followed Him, trying to trap Him without being influenced by<sup>8</sup> His teaching. But here was a scribe who was so touched by Jesus’ teaching that he volunteered to become a disciple.

But Jesus knew his heart. And His answer shows that this scribe’s reasons were not pure. Maybe he wanted to join himself to Jesus, hoping to gain more wealth from Him. But if this were true, Christ’s answer quickly should have discouraged him from his ambitious idea. In the end, the verse does not tell us what the scribe’s final choice was. From what Jesus said, it is not hard to think that the scribe turned away.

**How do we understand what was happening with this scribe and with Christ’s words in Mark 10:30? Are we not promised some quick profits in following Jesus now? If so, why is it not wrong to want those benefits? Or is it wrong?**

**MONDAY—JANUARY 21****AN UNNAMED DISCIPLE  
(Matthew 8:21, 22)**

**What is going on here in Matthew**

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

**8:21, 22? Why would Jesus say something like this to a person who first wanted to bury his own father?**

Yesterday, we studied about a scribe who wanted to be a disciple. Today we meet another volunteer.<sup>9</sup> But he is not named as a person.

As we study the story, we wonder, Is Jesus being a bit unreasonable? The man asked to bury his father. In the Jewish faith, it was an honorable duty to bury a parent. What is happening?

Really, the young man's father was not dead or even close to death. It was even possible that the father was at the time "enjoying good health. And the time of his death was still in the future."—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 366. If this is true, why did the man answer the way he did? Was it an excuse that Jesus could see through? Why?

This was because in Jesus' time, the dead were usually buried the same day. If the man's father had really died, there would not have been a problem, because the man could have buried his father and then returned to discipleship the same day.

This man's answer showed what kind of character<sup>10</sup> he had. The scribe was in too much of a hurry. But this man was slow and lazy. He was just putting off his discipleship to the future. This is because he did not want to make a quick promise. If he did not

commit right then, he would perhaps never commit. The man was just saying that he could begin discipleship only when he had time for it. But Jesus wanted him to know that He had limited time for ministry (work) and training disciples. For this reason, discipleship requires full attention and dedication right now.

**Is the Lord calling you to do something (end a relationship? give up a habit? be faithful in tithe? witness to someone?) that you plan to put off? What are the dangers of putting it off?**

**TUESDAY—JANUARY 22**

**THE RICH YOUNG RULER  
(Mark 10:17–23)**

**What lessons can we learn from the story of this would-be disciple in Mark 10:17–23? Read also Matthew 19:26; Luke 18:18–30.**

Today's study is about a well-known person. He did not come very quietly. Instead, he made himself known or seen by all. Mark says this man ran to Jesus and fell on his knees before Him. While Mark and Matthew do not name the man, Luke says he was a ruler. This probably means that he was a member of the honored council of the Jews. Matthew says that he was young. The name the "rich young ruler" is a sum of the

9. volunteer—a person who offers to do something of his or her own free will.

10. character—who you are; all the things a person does, feel, and thinks are what a person is made of. Your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

descriptions from all three Gospel stories.

In Jesus' presence, the rich young ruler quickly began a discussion. He probably tried to flatter Jesus. But Jesus did not fall for the flattery. Instead, He went right to the heart of the young ruler's question. He pointed the man to the law of God.

**Jesus knew that a person could not be saved by works of the law (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). Why did He point the young man toward the law?**

In a way, the answer to that question is found in the young man's answer. The young man kept the law. But he sensed that it was not enough. Something was missing. This is why he asked, "What else do I need to do?" (Matthew 19:20). In other words, by his actions, he seemed to be a faithful follower of the Lord. But something more was needed. Jesus' words, and the man's answer to those words, showed that his heart was not truly converted (born again). By pointing him to the commandments, Jesus showed the young man what he needed to be saved. He would need to obey the law by dying to self first. The man's wealth had become an idol<sup>11</sup> to him. Jesus showed him that his treasure was really on earth, not in heaven. What the young man really needed was a full change of heart.



**The rich young ruler loved his money more than he loved Jesus.**

**You might be keeping the commandments. But really, where is your treasure? What reasons do you have for your answer?**

### **WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 23**

#### **NICODEMUS (John 3:1–21)**

One of the most famous stories in the New Testament is the story of Nicodemus. He came to Jesus by night and asked the question, "How can these things be?" (John 3:9).

**What "things" was Nicodemus asking about in John 3:1–21?**

11. idol—anything we love more than God. Anything that turns us away from serving Him with all our hearts.

Jesus talked to Nicodemus about the workings of the Holy Spirit. But it was clear from Nicodemus's words and actions that he himself was being led by the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus came to Jesus without trying to trap Him. This made Nicodemus different from so many of the Jewish leaders who did try. Nicodemus came to learn, and this shows that his heart was serious and honest.

