

LIVING TRUTH MINISTRY



Following Jesus

An Eight-Week Journey of Discipleship

LEARN. REFLECT. RESPOND. CONTINUE.

A guided discipleship study designed to help you know Jesus more deeply, understand Scripture, grow in faith, live faithfully, and discover your place in God's story.

Joseph Charles Beach

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Following Jesus

An Eight-Week Journey of Discipleship

Following Jesus is an eight-week journey designed to help you know Jesus more deeply, understand what it means to be His disciple, grow in your relationship with God, understand Scripture, live faithfully, discern God's will, and discover your place in God's story.

By Joseph Charles Beach

Living Truth Ministry

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Following Jesus: An Eight-Week Journey of Discipleship

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Scripture references are included throughout the study to encourage readers to open and study the Bible directly.

Living Truth Ministry

Helping people know Christ, understand Scripture, and grow as lifelong disciples.

Welcome to Following Jesus

Following Jesus begins with a simple invitation:

"Follow Me."

Those words changed the lives of the first disciples, and the invitation remains the same today.

Jesus does not merely invite us to know things about Him. He calls us to know Him, trust Him, learn from Him, become more like Him, live what He teaches, and help others follow Him.

This eight-week journey is designed to help you do exactly that.

Each week focuses on one foundational question:

1. **What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?**
2. **Who Is Jesus - and Why Does He Matter?**
3. **What Does It Mean to Be a Disciple of Jesus?**
4. **How Do I Grow in My Relationship with God?**
5. **How Do I Read and Understand the Bible?**
6. **What Does Jesus Ask of His Followers?**
7. **How Do I Know and Follow God's Will?**
8. **What Is My Place in God's Story?**

The goal is not simply to complete eight lessons.

The goal is to develop a lifelong pattern of following Jesus.

How to Use This Study Guide

Each week follows the same discipleship rhythm:

1 - Learn - Read the Teaching

Begin by understanding the central biblical truth for the week.

2 - Study - Explore Scripture

Read the key passages carefully and consider what God has revealed.

3 - Reflect & Respond - Make It Personal

Use the reflection and discussion questions to examine your own life and, when studying with others, talk honestly about what you are learning.

4 - Continue - Take the Next Faithful Step

Turn what you have learned into one practical response of faith or obedience.

Each week also includes prayer and five optional days of Bible reading so the study can continue beyond a single meeting.

Three Ways to Use Following Jesus

Personal Study

Work through one week at a time on your own. Read slowly, write down your responses, pray honestly, and take the next step God places before you.

Discipleship Relationship

Work through the study with one other person. Meet weekly to discuss what you are learning, pray together, and encourage one another.

Small Group or Church Class

Read the teaching before meeting, then use the Scripture passages and discussion questions together. End by helping each person identify one practical next step.

BEGIN HERE

You do not need to understand everything before beginning. Start with Week One and allow Jesus to lead you one faithful step at a time.

WEEK 1

What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?

Following Jesus is not simply believing certain things about Christ. Jesus calls us to trust Him, learn from Him, surrender to Him, and follow Him with our lives.

FOLLOWING JESUS · AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week One

Purpose of This Week

This first week introduces the central invitation of discipleship:

Jesus does not merely call us to believe certain things about Him. He calls us to follow Him.

It is possible to know Christian language, attend church, agree with biblical truths, and still give little thought to what it actually means to organize an entire life around Jesus Christ.

This week invites us to move beyond simply identifying ourselves as Christians and begin considering what Jesus meant when He said:

"Follow Me."

The goal is not merely to gain more information about Jesus. It is to begin learning what it means to trust Him, walk with Him, learn from Him, and allow Him to shape the direction of our lives.

BIG IDEA

Following Jesus means trusting Him as Savior, surrendering to Him as Lord, learning from His teaching, becoming more like Him, and allowing Him to shape the direction and purpose of our lives.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

Matthew 4:18-22 - Jesus calls His first disciples to leave their old direction and follow Him.

Luke 9:23-24 - Jesus describes the cost of following Him.

John 10:27 - Jesus describes the relationship between the Shepherd and His followers.

John 15:1-17 - Jesus teaches His disciples to remain in Him and bear fruit.

Opening Question

When you hear Jesus say, "Follow Me," what do you think He is asking you to do?

Teaching Summary

Jesus Begins with an Invitation

Jesus' call to His first disciples was strikingly simple:

"Follow Me."

He did not begin by handing them a list of doctrines to memorize.

He invited them into a relationship.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John would spend time with Jesus. They would listen to Him teach. They would watch how He treated people. They would see His compassion, courage, holiness, authority, and obedience to the Father.

They would ask questions. They would misunderstand Him. They would fail. They would be corrected.

And over time, they would be changed.

Christian discipleship still begins with that same invitation.

Follow Jesus.

Following Jesus Is More Than Knowing About Jesus

There is an important difference between knowing **about** someone and actually knowing that person.

A person can know facts about Jesus: where He was born, what He taught, the miracles He performed, how He died, and that Christians believe He rose from the dead.

But discipleship goes further.

Jesus invites us into relationship with Him.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."
John 10:27

A disciple does not merely study Jesus from a distance.

A disciple follows Him.

Following Jesus Begins with Trust

We do not follow Jesus because we have already made ourselves worthy.

We follow Him because we recognize who He is and place our trust in Him.

Jesus is not merely a moral teacher.

He is Savior and Lord.

Following Him means entrusting ourselves to Him - our sin, our future, our failures, our hopes, and ultimately our lives.

Christianity begins with grace.

We are not rescuing ourselves.

We are responding to the One who came to rescue us.

Following Jesus Means Surrender

Jesus said:

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Luke 9:23

Those are demanding words.

Jesus does not invite us simply to add Him to a life whose direction we have already decided.

He calls us to surrender.

That does not mean that our desires, personalities, interests, or dreams have no value.

It means they are no longer our highest authority.

The disciple begins asking:

What does Jesus want?

What has Jesus taught?

Where is Jesus leading me?

Following Jesus Means Learning from Him

A disciple is a learner.

The first disciples learned from Jesus by walking with Him.

We learn from Him primarily through Scripture.

We listen to His teaching. We observe His character. We study how He treated people. We learn what He valued. We allow His words to challenge assumptions we may have carried for years.

Following Jesus means remaining teachable.

Sometimes He confirms what we already believe.

Sometimes He corrects us.

Both are part of discipleship.

Following Jesus Changes Our Direction

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, they left their nets.

That does not mean every Christian must abandon a profession or leave home.

It means that following Jesus gives life a new center.

The question becomes less:

"What do I want to do with my life?"

and increasingly:

"How can I faithfully follow Jesus with the life I have been given?"

Our work matters. Relationships matter. Money matters. Time matters. Habits matter. Private decisions matter.

Following Jesus eventually reaches every area of life.

Following Jesus Is Daily

Jesus said to take up the cross **daily**.

Discipleship is not one dramatic decision followed by spiritual autopilot.

It is a continuing pattern.

Today I follow Jesus.

Tomorrow I follow Jesus.

When life is easy, I follow Jesus.

When life is painful, I follow Jesus.

When I understand, I follow Jesus.

When I do not understand, I continue trusting Him.

Following Jesus Does Not Mean Perfection

The original disciples were far from perfect.

They misunderstood Jesus. They argued. They became afraid. They struggled with faith. Peter denied Jesus. Thomas doubted.

Yet Jesus continued teaching, correcting, forgiving, restoring, and forming them.

That gives us tremendous hope.

Following Jesus is not perfection.

It is direction.

The question is not whether we have already become everything Christ intends us to become.

The question is:

Which direction are we going?

Personal Reflection

1. When did I first begin thinking of myself as a follower of Jesus?

2. Is there a difference in my mind between being a Christian and actively following Jesus?

3. Which part of following Jesus feels easiest to me?

4. Which part feels most difficult?

5. Is there an area of my life I tend to keep separate from Jesus' leadership?

6. What might Jesus currently be teaching me?

7. Is there something I already know He wants me to do but have delayed?

8. What would taking one faithful step toward Jesus look like this week?

Group Discussion

1. What comes to mind when you hear the words "**Follow Me**"?
2. What is the difference between knowing about Jesus and following Jesus?
3. Why do you think Jesus connected following Him with self-denial?
4. What areas of life are easiest to surrender to Christ? Which are hardest?
5. Why is teachability so important for a disciple?
6. How can following Jesus change an ordinary workday or family life?
7. What can we learn from the failures of Jesus' first disciples?
8. What might one faithful step of discipleship look like for you this week?

Look More Closely

Matthew 4:18-22

Read the passage slowly.

Notice the movement.

Jesus Sees

Jesus notices Peter and Andrew in the middle of ordinary life. They are working. There is nothing outwardly dramatic about the setting.

Jesus Calls

"Follow Me."

The initiative begins with Jesus.

Jesus Gives Purpose

"I will make you fishers of men."

Jesus not only calls them **from** something. He begins forming them **for** something.

They Respond

They leave their nets and follow Him. Their response is not merely intellectual agreement. Their lives begin moving in a different direction.

REMEMBER THE MOVEMENT

Jesus calls. We respond. He changes us as we follow.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for calling me to follow You. Help me move beyond simply knowing things about You and learn to walk with You each day. Teach me to trust You as Savior, surrender to You as Lord, listen to Your Word, and allow You to change the direction of my life. Show me anything I am holding back from You. Give me courage to take the next faithful step. When I fail, teach me to return quickly to Your grace and keep following. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Take One Faithful Step

Do not try to change everything this week.

Choose **one area** where following Jesus needs to become more intentional:

Prayer. Bible reading. Forgiveness. A relationship. A habit. Money. Serving. Your schedule. A decision. Something you already know Jesus has been asking you to surrender.

Then complete this sentence:

This week, following Jesus means I will:

Make the answer **specific**.

Then take that step.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - Matthew 4:18-22

The invitation to follow Jesus

What did Jesus ask? How did the disciples respond?

Day 2 - Luke 9:18-26

The cost of discipleship

What does Jesus say following Him requires?

Day 3 - John 10:1-18, 27-30

Knowing and following the Shepherd

What kind of relationship does Jesus describe with His followers?

Day 4 - John 15:1-17

Remaining in Christ

What happens when a disciple remains connected to Jesus?

Day 5 - Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

A transformed life

What does a life increasingly shaped by God look like?

For each day's reading, ask three questions:

What does this show me about Jesus?

What does this show me about following Him?

What response does this require from me?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK

Keep Following

Following Jesus is not perfection. It is direction.

Jesus calls us. We trust Him. We learn from Him. We surrender to Him. He changes us. And one faithful step at a time, **we keep following.**

WEEK 2

Who Is Jesus - and Why Does He Matter?

Everything about Christianity ultimately depends upon the identity of Jesus Christ.

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Week Two

Purpose of This Week

Many people admire Jesus.

Some think of Him as a wise teacher.

Others see Him as a moral example, religious leader, healer, prophet, or compassionate reformer.

But the New Testament presents Jesus as far more than any of these.

Jesus made extraordinary claims about Himself. His followers came to believe that He is the eternal Son of God who entered human history, revealed the Father, gave His life for our sins, rose from the dead, and now reigns as Lord.

This week asks one of the most important questions anyone can answer:

Who is Jesus?

Because what we believe about Jesus changes what it means to follow Him.

BIG IDEA

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who entered human history, revealed the Father, gave His life for our sins, rose from the dead, and calls us to trust Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

John 1:1-18 - Jesus is the eternal Word who became flesh and lived among us.

Matthew 16:13-17 - Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Colossians 1:15-20 - Paul describes the supremacy of Christ over creation and redemption.

Mark 10:45 - Jesus explains that He came to serve and give His life as a ransom.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 - The death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus stand at the heart of the gospel.

Opening Question

If someone asked you, "Who is Jesus?" how would you answer?

Teaching Summary

Jesus Was a Real Person in Human History

Christianity is rooted in history.

Jesus was not presented by the Gospel writers as a mythical figure or abstract religious idea.

He lived in a real place during a real period of human history.

He was born into a Jewish family.

He grew.

He worked.

He ate.

He traveled.

He formed friendships.

He experienced fatigue.

He felt sorrow.

He suffered rejection.

And He died.

John describes the incarnation in one remarkable sentence:

"The Word became flesh."

John 1:14

God did not remain distant from the human condition.

He entered it.

Jesus Is More Than a Human Teacher

The New Testament does not describe Jesus as merely an unusually wise man.

John begins his Gospel:

"In the beginning was the Word."

John 1:1

Jesus did not begin His existence in Bethlehem.

The eternal Son entered human history.

This means that when we encounter Jesus, we are not merely encountering another religious teacher.

We are encountering the One through whom God has made Himself known.

Jesus Shows Us What God Is Like

People often wonder:

What is God like?

Is He distant?

Angry?

Compassionate?

Holy?

Patient?

Does He care about suffering?

The New Testament points us toward Jesus.

In Him we see compassion toward suffering people, patience with struggling disciples, tenderness toward the broken, truth spoken clearly, holiness without self-righteousness, justice without cruelty, and grace without pretending sin does not matter.

Jesus does not merely tell us things about God.

He reveals God to us.

Jesus Announced the Kingdom of God

A central message of Jesus' ministry was:

"The kingdom of God is at hand."

Jesus announced that God's reign was breaking into the world in a new way.

He demonstrated that kingdom through His words and actions.

He healed the sick.

Forgave sins.

Confronted evil.

Welcomed outsiders.

Restored broken people.

Challenged religious hypocrisy.

Taught people what life under God's rule looks like.

His miracles were not simply displays of power.

They were signs pointing toward God's kingdom.

Jesus Claimed Extraordinary Authority

Jesus' teaching forced people to ask who He really was.

He forgave sins.

He claimed authority over the Sabbath.

He spoke with authority over sickness, nature, and evil spirits.

He spoke about eternal life.

He described Himself as the final judge of humanity.

He accepted honor that belonged to God.

These were not ordinary claims.

Eventually everyone around Jesus had to confront the same question:

Who is this Man?

Jesus Is the Messiah

Jesus once asked His disciples what people were saying about Him.

They gave several answers.

Then Jesus made the question personal:

"But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered:

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matthew 16:16

The word **Christ** is not Jesus' last name.

It is a title.

It means **Messiah** - God's Anointed King.

Peter recognized that Jesus stood at the center of God's promises and purposes.

Jesus Came to Save Us

Jesus did not come only to teach.

He came on a rescue mission.

He said:

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

The cross was not an accidental end to Jesus' ministry.

Jesus understood His death as part of His mission.

At the cross, He gave Himself for sinners.

Forgiveness is possible not because sin does not matter.

It is possible because Christ dealt with it.

AT THE CROSS

The cross shows both the seriousness of sin and the depth of God's love.

Jesus Rose from the Dead

Christianity does not proclaim merely that Jesus' teachings survived after His death.

It proclaims that **Jesus Himself rose from the dead.**

Paul summarized the heart of the gospel:

Christ died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

He appeared to witnesses.

The resurrection means that death did not have the final word.

Sin did not have the final word.

The grave did not have the final word.

Jesus is alive.

The Resurrection Changes Everything

If Jesus remained dead, Christianity would lose its foundation.

Paul says this plainly in 1 Corinthians 15.

But if Jesus truly rose from the dead, then His resurrection confirms that:

His claims matter.

His death accomplished something.

Death has been defeated.

Our hope extends beyond this life.

Jesus is not merely a teacher from the past.

He is the living Lord.

Jesus Is Savior

Human beings cannot repair the deepest problem of sin simply by becoming more religious or accumulating enough good deeds.

We need rescue.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus offers:

Forgiveness.

Reconciliation with God.

Grace.

New life.

Freedom.

Hope.

Eternal life.

Salvation is not something we achieve.

It is something we receive.

Jesus Is Lord

Many people are comfortable with the idea of Jesus as Savior.

The word **Lord** is more demanding.

If Jesus is merely an inspiring teacher, we can choose which ideas we like.

If Jesus is Lord, His words carry authority.

His priorities matter.

His teaching matters.

His commands matter.

His direction matters.

This raises an important question:

How should I live because Jesus is Lord?

Jesus Is the Way to the Father

Jesus made one of His clearest claims in John 14:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life."

John 14:6

Christianity does not present Jesus as one spiritual guide among many equal alternatives.

It presents Him as uniquely able to reconcile humanity to God because He is uniquely who Scripture says He is.

Jesus does not merely point toward a path.

He says:

"I am the way."

Jesus Invites Us into Relationship with Him

It is possible to know many facts about Jesus without actually knowing Him.

We can know doctrines.

Bible stories.

Historical details.

Theological vocabulary.

Yet discipleship is personal.

Jesus calls people to know Him.

Trust Him.

Listen to Him.

Receive His grace.

Obey Him.

Remain in Him.

Following Jesus is not merely agreeing with a set of ideas.

It is living in relationship with the living Christ.

Personal Reflection

1. Before this study, what words would I have used to describe Jesus?

2. Which aspect of Jesus' identity is most meaningful to me right now? His humanity? His deity? His role as Savior? His lordship? Why?

3. Do I tend to think of Jesus primarily as someone who helps me, or as the Lord whom I follow?

4. What difference does the resurrection make to my understanding of Jesus?

5. Is there an area where I trust Jesus as Savior but resist His authority as Lord?

6. How does seeing Jesus as the revelation of God affect the way I think about God's character?

7. Do I personally know Jesus, or have I mainly accumulated information about Him?

8. If Jesus asked me today, "Who do you say that I am?" how would I answer?

Group Discussion

1. Why do you think so many different opinions about Jesus exist?
2. Why is it inadequate to describe Jesus only as a great moral teacher?
3. What do the humanity and deity of Jesus each teach us about Him?
4. Why is the resurrection essential to Christian faith rather than simply another miracle?
5. What is the difference between calling Jesus **Savior** and calling Him **Lord**?
6. Why can Jesus' claim to be the way to the Father be difficult for people today?
7. What aspect of Jesus' character most clearly helps you understand what God is like?
8. How might someone's life change if he or she genuinely believed Jesus is who the New Testament says He is?

Look More Closely

Matthew 16:13-17

Read the passage slowly.

Jesus begins by asking:

"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

The disciples report several opinions.

Then Jesus changes the question.

"But who do you say that I am?"

Notice the movement.

Public Opinion

People had many ideas about Jesus.

They still do.

The opinions of others can tell us what culture believes.

But they cannot answer the question for us.

Personal Conviction

Jesus turns toward His disciples.

Who do you say that I am?

Eventually every person must confront Jesus personally.

Confession

Peter answers:

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Peter recognizes both Jesus' identity and His significance.

Revelation

Jesus explains that Peter has recognized something he could not discover merely through human opinion.

God has revealed who Christ truly is.

PERSONAL QUESTION

Christianity eventually becomes personal: Who do you say Jesus is?

Write your answer:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me see You as You truly are. Thank You for entering our world, revealing the Father, giving Your life for my sin, and rising from the dead. Forgive me for the ways I have made You smaller than You are. Teach me to trust You as Savior, honor You as Lord, know You more deeply, and follow You faithfully. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Get to Know Jesus More Deeply

This week, spend time getting to know Jesus directly through one of the Gospels.

Begin reading the **Gospel of John**.

As you read, keep three questions in front of you:

What does Jesus say about Himself?

What does Jesus do?

How do people respond to Him?

Then complete this sentence:

Because Jesus is:

I will:

Make your response personal and specific.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - John 1:1-18

Who is the Word?

What does this passage tell you about Jesus before His birth?

Day 2 - Mark 2:1-12

What authority does Jesus claim?

Why were some people disturbed when Jesus forgave the man's sins?

Day 3 - Matthew 16:13-17

Who do you say Jesus is?

Write your own answer to Jesus' question.

Day 4 - Mark 10:32-45

Why did Jesus come?

What does Jesus say His mission includes?

Day 5 - 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-22

Why does the resurrection matter?

What would Christianity lose if Jesus did not rise?

For each day's reading, ask:

What does this passage reveal about Jesus?

Why does this matter?

How should I respond?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK

Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Jesus is not merely someone to admire. He is the Savior to trust and the Lord to follow.

The eternal Son entered our world. He revealed the Father. He proclaimed God's kingdom. He gave His life for our sins. He rose from the dead. He is alive.

And the One who asks, **"Who do you say that I am?"** is the same One who says, **"Follow Me."**

WEEK 3

What Does It Mean to Be a Disciple of Jesus?

A disciple is someone who learns from Jesus, follows Him, becomes more like Him, and helps others follow Him.

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Week Three

Purpose of This Week

The word **disciple** is central to the New Testament.

Yet many Christians are more familiar with words such as *believer*, *Christian*, or *church member* than with the word *disciple*.

A disciple is more than someone who agrees with certain truths about Jesus.

A disciple learns from Jesus.

A disciple follows Jesus.

A disciple becomes increasingly like Jesus.

A disciple learns to love and serve others.

And eventually, a disciple helps other people follow Jesus.

This week will help us understand discipleship not as an advanced level of Christianity for a few unusually committed people, but as the normal life of everyone who follows Christ.

BIG IDEA

A disciple of Jesus is someone who trusts Him, learns from Him, obeys Him, becomes more like Him, lives in community with His people, serves others, and helps other people follow Him.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

Luke 6:40 - Jesus teaches that a fully trained disciple becomes like the teacher.

John 8:31-32 - Jesus connects genuine discipleship with continuing in His Word.

John 13:34-35 - Jesus says that love for one another will identify His disciples.

John 15:1-8 - Jesus teaches His disciples to remain connected to Him and bear fruit.

Matthew 28:18-20 - Jesus sends His followers into the world to make disciples.

Opening Question

When you hear the word "disciple," what kind of person comes to mind?

Do I normally think of myself as a disciple of Jesus? Why or why not?

Teaching Summary

A Disciple Is a Learner

The word **disciple** carries the idea of a learner or apprentice.

The first disciples did not simply attend occasional lectures from Jesus.

They lived alongside Him.

They listened to Him teach.

They watched how He treated people.

They observed how He prayed.

They saw how He responded to opposition.

They asked questions.

They made mistakes.

They received correction.

And gradually, they learned His way of life.

Jesus said:

"A disciple is not above his teacher."

Luke 6:40

The goal of discipleship is not simply knowing more about Jesus.

The goal is increasingly becoming like Jesus.

A Disciple Continues in Jesus' Word

Jesus told those who believed Him:

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."
John 8:31

Disciples remain in Jesus' teaching.

They do not listen only when His words agree with what they already believe.

They allow His truth to correct them.

Shape them.

Challenge them.

Encourage them.

And sometimes confront them.

This requires humility.

A disciple continually asks:

What does Jesus say is true?

What does Jesus say is good?

What does Jesus say is wise?