### **What can we learn from Christ's words about discipleship from what He said to Nicodemus?**

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus was made to fit with his needs. But, in John's Gospel, Jesus' answer lists what is necessary and unnecessary for discipleship. It says that physical birth and family history in the Jewish nation are not necessary for true discipleship. Discipleship means a rebirth that unites a person with heaven and opens him up to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus's misunderstanding exposed the fact that being born a Jew or being born into the right family was not enough. But it did give Jesus a good opportunity (a chance) to explain to Nicodemus what true discipleship is. At first, Nicodemus did not fully accept Jesus' invitation to be a disciple. But, at times, Nicodemus did serve as a secret disciple. This means that he, at first, was a would-be disciple, because he did not accept the call fully. But we know that he later changed (John 19:39).

**You might be in the right church, with the right doctrines and teachings. But why is that not enough? How can we avoid the danger of thinking that membership in the right church, or even knowing true doctrines, is all that we need?**



**Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again to be saved. Rebirth unites a person with heaven.**

## **THURSDAY—JANUARY 24**

### **GROUP THINKING (Luke 4:16–30)**

Salvation, we know, is personal. We are not saved in groups. We are not brought as a group into the kingdom of heaven (Ezekiel 14:20). In the end,

we each will have to answer for our own actions. We are not responsible for the actions of others (Romans 14:12).

Most of us do not live alone. We mix with other people. We influence others, and they influence us too. It is just part of who we are that we influence one another, either for good or for evil. How sad that the influences can be negative. For this reason, we need to be careful.

**What happened here in Luke 4:16–30? Why did the people, as a group, act as they did? What led to the downfall of these would-be disciples?**

At first, all the people were impressed with Jesus' words. But when those words became too honest, the people, as a group, turned angry against Jesus. Suppose some would-be disciple there had accepted the rebuke<sup>12</sup> humbly instead of becoming angry? Who knows what his or her influence might have had on the others? Instead, every person in the synagogue (Jewish church) became angry, so angry that they tried to kill Jesus. No doubt each one's anger influenced another, and then another, until the whole synagogue became angry and tried to kill Him. If any one of these people had accepted Jesus' rebuke on a one-to-one basis, the group still might have gotten angry. But they would have walked away.

12. rebuke—scolding.

13. prejudices—opinions already formed against someone or something before hearing both sides of the issue; pre-judged ideas.

Now they formed a mob. Then they acted in a horrible way.



The mob became so angry they tried to kill Jesus.

**How easily influenced are you by the crowd, by the prejudices<sup>13</sup> and teachings of your own society? What useful steps could you take that could help protect you from the dangers of group thinking?**

### FRIDAY—JANUARY 25

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 365, 366, 456–460, 602–605, 926–934; Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” pages 167–177; “Peace Be Still,”

pages 333–341; “One Thing Thou Lackest,” pages 518–523, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Those who are converted [born again] in life and practice will show a healthy and spiritual life that can be influential.<sup>14</sup> Those who have a knowledge of the truth as it is revealed in God’s Word must now come forth. My brothers, God requires this of you. Every bit of your influence is now to be used on the right side. All are now to learn how to stand in defense of truth that is worthy of acceptance.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry [Work]*, page 22.

“Nicodemus had not publicly accepted Christ. But, in the Sanhedrin council,<sup>15</sup> he often stopped the plans of the priests to destroy Jesus. When Christ had been crucified [put to death] on the cross, Nicodemus remembered the words that He had spoken to him in the night interview on the Mount of Olives. [Read John 3.] Nicodemus remembered His words: ‘Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. The Son of Man must be lifted up also’ [John 3:14, NIV]. Nicodemus quickly saw Jesus as the world’s Savior.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>16</sup> page 104.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Has there ever been a time when you got caught up in group thinking? Have you ever gone along with the crowd or did something that you later were sorry about? If so, what have you learned from that experience that could help protect you from doing the same thing again?
- ❷ Think more about this week’s point that being part of the true church is not enough. What message is there for us as Seventh-day Adventists? How are we in danger of falling into that same trap? In class, talk about how we can protect ourselves from that trap.
- ❸ Review the reason that these would-be disciples used for not fully accepting Jesus. (Nicodemus was the only would-be disciple that we know of who became a true disciple later.) What other excuses do people use? How can we as a church help those who are struggling with this important decision?
- ❹ What is the difference between being a *believer* and being a *disciple*?

14. influential—having a good or positive effect on someone or something.

15. Sanhedrin council—the highest Jewish council.

16. apostles—God’s disciples (followers) who preached and taught the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.