How should His teaching reshape the way I think?

One of the most important questions a disciple can ask is:

Am I willing to let Jesus correct the way I already think?

A Disciple Follows Jesus as Lord

Discipleship is not merely academic.

Jesus did not say:

"Learn My ideas."

He said:

"Follow Me."

His teaching carries authority.

That authority eventually reaches every part of life.

Relationships.

Habits.

Priorities.

Plans.

Money.

Words.

Private choices.

Work.

Time.

Sexuality.

Forgiveness.

Conflict.

A disciple begins learning to say:

Jesus has the right to lead my life.

A Disciple Becomes Like Jesus

Jesus said:

"Everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

Luke 6:40

Christian maturity is ultimately **Christlikeness**.

We are not simply trying to become more religious.

God is forming the character of Christ within us.

Over time, we begin to grow in:

Love.

Compassion.

Humility.

Truthfulness.

Holiness.

Patience.

Courage.

Forgiveness.

Faithfulness.

Generosity.

Service.

Knowledge matters.

Theology matters.

Understanding Scripture matters.

But discipleship turns truth into character.

A Disciple Remains Connected to Jesus

Jesus used the picture of a vine and branches to describe the life of a disciple.

"Abide in Me."

John 15:4

A branch does not produce fruit by separating itself from the vine and trying harder.

It bears fruit because it remains connected to its source of life.

This is an important picture of Christian growth.

Discipleship is not simply religious effort.

We depend upon Christ.

His grace.

His Word.

His Spirit.

His strength.

His presence.

The Christian life is not becoming increasingly independent from Jesus.

It is becoming increasingly dependent upon Him.

A Disciple Bears Fruit

Jesus says that branches connected to Him bear fruit.

Fruit is visible evidence of internal life.

Spiritual fruit may appear through:

Changed character.

Growing obedience.

Greater love.

More patience.

Increased generosity.

Quicker repentance.

Greater faithfulness.

Increasing self-control.

A deeper desire to serve.

The question is not whether we have reached perfection.

The question is:

Is Christ producing something in me that was not there before?

A Disciple Loves Other Believers

Jesus said:

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:35

Jesus identifies love as a visible mark of discipleship.

This matters because Christian community can be difficult.

People disappoint us.

Misunderstand us.

Disagree with us.

Sometimes wound us.

Yet community creates opportunities to practice what Jesus teaches.

Patience.

Forgiveness.

Humility.

Grace.

Truth.

Service.

Church is not simply where disciples receive teaching.

It is one of the places where disciples **learn to love like Jesus**.

A Disciple Serves

Jesus radically redefined greatness.

He taught:

"Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant."

Mark 10:43

The world often measures greatness by:

Position.

Influence.

Authority.

Recognition.

Money.

Prestige.

Jesus points in another direction.

Service.

A disciple gradually stops asking only:

"What am I getting?"

and begins asking:

"How can I serve?"

A Disciple Learns Through Failure

The first disciples were not examples of instant spiritual maturity.

They misunderstood Jesus.

They argued about who was greatest.

They panicked during storms.

They sometimes failed to understand what Jesus was teaching.

They fell asleep when He asked them to pray.

Peter denied Him.

Others abandoned Him.

Yet Jesus continued teaching them.

Correcting them.

Forgiving them.

Restoring them.

Their failures did not mean discipleship had ended.

Failure became part of the process through which Jesus formed them.

That is important for us.

When we fail, the answer is not to run away from Jesus.

The answer is to return to Him.

Confess.

Receive grace.

Learn.

And continue following.

A Disciple Is Teachable

One of the most important qualities of a disciple is humility.

A disciple must be able to say:

I may be wrong.

I need to learn.

I need correction.

I do not understand this yet.

Jesus knows better than I do.

If Jesus never challenges any of our assumptions, preferences, or priorities, we may not be listening very closely.

A teachable disciple does not assume maturity means never being corrected.

Maturity often means becoming **more willing to receive correction**.

A Disciple Lives Differently

Jesus' teaching eventually reaches ordinary life.

How we speak.

How we forgive.

How we respond to conflict.

How we use money.

How we treat difficult people.

How we respond to temptation.

How we use our time.

How we serve.

How we make decisions.

A disciple repeatedly asks:

What would following Jesus look like here?

That question can be asked at work.

At home.

During conflict.

While spending money.

While making plans.

When someone hurts us.

When we are afraid.

When nobody else is watching.

A Disciple Helps Make Other Disciples

After His resurrection, Jesus told His followers:

"Make disciples."

Matthew 28:19

Discipleship eventually reproduces.

Someone teaches us.

Encourages us.

Walks beside us.

Explains Scripture.

Prays with us.

Corrects us.

Helps us mature.

Eventually, we begin doing some of those same things for another person.

You do not need to know everything before helping someone else follow Jesus.

You simply need to be able to say:

"Come with me as I continue following Him."

Discipleship Is a Lifelong Journey

There is no point in this life when we graduate from needing Jesus.

There will always be more to learn.

More areas to surrender.

More truth to understand.

More character to develop.

More people to love.

More opportunities to serve.

More ways to trust Him.

A mature disciple is not someone who has stopped learning.

A mature disciple has learned how important it is to **keep learning from Jesus**.

Personal Reflection

1. Before this study, did I think of myself as a disciple of Jesus? Why or why not?

2. Which part of discipleship comes most naturally to me - learning, obeying, serving, community, or helping others grow?

3. Which area feels most difficult?

4. Is there an area where Jesus has recently challenged the way I think?

5. Am I becoming more teachable, or do I tend to become defensive when corrected?

6. What spiritual fruit can I see God gradually developing in my life?

7. Who is currently helping me become a stronger disciple?

8. Is there someone I could begin encouraging in his or her relationship with Jesus?

Group Discussion

1. What is the difference between being a Christian consumer and being a disciple?
2. Why is teachability essential to discipleship?
3. What does Jesus mean when He says that a trained disciple becomes like the teacher?
4. Why is Christian community necessary for growth?
5. How can failure actually become part of the discipleship process?
6. What does spiritual fruit look like in everyday life?
7. Why can serving others help us grow spiritually?
8. What might change in a church if everyone saw himself or herself as both a disciple and someone who helps make disciples?

Look More Closely

John 15:1-8

Read John 15:1-8 slowly.

Jesus uses the picture of a vine and branches to explain the disciple's relationship with Him.

Notice three movements.

Connection

Jesus says:

"Abide in Me."

The branch must remain connected to the vine.

Discipleship begins with relationship.

Dependence

Jesus says:

"Without Me you can do nothing."

That challenges our natural tendency toward self-sufficiency.

Jesus does not call us to transform ourselves independently.

We depend upon Him.

Fruit

The connected branch begins producing fruit.

Visible growth begins emerging because the life of the vine is flowing through the branch.

The principle is simple:

THE PRINCIPLE

Christian growth is not primarily: Try harder. It is: Remain close to Jesus.

What helps me remain close to Jesus?

What tends to pull me away?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for calling me to be Your disciple. Teach me to remain close to You, listen to Your Word, receive correction with humility, obey what You show me, and increasingly reflect Your character. Help me love Your people, serve others faithfully, and become someone who helps other people follow You. When I fail, teach me to return quickly to Your grace and continue learning from You. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Practice One Area of Discipleship

Choose one area to practice intentionally this week.

Learn

Spend additional time in Jesus' teaching.

Obey

Act on something Scripture has already made clear.

Remain

Set aside regular time for prayer and Scripture.

Love

Take a deliberate step toward another believer.

Serve

Meet one practical need without seeking recognition.

Disciple

Encourage another person in his or her faith.

This week, Jesus is teaching me to become more:

One step I will take is:

Keep it simple.

Keep it specific.

Then do it.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - Luke 6:39-49*Becoming like the Teacher*

What does Jesus say about learning, character, and obedience?

Day 2 - John 8:28-36*Continuing in Jesus' Word*

What does genuine discipleship look like according to Jesus?

Day 3 - John 13:1-17, 34-35*Serving and loving*

What does Jesus demonstrate before asking His disciples to do the same?

Day 4 - John 15:1-17*Remaining and bearing fruit*

What happens when a disciple remains connected to Jesus?

Day 5 - Matthew 28:16-20*Making disciples*

What mission does Jesus give His followers?

For each day's reading, ask:

What does this show me about a disciple?

What is Jesus forming in His followers?

What is one response I can make?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK

Keep Learning from Jesus

A disciple is not merely someone who knows about Jesus. A disciple is someone who is learning to become like Jesus.

We learn from Him. We remain in Him. We obey Him. We love His people. We serve others. We grow through failure. We bear fruit. And we help others follow Him.

Discipleship is not an advanced course we eventually graduate into. **It is the everyday life of following Jesus.**

WEEK 4

How Do I Grow in My Relationship with God?

Spiritual growth is not primarily about trying harder. It is about remaining close to Jesus and allowing God to form us over time.

FOLLOWING JESUS · AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Four

Purpose of This Week

Many Christians genuinely want to grow closer to God but are uncertain about how spiritual growth actually happens.

We may assume that maturity comes from greater effort, more religious activity, or simply accumulating more biblical knowledge.

Those things can be useful, but Scripture presents spiritual growth as something deeper.

Growth happens as we remain connected to Christ, listen to God's Word, pray, worship, obey, live in Christian community, serve others, and depend upon the Holy Spirit.

These practices do not earn God's love.

They help place us where we can increasingly know Him, trust Him, and respond to what He is doing in our lives.

This week is about learning the rhythms that help a disciple remain close to Jesus and become more like Him.

BIG IDEA

Spiritual growth happens as we remain connected to Jesus, receive God's Word, pray, worship, obey, walk with other believers, serve others, and depend upon the Holy Spirit to form the character of Christ within us.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

John 15:1-11 - Jesus teaches that spiritual fruit comes from remaining connected to Him.

Psalms 1:1-3 - The person who delights in God's Word becomes like a tree planted beside streams of water.

Colossians 2:6-7 - Paul describes believers as rooted, built up, and established in Christ.

Galatians 5:16-25 - The Holy Spirit produces Christlike character within God's people.

Hebrews 10:19-25 - Believers are encouraged to draw near to God and strengthen one another.

Opening Question

When you think about growing spiritually, what do you usually imagine you need to do?

Do I normally think of spiritual growth as trying harder, or as learning to remain closer to God?

Teaching Summary

Spiritual Growth Begins with Relationship

Christian growth does not begin with a program.

It begins with a Person.

Jesus said:

"Abide in Me, and I in you."

John 15:4

Before Jesus told His disciples to produce fruit, He told them to remain in Him.

That order matters.

We sometimes approach spiritual growth like a self-improvement project.

Read more.

Pray more.

Try harder.

Do better.

Avoid mistakes.

But Jesus gives us a different picture.

A branch bears fruit because it remains connected to the vine.

The life comes first.

Then the fruit.

Spiritual growth begins by staying close to Jesus.

Growth Is God's Work in Us

Christians participate actively in spiritual growth, but we are not transforming ourselves by our own strength.

Paul wrote:

"It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."
Philippians 2:13

God works within His people.

The Holy Spirit changes desires.

Convicts us of sin.

Reminds us of truth.

Produces spiritual fruit.

Strengthens us to obey.

Guides us toward Christlikeness.

This means spiritual growth involves both **dependence and participation**.

God works in us.

And we respond faithfully.

Scripture Helps Us Know God

One of the primary ways we grow is through God's Word.

Scripture reveals:

Who God is.

What He has done.

What He values.

What is true.

What sin does.

Who Jesus is.

How God's people are called to live.

The goal of Bible reading is not simply completing chapters.

It is learning to hear and respond to God's truth.

Psalm 1 describes the person who delights in God's instruction as:

"A tree planted by the rivers of water."

Roots develop slowly.

But deep roots produce stability.

Regular exposure to Scripture helps truth move from something we occasionally hear into something that increasingly shapes how we think.

Prayer Deepens Relationship

Prayer is more than asking God for things.

Prayer is relationship.

We worship.

Confess.

Give thanks.

Ask.

Listen.

Bring fear to Him.

Express grief.

Seek wisdom.

Intercede for others.

Entrust our lives to Him.

Jesus Himself regularly withdrew to pray.

If the Son of God intentionally made space for communion with the Father, prayer should not be viewed as an optional spiritual extra.

Prayer teaches us dependence.

It reminds us:

I am not carrying my life alone.

Worship Reorients Our Hearts

We often think of worship primarily as singing.

Singing is one expression of worship, but worship is larger.

Worship means recognizing God's worth and responding accordingly.

It turns our attention away from ourselves and toward Him.

God is Creator.

God is holy.

God is faithful.

God is merciful.

God is sovereign.

God is worthy.

Worship reorders our perspective.

Our circumstances may not immediately change.

But when we remember who God is, we begin seeing our circumstances differently.

Obedience Is Part of Growth

Jesus connected love and obedience:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments."

John 14:15

We do not obey Jesus to make Him love us.

We obey because He already loves us and because we trust that His way is good.

Knowledge without obedience can actually become dangerous.

We may know what Scripture says while continually resisting it.

Growth happens when truth becomes practice.

We read about forgiveness.

Then forgive.

We read about generosity.

Then give.

We read about truthfulness.

Then tell the truth.

We read about serving.

Then serve.

One of the most important questions after reading Scripture is:

What should I do because this is true?

Repentance Is a Normal Part of Growth

Spiritual maturity does not mean reaching a point where repentance is no longer necessary.

In many ways, the opposite is true.

As we grow closer to God, we often become more aware of attitudes, motives, habits, and patterns that need to change.

Repentance means more than feeling guilty.

It means turning.

We acknowledge what is wrong.

Receive God's forgiveness.

And move in a new direction.

A growing Christian becomes increasingly quick to say:

I was wrong.

Please forgive me.

Lord, change this in me.

Repentance is not evidence that discipleship has failed.

It is one of the ways discipleship progresses.

Community Helps Us Grow

Christianity was never designed to be lived entirely alone.

Other believers encourage us.

Challenge us.

Teach us.

Pray for us.

Serve us.

Correct us.

Walk with us through suffering.

Remind us of truth when we forget.

Hebrews says:

"Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works."
Hebrews 10:24

Sometimes God uses another believer to expose something we cannot see in ourselves.

Sometimes He uses us to strengthen someone else.

Community is not always comfortable.

But it is deeply formative.

Serving Forms Christlike Character

Jesus came as a servant.

As we serve others, God often works on us at the same time.

Service confronts selfishness.

It develops compassion.

It teaches patience.

It forces us to notice needs beyond our own.

It helps us discover gifts.

It reminds us that following Jesus is not only about personal spiritual experiences.

Jesus forms us into people who increasingly ask:

Who can I help?

Trials Can Produce Growth

We would often choose to grow without difficulty.

Scripture repeatedly shows that suffering can become one of God's deepest classrooms.

James wrote:

"The testing of your faith produces patience."
James 1:3

Trials reveal what we trust.

They expose weakness.

They deepen dependence.

They teach endurance.

They often strip away illusions of control.

This does not mean suffering is easy or that every painful event should be explained with a simple spiritual slogan.

It means God is able to work even within circumstances we would never have chosen.

Sometimes we discover His faithfulness most deeply when we have nowhere else to stand.

Growth Usually Happens Slowly

We often prefer dramatic change.

But much spiritual growth is gradual.

Day after day.

Prayer after prayer.

Conversation after conversation.

Decision after decision.

Repentance after repentance.

Scripture after Scripture.

Small acts of obedience accumulate.

Eventually we realize:

I respond differently than I once did.

I forgive more quickly.

I worry less.

I trust God more deeply.

I recognize temptation sooner.

I think about other people more often.

I recover from failure more quickly.

Growth may be difficult to see from one day to another.

But over time, fruit becomes visible.

Comparison Can Distort Growth

One of the quickest ways to become discouraged is to compare our spiritual growth with someone else's.

We see another person's knowledge.

Giftedness.

Confidence.

Prayer life.

Leadership.

Experience.

And conclude that we are failing.

But Jesus does not ask us to become someone else.

He asks us to follow Him.

Different believers grow at different rates and in different areas.

The better question is not:

Am I as mature as that person?

It is:

Am I more responsive to Jesus than I was before?

Spiritual Disciplines Are Means, Not the Goal

Bible reading.

Prayer.

Fasting.

Worship.

Silence.

Giving.

Serving.

Community.

These practices are often called spiritual disciplines.

They are valuable.

But they are not trophies.

The goal is not to become impressive at spiritual activities.

The goal is to know Christ and become like Him.

A person can read many chapters and remain prideful.

Pray long prayers and remain unloving.

Attend many church services and refuse to forgive.

The practice matters because of what God uses it to form within us.

KEEP THE GOAL CLEAR

Spiritual disciplines are pathways toward relationship and transformation, not achievements to display.

The Holy Spirit Produces Fruit

Galatians 5 describes the fruit of the Spirit:

Love.

Joy.

Peace.

Patience.

Kindness.

Goodness.

Faithfulness.

Gentleness.

Self-control.

Notice that Paul calls this **fruit of the Spirit**.

Not fruit of human determination.

The Spirit forms the character of Christ within us.

Our responsibility is to walk with Him rather than continually resist His work.

A helpful question is:

Where might the Holy Spirit be asking me to cooperate with what He is doing in me?

Growth Requires Grace

Sometimes Christians become discouraged because they focus so heavily on what still needs to change that they forget how much grace has already been given.

God knows we are unfinished.

He knows our weaknesses.

He knows how slowly we sometimes learn.

The answer is not complacency.

But neither is constant spiritual condemnation.

Growth happens within grace.

We fail.

We repent.

We receive forgiveness.

We learn.

We get up.

And we keep following.

Personal Reflection

1. How would I describe my relationship with God right now?

2. Which spiritual practice currently helps me feel most connected to God?

3. Which practice have I neglected?

4. Am I reading Scripture primarily to finish something, or to hear and respond to God's truth?

5. What has my prayer life been like recently?

6. Is there an area where I already know God wants my obedience?

7. Who are the people helping me grow spiritually?

8. What fruit of the Spirit do I most want God to develop in me right now?

9. Can I identify one area where God has already changed me?

10. What one rhythm could I practice consistently during the coming week?

Group Discussion

1. Why do Christians sometimes treat spiritual growth primarily as trying harder?
2. What does Jesus' picture of the vine and branches teach us about growth?
3. What is the difference between reading Scripture for information and reading it for transformation?
4. Why is obedience necessary for spiritual growth?
5. How can repentance actually be a sign of maturity?
6. Why do we need other believers in order to grow?
7. How can serving other people change us?
8. What dangers come from comparing our spiritual growth with someone else's?
9. Which fruit of the Spirit do you most want to see grow in your life?
10. What practical rhythm could help you remain closer to Jesus this week?

Look More Closely

John 15:1-8

Read the passage slowly.

Jesus uses the image of a vine and branches.

Notice four movements.

Remain

"Abide in Me."

Growth begins with connection to Christ.

The first question is not:

How hard am I trying?

It is:

Am I remaining close to Jesus?

Depend

Jesus says:

"Without Me you can do nothing."

This challenges spiritual self-sufficiency.

We cannot produce Christlike character merely through determination.

We need Him.

Prune

Jesus describes the Father pruning fruitful branches so they can bear more fruit.

Growth sometimes involves removal.

A habit.

An attitude.

A distraction.

A priority.

Something may need to be cut away so something healthier can grow.

Consider:

Is God currently pruning something from my life?

Bear Fruit

The goal is fruit.

A changed life.

Christlike character.

Love.

Obedience.

Faithfulness.

Service.

Jesus is not merely interested in religious activity.

He is forming people who increasingly reflect Him.

KEEP THE PICTURE

Remain close to Jesus, and allow His life to produce fruit through yours.

Prayer

Father, thank You that You do not ask me to transform myself by my own strength. Help me remain close to Jesus. Give me a hunger for Your Word, a deeper life of prayer, a willing heart of obedience, and healthy relationships with Your people. Show me where I need to repent and where I need to trust You more deeply. Holy Spirit, produce the character of Christ within me. Teach me to be patient with the process while continuing to respond faithfully to what You are doing in my life. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Establish One Simple Rhythm

Do not attempt to overhaul your entire spiritual life this week.

Choose **one simple practice** that will help you remain close to Jesus.

For example:

Read one chapter of Scripture each morning.

Spend ten minutes in prayer before starting the day.

Write down one truth from Scripture each evening.

Attend church consistently.

Meet with another believer.

Begin serving somewhere.

Practice gratitude.

Confess an ongoing struggle to God.

Remove one recurring distraction.

This week, I will intentionally make room for God by:

When:

Where:

Then practice that rhythm consistently for seven days.

The goal is not perfection.

The goal is intentional connection.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - John 15:1-11

Remain in Christ

What does Jesus say is necessary for bearing fruit?

Day 2 - Psalm 1

Roots in God's Word

What distinguishes the fruitful person described in this Psalm?

Day 3 - Matthew 6:5-13

Learning to pray

What does Jesus teach us to value in prayer?

Day 4 - Galatians 5:13-26

Walking by the Spirit

What contrasts do you see between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit?

Day 5 - Hebrews 10:19-25

Growing together

What responsibilities do believers have toward one another?

For each day's reading, ask:

What does this teach me about growing with God?

What is God inviting me to practice?

What is one response I can make today?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK

Remain Close

Spiritual growth is not primarily about trying harder. It is about remaining closer to Jesus.

Stay in His Word. Talk with Him. Worship Him. Obey what He shows you. Walk with His people. Serve others. Depend upon His Spirit. Repent when necessary. Receive His grace. And allow God to do His patient work within you.

Roots deepen before fruit appears. So remain close. **Keep growing. Keep trusting. Keep following Jesus.**

WEEK 5

How Do I Read and Understand the Bible?

The goal of Bible reading is not merely to finish the passage. It is to understand what God has revealed and faithfully respond to His Word.

FOLLOWING JESUS · AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Five

Purpose of This Week

Many Christians believe the Bible is important but still feel uncertain when they actually sit down to read it.

Where should I begin?

What does this passage mean?

How do I know whether I am interpreting it correctly?

How does this part of Scripture relate to Jesus?

What should I do with difficult passages?

How does something written thousands of years ago speak into my life today?

These are good questions.

The Bible is a collection of many books written by different human authors in different historical settings and literary forms. Yet together these writings tell one unified story of God's creation, humanity's rebellion, God's work of redemption, the coming of Jesus Christ, and the restoration God is bringing through Him.

This week will introduce a practical way to read Scripture carefully, understand it in context, recognize its place within God's larger story, see how that story centers on Christ, and respond faithfully to what God has revealed.

BIG IDEA

Read the Bible in context, understand what the passage meant, locate it within God's larger story, see how it relates to Jesus Christ, and faithfully respond to the truth God has revealed.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:14-17 - Scripture is God-breathed and equips God's people for faithful living.

Luke 24:25-27, 44-47 - Jesus shows that the Scriptures ultimately point toward God's redemptive work fulfilled in Him.

Psalms 119:9-16 - God's Word is treasured, learned, remembered, and lived.

James 1:22-25 - God's Word is not merely something to hear but something to obey.

Acts 17:10-12 - The Bereans examine the Scriptures carefully to evaluate what they are being taught.

Opening Question

What is the most difficult part of Bible reading for you - understanding what the passage means, knowing where to begin, staying consistent, remembering what you read, applying it, understanding difficult passages, or something else?

What would I most like to improve about the way I read the Bible?

Teaching Summary

The Bible Is Meant to Be Read

The Bible is not merely a religious symbol.

It is not meant to remain closed on a shelf.

God has given Scripture to reveal truth, form His people, and equip them to live faithfully.

Paul wrote:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."
2 Timothy 3:16

Scripture teaches.

Corrects.

Trains.

Encourages.

Warns.

Reveals.

Forms.

The goal is not simply to own a Bible.

It is to become a person whose thinking and living are increasingly shaped by God's Word.

The Bible Is Both Divine and Human

Christians believe Scripture is God's Word.

At the same time, God communicated through real human authors.

Moses wrote differently from David.

David wrote differently from Isaiah.

Isaiah wrote differently from Luke.

Luke wrote differently from Paul.

These authors wrote within particular historical settings, cultures, languages, circumstances, and literary forms.

That means reading the Bible faithfully requires us to take seriously both realities:

God speaks through Scripture, and He chose to speak through human authors in real historical contexts.

We honor Scripture when we seek to understand what those authors were actually communicating.

Context Matters

One of the easiest ways to misunderstand the Bible is to remove a sentence from its context.

Imagine receiving a letter from someone and reading only one line in the middle without knowing what came before or after it.

You might completely misunderstand the writer.

The same thing can happen with Scripture.

Before asking:

"What does this verse mean to me?"

we should first ask:

"What does this verse mean here?"

Read the paragraph.

Read the verses before and after it.

When possible, understand the chapter.

Ask how that section fits within the whole book.

Context protects us from making Scripture say something the biblical author never intended.

Ask What Kind of Writing You Are Reading

The Bible contains different kinds of literature.

History.

Poetry.

Wisdom.

Prophecy.

Letters.

Gospels.

Apocalyptic literature.

Parables.

Law.

Each kind of writing communicates differently.

We do not read a poem exactly like a historical narrative.

We do not read Proverbs exactly like one of Paul's letters.

We do not read Revelation exactly like Acts.

Recognizing the literary form helps us ask better questions.

For example, poetry frequently uses imagery.

Proverbs often express general wisdom rather than unconditional promises.

Letters address real churches facing real situations.

Narratives describe what happened but do not necessarily command us to imitate every action described.

Understanding genre helps us hear Scripture as it was intended.

Begin with Observation

Before rushing toward interpretation, slow down and observe what the passage actually says.

Ask:

Who is speaking?

Who is being addressed?

What is happening?

What words or ideas are repeated?

Is there a command?

A promise?

A warning?

A contrast?

A question?

A reason given for something?

What appears to be the central idea?

Often we misunderstand Scripture because we move too quickly past observation.

Good Bible reading begins by paying attention.

Ask What the Author Intended

The next question is:

What was the author trying to communicate?

Our goal is not to invent a meaning.

It is to discover meaning.

Ask:

What problem is being addressed?

What truth is being explained?

What response is being called for?

What would the original audience likely have understood?

This keeps Bible reading anchored in Scripture rather than in our imagination.

Read the Bible as One Larger Story

The Bible contains many stories.

But together they belong to one larger story.

A simple framework can help us understand that story:

Creation

God creates everything good.

Human beings are made in His image and given a meaningful place within creation.

Fall

Humanity rebels against God.

Sin enters the human story and brings guilt, corruption, broken relationships, suffering, and death.

Redemption

God begins His work of rescue.

He calls Abraham.

Forms Israel.

Gives His covenant.

Sends prophets.

Promises a coming King and Redeemer.

Christ

Jesus enters the story.

He fulfills God's promises.

Reveals the Father.

Announces God's kingdom.

Dies for sin.

Rises from the dead.

Church and Mission

Jesus sends His followers into the world with the gospel.

The Spirit forms a people who belong to Christ and participate in His mission.

Restoration

God's story moves toward the restoration of creation.

Christ will return.

Evil will be judged.

Death will be defeated.

God will dwell with His people.

This larger story helps individual passages make sense.

Jesus Stands at the Center of the Story

After His resurrection, Jesus helped His disciples understand Scripture differently.

Luke tells us:

"Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Luke 24:27

This does not mean every verse secretly contains Jesus' name.

It means the entire biblical story moves toward and finds its fulfillment in Him.

The promises.

The kingdom.

The sacrifices.

The covenant.

The priesthood.

The longing for redemption.

The promised King.

The hope of restoration.

All ultimately find their fulfillment in God's work through Christ.

A helpful question when reading Scripture is:

How does this passage fit within the story that leads to Jesus and God's redemptive work through Him?

Do Not Force Jesus into Every Detail

Reading Scripture as Christ-centered does not mean turning every small detail into a hidden symbol.

We should not invent connections the text does not support.

Instead, we can ask larger questions:

What does this passage reveal about God?

What does it reveal about humanity?

What problem does it expose?

What promise does it advance?

Where does it sit within the story of redemption?

How is this ultimately fulfilled, clarified, or transformed through Jesus?

This keeps Christ-centered interpretation rooted in the actual biblical story.

Scripture Interprets Scripture

Difficult passages should not be interpreted in isolation from clearer passages.

One part of Scripture often helps explain another.

The Bible develops themes across many books:

Creation.

Covenant.

Kingdom.

Sacrifice.

Temple.

Priesthood.

Justice.

Grace.

Faith.

Resurrection.

New creation.

As we become more familiar with the whole Bible, individual passages begin connecting with one another.

This is one reason consistent reading matters.

The more Scripture we know, the better equipped we become to understand Scripture.

Difficult Passages Require Humility

There will be passages you do not understand immediately.

That is normal.

Some involve unfamiliar customs.

Ancient history.

Difficult theology.

Symbolic language.

Questions about translation.

Complex arguments.

Do not become discouraged.

Instead:

Read the surrounding context.

Compare translations.

Look for related passages.

Consult trustworthy study resources.

Ask a mature Christian or teacher.

Return to the passage later.

And be willing to say:

"I do not understand this yet."

Humility is not a weakness in Bible study.

It is a strength.

Be Careful with Personal Experience

Our experiences matter.

They shape the questions we bring to Scripture.

But experience should not become the final authority over what the Bible means.

Sometimes Scripture comforts us.

Sometimes it confirms us.

Sometimes it challenges us.

Sometimes it contradicts what we assumed was true.

A disciple allows Scripture to correct experience rather than continually reshaping Scripture to fit personal preference.

Read Prayerfully

Bible reading is not merely an academic exercise.

Before reading, pray.

Ask God for wisdom.

Understanding.

Humility.

Attention.

A willing heart.

You might pray:

"Lord, help me understand what You have revealed and give me a heart willing to respond."

We are not asking God to give the passage a new private meaning.

We are asking Him to help us rightly understand and faithfully receive what He has already revealed.

Knowledge Should Lead to Transformation

It is possible to know a great deal about the Bible and still resist what it teaches.

James warns:

"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."

James 1:22

The goal of Bible study is not merely:

What information did I learn?

It should eventually lead to:

What should I believe?

What should change?

What should I trust?

What should I stop doing?

What should I begin doing?

What should I remember?

How should I respond to God?

Truth is meant to shape life.

Application Must Flow from Meaning

There is an important order:

First: What does the passage mean?

Then: How should I respond?

If we skip the first question, we can create applications that have little connection to the actual text.

Faithful application begins with faithful interpretation.

Once we understand the central truth, we can ask how that truth speaks into our present circumstances.

Not Every Passage Applies in the Same Way

Some passages contain direct commands for Christians.

Others describe events.

Some reveal God's character.

Some expose human sin.

Some communicate promises made to particular people in particular situations.

Some teach general wisdom.

A careful reader asks:

What kind of response does this passage actually call for?

Sometimes application is an action.

Sometimes it is a belief.

Sometimes worship.

Repentance.

Trust.

Hope.

Remembering.

Waiting.

Not every passage ends with a task.

Sometimes the faithful response is simply:

"God, I believe what You have revealed about Yourself."

Consistency Matters More Than Quantity

Some people become discouraged because they imagine serious Bible reading requires hours every day.

A long period of study can be valuable.

But a smaller amount read consistently and thoughtfully can also produce deep growth.

Reading one passage slowly may be more formative than rushing through five chapters without understanding them.

Start somewhere sustainable.

Read carefully.

Think.

Pray.

Respond.

Then return tomorrow.

Over time, Scripture begins to become familiar territory.

A Simple Bible Reading Method

1. What Does the Passage Say?

Observe.

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

What words or ideas stand out?

What is happening?

2. What Does the Passage Mean?

Interpret.

What is the author communicating?

Why was this written?

What is the central truth?

3. Where Does This Fit in God's Story?

Locate the passage.

Creation?

Fall?

Israel?

Promise?

Christ?

Church and mission?

Restoration?

4. How Does This Relate to Jesus?

Ask how the passage contributes to the biblical story fulfilled in Christ.

5. How Should I Respond?

Believe?

Repent?

Obey?

Trust?

Worship?

Pray?

Remember?

Serve?

Take one faithful step.

Personal Reflection

1. What has my normal approach to Bible reading been?

2. Do I tend to read individual verses or larger passages in context?

3. Which part of Bible interpretation feels most difficult to me?

4. Have I ever discovered that a verse meant something different in context than I originally thought?

5. How well do I understand the larger story of Scripture?

6. Do I normally look for how passages fit within God's redemptive story centered on Jesus?

7. Do I tend to read for information, encouragement, application - or some combination?

8. How willing am I to let Scripture correct something I already believe or want?

9. What could help me become more consistent in Bible reading?

10. What is one practical change I can make this week?

Group Discussion

1. What makes Bible reading difficult for many Christians?
2. Why is context so important when interpreting Scripture?
3. What can happen when we begin with "What does this mean to me?" rather than "What does this passage mean?"
4. How does knowing the larger story of Scripture help us understand individual passages?
5. What does it mean to say that Jesus stands at the center of the biblical story?
6. Why should we avoid trying to make every small biblical detail into a hidden reference to Jesus?
7. What should we do when we encounter a passage we do not understand?
8. Why can biblical knowledge without obedience become spiritually dangerous?
9. What is the difference between faithful application and simply attaching our own ideas to a verse?
10. Which of the five Bible-reading questions would help you most right now?

Look More Closely

Luke 24:13-35

Read the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

They are confused.

Jesus has been crucified.

Their expectations appear to have collapsed.

Then the risen Jesus begins helping them understand Scripture.

Notice the progression.

They Know the Events

They know Jesus was crucified.

They have heard reports about the empty tomb.

But they do not yet understand what those events mean.

Information alone has not produced understanding.

Jesus Opens the Scriptures

Luke says:

"Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Jesus places His death and resurrection within the larger biblical story.

The cross is not an isolated tragedy.

It belongs to God's redemptive purpose.

Scripture Leads Them Toward Christ

Later the disciples say:

"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

Jesus helps them see that Scripture forms one unfolding story that ultimately points toward God's redemption through Him.

Understanding Leads to Response

The disciples do not simply gain information.

They return to Jerusalem and tell others what happened.

Truth leads to response.

READ WITH PURPOSE

Read Scripture carefully. See the story. See Christ. Then respond faithfully.

Practice the Method

Choose a short passage such as **Mark 2:1-12** and work through these questions.

What does the passage say?

What does the passage mean?

Where does this fit in God's larger story?

What does this reveal about Jesus?

How should I respond?

Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us Your Word. Help me approach Scripture with humility, attention, patience, and a willing heart. Teach me to understand passages in their proper context, recognize their place within Your larger story, and see how Your work of redemption centers on Jesus Christ. Protect me from using Scripture merely to confirm what I already think. Correct me where I am wrong, strengthen me where I am weak, and help me faithfully respond to what You reveal. Give me a growing desire to know Your Word and live according to Your truth. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Read One Gospel Passage Each Day

Choose the **Gospel of Mark** this week.

Each day, read a short section rather than trying to cover large amounts.

Use the same five questions:

1. What does the passage say?

2. What does the passage mean?
3. Where does this fit within God's story?
4. What does this show me about Jesus?
5. How should I respond?

Today I learned:

My response will be:

The goal is not speed.

The goal is understanding and faithful response.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Why Scripture matters

What does Paul say Scripture is able to accomplish?

Day 2 - Psalm 119:9-24

Treasuring God's Word

What attitudes toward Scripture do you see in this passage?

Day 3 - Luke 24:13-35

Seeing the larger story

How does Jesus help the disciples understand Scripture?

Day 4 - Acts 17:10-12

Examining Scripture carefully

What do the Bereans do when they hear teaching?

Day 5 - James 1:19-27*Responding to God's Word*

What danger does James identify? What does genuine response look like?

For each day's reading, ask:

What does the passage say?

What is the central truth?

How does it fit within Scripture's larger story?

What does it reveal about God or Christ?

How should I respond?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK**Read to Understand. Understand to Respond.**

The goal of Bible reading is not merely to finish the passage. It is to understand God's Word and faithfully respond to what He has revealed.

Read in context. Pay attention. Ask what the author meant. Recognize the kind of writing you are reading. See the larger biblical story. Keep Jesus at the center. Approach difficult passages with humility. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Pray for understanding.

And when God's truth becomes clear, **respond faithfully.**

Do not simply ask: "Did I read my Bible today?" Learn to ask: "What has God revealed - and what should I do because it is true?"

WEEK 6

What Does Jesus Ask of His Followers?

Jesus does not call us merely to admire His teaching. He calls us to live it.

FOLLOWING JESUS · AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Six

Purpose of This Week

Following Jesus eventually becomes visible in the way we live.

Jesus speaks about love.

Obedience.

Forgiveness.

Holiness.

Generosity.

Serving.

Trust.

Prayer.

Our words.

Our possessions.

Our relationships.

Our treatment of people who are difficult to love.

Our concern for those who are hurting.

And our participation in His mission.

Jesus is not simply giving us a collection of religious ideals. He is describing the kind of life that begins to emerge when a person increasingly lives under His leadership.

We do not obey Jesus in order to earn salvation.

We obey because we belong to Him.

This week asks a practical question:

If I really am following Jesus, what does He ask me to do?

BIG IDEA

Jesus calls His followers to love God, love people, obey His teaching, forgive others, pursue holiness, serve humbly, trust God, use their resources faithfully, care for people in need, and participate in His mission.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

Matthew 22:34-40 - Jesus identifies love for God and love for neighbor as the great commandments.

John 14:15-24 - Jesus connects love for Him with obedience.

Matthew 5:43-48 - Jesus calls His followers to love even their enemies.

Mark 10:35-45 - Jesus redefines greatness through humble service.

Matthew 6:19-34 - Jesus teaches about possessions, priorities, and trusting the Father.

Matthew 28:18-20 - Jesus sends His followers to make disciples.

Opening Question

When you think about what Jesus asks of His followers, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Which teaching of Jesus is easiest for me to agree with but hardest for me to actually live?

Teaching Summary

Jesus Calls Us to Love God

Someone once asked Jesus which commandment was greatest.

Jesus answered:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Following Jesus begins with God at the center.

Not simply church attendance.

Not religious activity.

Not outward appearance.

Love.

We learn to treasure God.

Trust Him.

Seek Him.

Listen to Him.

Worship Him.

Submit our lives to Him.

Love for God gradually reshapes what we value.

The question becomes:

What does my life reveal that I truly love most?

Jesus Calls Us to Love People

Jesus immediately connected love for God with another command:

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Our relationship with God cannot remain separated from the way we treat people.

That includes:

Family.

Friends.

Coworkers.

Church members.

Neighbors.

Strangers.

People who inconvenience us.

People who disagree with us.

People who cannot repay us.

Love becomes visible through action.

Listening.

Encouraging.

Giving.

Serving.

Showing compassion.

Speaking truth graciously.

Being patient.

Making room for another person's needs.

Jesus does not allow spirituality to remain purely private.

Jesus Calls Us to Obey

Jesus said:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments."

Obedience is not how we purchase God's love.

It is one way our love responds to Him.

A disciple eventually encounters teachings of Jesus that are difficult.

Forgive.

Tell the truth.

Love your enemies.

Do not live for possessions.

Serve rather than seek status.

Remain sexually faithful.

Do not retaliate.

Trust God.

Care for the vulnerable.

Make disciples.

At those moments, discipleship becomes very practical.

Will I follow Jesus only when I agree with Him?

Or will I trust that He knows what leads to life?

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is faith put into practice.

Jesus Calls Us to Forgive

Few teachings of Jesus are more challenging than forgiveness.

Jesus repeatedly tells His followers to forgive.

Forgiveness does not mean pretending nothing happened.

It does not mean calling evil good.

It does not automatically restore trust.

It does not always remove appropriate consequences or boundaries.

Forgiveness means releasing personal vengeance and entrusting justice to God.

Why does Jesus emphasize this so strongly?

Because forgiven people are called to become forgiving people.

We remember the mercy we have received.

Then we learn to extend mercy.

Sometimes forgiveness happens quickly.

Sometimes the decision must be reaffirmed many times while healing continues.

But resentment cannot be allowed to become our master.

Jesus Calls Us to Love Our Enemies

Jesus goes beyond loving people who love us.

He says:

Love your enemies and pray for those who mistreat you.

That is one of the clearest places where the life of Jesus confronts the instincts of the world.

Our natural response is often:

Retaliate.

Humiliate.

Win.

Avoid.

Punish.

Hold the offense forever.

Jesus teaches another way.

Love does not mean agreeing with evil.

It means refusing to allow another person's wrong behavior to determine the character of our own response.

We can pursue truth and justice without becoming consumed by hatred.

Jesus Calls Us to Pursue Holiness

Grace does not mean sin becomes unimportant.

Jesus forgives sinners and then calls them toward a different life.

Holiness means belonging to God and increasingly reflecting His character.

That touches our:

Thoughts.

Desires.

Words.

Relationships.

Bodies.

Private habits.

Entertainment.

Integrity.

Choices when nobody is watching.

The goal is not religious image management.

The goal is becoming the same person privately that we appear to be publicly.

Holiness asks:

Is there anything in my life that I am defending even though I know Jesus wants it changed?

Jesus Calls Us to Watch Our Words

Jesus takes words seriously.

Our speech reveals what is happening within us.

Words can:

Encourage.

Heal.

Clarify.

Comfort.

Teach.

Bless.

But words can also:

Humiliate.

Gossip.

Manipulate.

Lie.

Accuse.

Destroy reputations.

Escalate conflict.

A disciple learns to ask:

Is it true?

Is it necessary?

Is it loving?

Is this the right time?

Would I say this if the person were standing in front of me?

Following Jesus reaches our conversations, messages, social media, and private discussions.

Jesus Calls Us to Serve

The disciples once argued about greatness.

Jesus responded by turning their assumptions upside down.

Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.

Jesus Himself modeled this.

He welcomed children.

Touched people others avoided.

Washed His disciples' feet.

Made time for hurting people.

Ultimately He gave His life.

Christian service is not primarily about obtaining a position.

It is about becoming available.

A servant notices.

A servant asks:

What does this person need, and how can I help?

Jesus Calls Us to Humility

Pride constantly tempts us to place ourselves at the center.

We want recognition.

Credit.

Influence.

Control.

The last word.

Humility does not mean pretending we have no gifts or value.

It means seeing ourselves correctly before God.

Everything we have is received.

Strength.

Ability.

Opportunity.

Resources.

Knowledge.

Influence.

All are entrusted to us.

Humility allows us to serve without needing applause.

To apologize.

To learn.

To listen.

To admit mistakes.

And to celebrate what God is doing through someone else.

Jesus Calls Us to Trust the Father

Jesus knows how easily worry can dominate us.

Money.

Health.

Family.

Work.

The future.

What if?

How will?

What happens next?

In Matthew 6, Jesus points toward the Father's care.

He does not promise that His followers will never face hardship.

He teaches that they do not face life as abandoned people.

Our Father knows what we need.

Trust does not mean ignoring responsibility.

It means refusing to live as though everything ultimately depends upon us.

Jesus teaches us to seek God's kingdom first and trust the Father with what we cannot control.

Jesus Calls Us to Use Money Faithfully

Jesus spoke frequently about possessions because money reveals priorities.

Money itself is not evil.

But it can easily become a rival master.

Jesus warns against storing up treasure as though earthly possessions were our ultimate security.

He calls us toward:

Generosity.

Contentment.

Stewardship.

Compassion.

Eternal priorities.

A disciple asks:

Do my financial choices reflect what I say I value?

Am I generous?

Am I controlled by possessions?

Do I see what I have as mine alone, or as something entrusted to me?

Jesus Calls Us to Care for People

Throughout His ministry, Jesus repeatedly notices people others overlook.

The sick.

Poor.

Grieving.

Rejected.

Social outsiders.

Children.

People trapped in sin.

People carrying shame.

People others considered inconvenient.

Following Jesus teaches us to notice.

Sometimes ministry is dramatic.

Often it is not.

It may look like:

Sitting beside someone who is hurting.

Providing a meal.

Visiting.

Giving.

Listening.

Praying.

Encouraging.

Helping someone obtain practical assistance.

Making space for someone who feels forgotten.

Compassion becomes part of discipleship.

Jesus Calls Us to Reconciliation

Jesus cares about relationships.

He teaches His followers not simply to maintain a religious appearance while refusing to address brokenness.

Sometimes we need to go to someone.

Listen.

Apologize.

Tell the truth.

Seek peace.

Reconciliation is not always possible because it requires willingness from more than one person.

But as far as it depends upon us, disciples should be people who move toward peace rather than continually feeding conflict.

A powerful spiritual practice is learning to say:

"I was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

Jesus Calls Us to Live Differently

Jesus often describes His followers as people whose lives should become visible.

Salt.

Light.

Fruit-bearing branches.

People known by love.

The goal is not drawing attention to ourselves.

It is living in such a way that God's character becomes increasingly visible through ordinary life.

How we work.

How we treat employees or coworkers.

How we speak to family.

How we handle conflict.

How we respond when wronged.

How we use money.

How we treat people who can do nothing for us.

These everyday places become the location of discipleship.

Jesus Calls Us to Participate in His Mission

After His resurrection, Jesus told His followers:

"Go therefore and make disciples."

The Christian life is never intended to become entirely inward.

We receive the gospel.

Then we help others encounter it.

This may include:

Sharing our faith.

Explaining Scripture.

Inviting someone to church.

Praying with another person.

Mentoring.

Serving.

Supporting missions.

Raising children to know Christ.

Leading a group.

Walking beside a new believer.

Every Christian does not participate in exactly the same way.

But every disciple belongs to the mission.

Jesus Calls Us to Faithfulness

We sometimes imagine discipleship requires doing something spectacular.

Jesus frequently points us toward ordinary faithfulness.

Tell the truth.

Keep your word.

Forgive.

Pray.

Give.

Serve.

Love.

Remain faithful in marriage.

Care for family.

Help someone.

Resist temptation.

Use your gifts.

Encourage another believer.

Speak about Jesus.

These ordinary decisions form a faithful life.

ORDINARY FAITHFULNESS

Great faithfulness is often built through thousands of small acts of obedience.

Obedience Flows from Grace

This is essential.

We are not trying to convince God to accept us by performing well enough.

Christian obedience begins after grace.

Jesus saves.

Jesus forgives.

Jesus restores.

Then He teaches us how to live.

We obey not as frightened employees trying to earn a paycheck.

We respond as people who have been loved and rescued.

Grace does not make obedience unnecessary.

Grace makes loving obedience possible.

Personal Reflection

1. Which teaching of Jesus in this week's study challenges me most?

2. Is there someone I need to forgive?

3. Is there someone from whom I need to ask forgiveness?

4. What do my words reveal about the condition of my heart?

5. Where might Jesus be asking me to serve rather than seek recognition?

6. Is worry controlling any particular area of my life?

7. What do my financial priorities reveal about what I value?

8. Who around me may currently need compassion or practical help?

9. How am I presently participating in Jesus' mission?

10. What act of obedience have I been delaying?

Group Discussion

1. Why is it possible to admire Jesus' teaching without actually obeying it?
2. Which teachings of Jesus are most difficult to practice in everyday life?
3. What is forgiveness - and what is it not?
4. How can Christians love enemies without approving of wrongdoing?
5. Why does Jesus speak so much about money and possessions?
6. What does servant leadership look like in a family, workplace, church, or community?
7. What is the difference between worry and responsible concern?
8. How can ordinary acts of compassion reflect the character of Jesus?
9. What does participating in the Great Commission look like for an ordinary Christian?
10. What small act of obedience could make a meaningful difference in your life this week?

Look More Closely

Mark 10:35-45

Read the passage carefully.

James and John approach Jesus with a request.

They want positions of honor.

Notice what Jesus does with their understanding of greatness.

The World's Pattern

Jesus describes rulers who exercise authority over others.

Status and power become ways of elevating oneself.

That model remains familiar.

Success often means:

Being above.

Being noticed.

Having authority.

Getting recognition.

Jesus' Pattern

Jesus says:

"Yet it shall not be so among you."

His kingdom operates differently.

Greatness becomes service.

Leadership becomes responsibility.

Influence becomes an opportunity to help others.

Jesus Is the Example

Jesus does not simply demand service from His followers.

He serves first.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

The King becomes the Servant.

Then He tells His disciples to follow Him.

Where am I tempted to seek recognition rather than serve?

Who could I quietly serve this week?

What would Jesus-shaped greatness look like in my current responsibilities?

KINGDOM GREATNESS

In the kingdom of God, greatness is measured differently.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me and showing me what a faithful life looks like. Teach me not merely to admire Your words but to live them. Help me love God wholeheartedly and love the people around me. Give me strength to forgive, courage to obey, humility to serve, wisdom to use my resources faithfully, compassion to notice those who are hurting, and trust when I am tempted to worry. Show me where my life does not yet reflect Your teaching. By Your grace, help me take the next faithful step and participate in Your mission wherever You have placed me. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Practice One Teaching of Jesus

Choose **one area** from this week's study.

Love.

Forgiveness.

Obedience.

Holiness.

Words.

Service.

Humility.

Trust.

Generosity.

Compassion.

Reconciliation.

Mission.

Now make it specific.

Jesus is asking me to:

The person or situation involved is:

The specific action I will take is:

I will do this by:

Do not choose ten things.

Choose one.

Then obey what you already know.

Faithfulness begins with the next step.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - Matthew 22:34-40

Love God and love people

Why does Jesus place these commandments at the center?

Day 2 - Matthew 5:38-48

Responding differently

How does Jesus challenge our natural response to people who mistreat us?

Day 3 - Matthew 6:19-34

Money, priorities, and trust

What does Jesus say about treasure, masters, worry, and seeking God's kingdom?

Day 4 - Mark 10:35-45*Greatness through service*

How does Jesus redefine leadership and greatness?

Day 5 - Matthew 28:16-20*Living on mission*

What does Jesus tell His disciples to do? What part of that mission can you participate in?

For each day's reading, ask:

What does Jesus ask of His followers?

Where do I see His character?

What should change in me?

What is one faithful response?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK**Live What Jesus Teaches**

Jesus does not call us merely to admire His teaching. He calls us to live it.

Love God. Love people. Obey. Forgive. Pursue holiness. Speak truth with grace. Serve humbly. Trust the Father. Use resources faithfully. Notice hurting people. Seek peace. Participate in Christ's mission.

And remember: We do not obey Jesus so that He will love us. **We learn to obey because He has already loved us.**

Grace brings us to Jesus. Grace teaches us to follow Him. And one faithful act of obedience at a time, **His way increasingly becomes our way.**

WEEK 7

How Do I Know and Follow God's Will?

God's will is not a spiritual guessing game. He usually leads us through Scripture, wisdom, prayer, the Holy Spirit, godly counsel, circumstances, and faithful obedience.

FOLLOWING JESUS · AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Seven

Purpose of This Week

Few questions create more anxiety for Christians than:

What is God's will for my life?

We wonder about:

Career.

Marriage.

Moving.

Ministry.

Finances.

Relationships.

Major decisions.

Opportunities.

And sometimes even everyday choices.

We may fear that God has hidden one perfect path and that one wrong decision could cause us to miss His plan permanently.

But Scripture presents a healthier picture.

Much of God's will has already been revealed.

Love God.

Love people.

Follow Jesus.

Pursue holiness.

Tell the truth.

Forgive.

Serve.

Practice justice and mercy.

Walk humbly.

Make disciples.

For decisions Scripture does not address directly, God gives us wisdom, prayer, the Holy Spirit, godly counsel, circumstances, and freedom to make faithful choices.

This week is about learning to seek God without turning guidance into fear, superstition, or endless uncertainty.

BIG IDEA

God's will is not a spiritual guessing game. Begin with what God has already revealed in Scripture, seek Him in prayer, walk by the Holy Spirit, pursue wisdom, listen to godly counsel, consider circumstances carefully, and take the next faithful step while trusting Him with the outcome.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

Romans 12:1-2 - A transformed mind helps believers discern what is good and pleasing to God.

James 1:5-8 - God invites us to ask Him for wisdom.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - We are called to trust God rather than lean entirely on our own understanding.

Galatians 5:16-25 - The Holy Spirit shapes the character and direction of believers.

Colossians 3:12-17 - God's will becomes visible through Christlike character, gratitude, peace, wisdom, and obedience.

Psalms 119:105 - God's Word provides light for the path before us.

Opening Question

When you are trying to make an important decision, how do you usually try to determine God's will?

Do decisions about God's will usually produce peace, fear, confidence, confusion - or some combination? Why?

Teaching Summary

Much of God's Will Is Already Revealed

When Christians ask about God's will, we often begin with questions such as:

Which job?

Which city?

Which opportunity?

Which relationship?

But Scripture spends enormous attention on the kind of people God wants us to become.

God's will includes:

Faithfulness.

Holiness.

Love.

Truthfulness.

Generosity.

Forgiveness.

Sexual integrity.

Compassion.

Gratitude.

Prayer.

Service.

Justice.

Humility.

Making disciples.

Before asking:

"Which option should I choose?"

we should often begin with:

"Am I faithfully living what God has already made clear?"

Sometimes the guidance we need is not hidden.

It is already written.

Scripture Gives Us Boundaries

God will not lead us in a direction that contradicts what He has revealed in Scripture.

This gives us an important starting point.

If an option requires us to:

Lie.

Act dishonestly.

Abandon clear biblical responsibility.

Participate in sin.

Mistreat someone.

Compromise integrity.

Then we do not need a mysterious sign.

Scripture has already given direction.

God's Word acts like boundaries along the road.

Within those boundaries, many choices may still remain.

That is where wisdom becomes important.

God's Will Is More About Formation Than Prediction

We often want God to tell us exactly what will happen next.

But God is frequently more interested in forming us than in giving us complete advance knowledge.

He forms:

Trust.

Patience.

Wisdom.

Courage.

Humility.

Dependence.

Faithfulness.

Sometimes we want a detailed map.

God gives enough light for the next step.

Psalms 119 says:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

A lamp does not usually illuminate the next ten miles.

It gives enough light to keep walking.

Ask God for Wisdom

James writes:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God."

Notice that James speaks about **wisdom**.

Wisdom is more than receiving information about the future.

Wisdom means learning to see situations from God's perspective and make faithful decisions.

When facing a decision, prayer might sound like:

Lord, show me what matters most.

Expose selfish motives.

Give me wisdom.

Help me recognize what is true.

Close my heart to what is wrong.

Give me courage to do what is right.

Prayer is not simply asking God to approve the decision we already want.

It is placing the decision before Him.

Examine Your Motives

Sometimes the hardest part of discerning God's will is not knowing the options.

It is understanding our own heart.

We may say:

"I want God's will."

while quietly meaning:

"I hope God wants what I already want."

Ask:

Why do I want this?

Fear?

Pride?

Comfort?

Money?

Status?

Approval?

Control?

Love?

Service?

Responsibility?

Faithfulness?

A good opportunity can still be pursued for unhealthy reasons.

And a difficult option can sometimes be the faithful one.

We should pray with the Psalmist:

"Search me, O God."

A Transformed Mind Helps Us Discern

Romans 12 connects discernment with transformation.

Paul says not to be conformed to the patterns of the world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Then we become better able to discern what pleases God.

That means discernment is not isolated from discipleship.

The more Scripture shapes our thinking,

the more Christ shapes our character,

the more the Spirit develops wisdom,

the better prepared we become to make faithful decisions.

Guidance is not merely about obtaining answers.

It is about becoming the kind of person who can recognize what is wise.

The Holy Spirit Leads God's People

Christians are not left to navigate life alone.

God gives the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit:

Convicts.

Teaches.

Reminds.

Forms Christlike character.

Gives wisdom.

Strengthens.

Guides.

But we must be careful not to reduce the Spirit's leading to every passing thought or feeling.

We are capable of confusing:

Desire with guidance.

Fear with warning.

Excitement with confirmation.

Anxiety with prohibition.

This is why spiritual impressions should be tested.

Against Scripture.

Through prayer.

With wisdom.

With mature counsel.

By considering fruit and motives.

The Holy Spirit never needs us to become careless thinkers.

Peace Can Matter - but It Is Not the Only Test

Christians sometimes say:

"I have peace about it."

Peace can matter.

But peace alone does not determine whether a decision is right.

A person can feel comfortable about a foolish choice.

And a faithful choice can sometimes create fear.

Jesus experienced deep anguish before the cross.

Paul repeatedly entered difficult situations knowing suffering might follow.

Biblical peace is deeper than simply feeling relaxed.

It is confidence in God while walking faithfully.

So do not ask only:

"Does this feel peaceful?"

Ask:

"Is this faithful, wise, biblical, loving, and consistent with the person Jesus is forming me to become?"

Godly Counsel Protects Us from Blind Spots

Proverbs repeatedly praises wise counsel.

Other people often see things we cannot.

A mature Christian may notice:

A danger.

A motive.

An opportunity.

A pattern.

A consequence.

A strength.

A weakness.

Counsel is especially important when:

Emotions are strong.

Consequences are significant.

We are tempted to act quickly.

A relationship is involved.

We already know what answer we want.

But we should choose counselors carefully.

Do not simply ask enough people until someone agrees with you.

Seek people who:

Love Christ.

Know Scripture.

Know you.

Are willing to tell you the truth.

And do not benefit personally from steering you toward a particular choice.

Circumstances Can Provide Information

Circumstances matter.

An opportunity appears.

A door closes.

Finances change.

A job becomes available.

Someone invites us into ministry.

Health changes.

A relationship develops.

These circumstances give us information.

But circumstances alone do not automatically reveal God's will.

An open door may be an opportunity.

Or a temptation.

A closed door may be protection.

Or an obstacle requiring perseverance.

Paul sometimes walked through open doors.

At other times, he faced severe opposition while still doing exactly what God wanted.

Circumstances are one part of discernment.

Not the whole process.

Do Not Build Your Life Around Signs

When uncertain, we can become desperate for signs.

We may ask God to make something happen by a certain time.

See a particular number.

Arrange an unlikely coincidence.

Make someone say a specific phrase.

Sometimes God certainly uses unusual circumstances.

But building a decision-making system around signs can become spiritually unhealthy.

It can lead us toward superstition rather than wisdom.

God has already given us much richer resources:

Scripture.

Prayer.

The Spirit.

Wisdom.

Counsel.

Character.

Community.

Providence.

Faith.

You do not need to invent secret codes for God to communicate with you.

Wisdom Often Means Comparing Good Options

Some decisions are not between right and wrong.

They are between two legitimate possibilities.

Two jobs.

Two schools.

Two ministries.

Two neighborhoods.

Two schedules.

Two ways of using resources.

In these situations, God may give genuine freedom.

Ask:

Which option best fits my responsibilities?

Where can I serve faithfully?

What effect will this have on my family?

What are the long-term consequences?

Which option uses the gifts and opportunities God has entrusted to me?

What do wise people see?

Which decision allows me to live faithfully before Christ?

There may not always be only one possible faithful answer.

God Can Lead Through Desire

Desire should not rule us.

But neither must every personal desire be distrusted.

God gives people different:

Abilities.

Interests.

Passions.

Burdens.

Personalities.

Opportunities.

Experiences.

Sometimes a healthy desire can help reveal where we may serve fruitfully.

The important question is whether desire is being surrendered to God.

We can say:

"Lord, this is what I want. But I want You more."

That is very different from demanding that God bless our plans.

Responsibility Matters

Sometimes Christians become so focused on discovering a dramatic calling that they neglect responsibilities already in front of them.

God's will includes ordinary faithfulness.

Care for family.

Keep commitments.

Work honestly.

Pay what you owe.

Serve people.

Keep your word.

Fulfill responsibilities.

Sometimes the next faithful step is not mysterious at all.

It is simply doing well what God has already placed in our hands.

Waiting Can Be Part of God's Will

Sometimes we do not have enough clarity to act.

That can be difficult.

We want certainty.

Now.

But Scripture is filled with waiting.

Abraham waited.

Joseph waited.

David waited.

Israel waited.

The disciples waited.

Waiting does not always mean doing nothing.

While waiting we can:

Pray.

Learn.

Prepare.

Serve.

Seek counsel.

Grow.

Fulfill present responsibilities.

Sometimes God's answer is not:

Yes.

Or:

No.

Sometimes it is:

Not yet. Keep following Me here.

Fear Can Paralyze Discernment

Some believers become trapped by fear of making the wrong decision.

They analyze endlessly.

Ask more people.

Pray for more signs.

Reconsider the same evidence.

Delay.

Then delay again.

At some point, discernment must become action.

If you have:

Sought Scripture.

Prayed.

Examined motives.

Pursued wisdom.

Received counsel.

Considered circumstances.

And the options before you are morally faithful,

then make the wisest decision you can.

Trust God.

And move.

God Is Greater Than Your Mistakes

This truth can bring tremendous freedom.

We sometimes imagine that God's plan is so fragile that one imperfect decision can destroy everything.

But God is sovereign.

That does not remove responsibility.

Poor decisions have real consequences.

Sin matters.

Wisdom matters.

But God's purposes are not helpless before our limitations.

He can:

Correct.

Redirect.

Teach.

Redeem.

Restore.

Close doors.

Open others.

Use even our mistakes to deepen wisdom.

Our confidence is not ultimately in our ability to make flawless decisions.

OUR CONFIDENCE

Our confidence is in the faithfulness of God.

Sometimes God Redirects Us

We may make a wise decision and later discover that circumstances have changed.

That does not necessarily mean the original decision was wrong.

Life has seasons.

Assignments change.

Relationships change.

Health changes.

Responsibilities change.

Ministry changes.

God may faithfully lead us into one season and later faithfully lead us out of it.

Discipleship requires ongoing listening.

The question remains:

What does faithfulness look like now?

The Next Faithful Step Is Usually Enough

We often want to know the entire future.

God frequently gives enough direction for today.

Do the next thing you know is faithful.

Make the call.

Have the conversation.

Fill out the application.

Apologize.

Wait.

Serve.

Save.

Give.

Ask for counsel.

Say no.

Say yes.

Begin preparing.

Stop something that is clearly wrong.

Take the next step.

Then keep listening.

KEEP WALKING

God's will is often discovered while walking faithfully, not while standing still demanding certainty about the entire road.

A Practical Discernment Framework

1. What Has Scripture Already Made Clear?

Does either option violate a clear biblical command or principle?

2. What Am I Praying?

What have I honestly brought before God?

3. What Are My Motives?

Why do I want this?

4. What Would Wisdom Suggest?

What are the likely consequences of each option?

5. What Is the Holy Spirit Producing?

Would this choice move me toward Christlike character or away from it?

6. What Do Wise Believers See?

Who knows God, knows me, and can speak honestly?

7. What Do the Circumstances Tell Me?

What opportunities, limitations, or responsibilities should I consider?

8. What Is the Next Faithful Step?

Even if I cannot see the entire future, what can I faithfully do now?

Personal Reflection

1. What decision or area of uncertainty is currently occupying my thoughts?

2. Has Scripture already made any part of this decision clear?

3. What do I most want to happen?

4. What fears influence this decision?

5. Are pride, comfort, money, approval, control, or fear influencing me?

6. Who could give me wise and honest counsel?

7. What circumstances should I take seriously without treating them as automatic signs?

8. Am I waiting because wisdom says to wait - or because I am afraid to decide?

9. What would a faithful decision look like even if the outcome were difficult?

10. What is the next step I can take without needing to know the whole future?

Group Discussion

1. Why can seeking God's will sometimes create so much anxiety?
2. What is the difference between God's revealed will and decisions Scripture does not directly address?
3. Why should Scripture be the starting point for discernment?
4. How can our motives distort what we think God is telling us?
5. What role should personal peace play in a decision? What are its limitations?
6. How can godly counsel protect us from blind spots?
7. Why should we be cautious about interpreting every circumstance as a sign from God?
8. Can two different choices both be faithful? Why?
9. What does waiting faithfully look like?
10. How does trusting God's sovereignty give us freedom to make decisions?

Look More Closely

Romans 12:1-2

Read the passage slowly.

Paul connects the life surrendered to God with a transformed way of thinking.

Notice the progression.

Surrender

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice."

Discerning God's will begins with surrender.

Before asking:

"God, which option will make me happiest?"

we learn to pray:

"God, my life belongs to You."

Resist Conformity

Paul warns:

"Do not be conformed to this world."

Every culture carries assumptions about:

Success.

Money.

Power.

Relationships.

Identity.

Comfort.

Purpose.

A disciple cannot automatically accept those assumptions.

Renew the Mind

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

As Scripture reshapes our thinking, our ability to make wise decisions grows.

We begin seeing life through a different framework.

Discern

Then Paul speaks about discerning God's will.

This suggests an important principle:

DISCERNMENT

Good discernment grows from a surrendered life and a renewed mind.

Where might cultural assumptions be shaping my decision more than Scripture?

What truth from Scripture needs to shape the way I think about this situation?

Prayer

Father, thank You that You are not trying to hide Your will from me. Teach me to begin with what You have already revealed. Give me wisdom where Scripture does not give a direct answer. Search my motives and expose fear, pride, selfishness, or control. Help me listen to Your Spirit, receive wise counsel, understand circumstances carefully, and trust You when I cannot see the whole road. Protect me from superstition, endless anxiety, and the demand for perfect certainty. Give me courage to take the next faithful step and confidence that You are able to guide, correct, and redirect me as I continue following Jesus. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Bring One Decision Before God

Choose one real decision you are currently facing.

Scripture - What has God already made clear?

Prayer - What do I need to ask God for?

Motives - What is happening inside my heart?

Wisdom - What choice appears wisest?

Counsel - Who should I talk with?

Circumstances - What facts do I need to consider?

Faithful Step - What is the next thing I can do?

Then complete this sentence:

I do not need to know everything about the future. My next faithful step is:

Take that step when the time is right.

Then trust God with what comes next.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - Romans 12:1-8

A surrendered and transformed life

What connection does Paul make between transformation and discernment?

Day 2 - Proverbs 3:1-8

Trusting God

What does it mean not to lean entirely on your own understanding?

Day 3 - James 1:2-8

Asking for wisdom

What does James tell believers to do when they lack wisdom?

Day 4 - Galatians 5:13-26*Walking by the Spirit*

What kind of character does the Holy Spirit produce? How might character influence decision-making?

Day 5 - Colossians 3:12-17*The kind of life God desires*

What priorities and qualities in this passage are already clearly part of God's will?

For each day's reading, ask:

What has God made clear?

What does wisdom look like here?

What needs to change in my thinking?

What is one faithful response?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK**Take the Next Faithful Step**

God's will is not a spiritual guessing game.

Begin with Scripture. Pray. Examine your motives. Seek wisdom. Walk by the Spirit. Listen to mature believers. Consider circumstances. Fulfill the responsibilities already in front of you. Wait when waiting is wise. Decide when it is time to decide.

And when you cannot see the entire road, **take the next faithful step.**

You do not have to know everything about tomorrow to obey Jesus today. And your confidence does not rest in your ability to make every decision perfectly.

Your confidence rests in the faithfulness of the God you are following.

WEEK 8

What Is My Place in God's Story?

Your life matters not because you are the center of the story, but because God has graciously given you a place within His story.

FOLLOWING JESUS · AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Eight

Purpose of This Week

Most people eventually ask questions about purpose.

Why am I here?

What am I supposed to do with my life?

Does my work matter?

Do my experiences matter?

What about my gifts?

My relationships?

My failures?

My limitations?

My opportunities?

Does God have a purpose for ordinary people living ordinary lives?

Scripture gives us a freeing answer.

The purpose of life is not to become the center of the story.

Jesus is the center.

We are invited to know God, glorify Him, become more like Christ, love and serve people, faithfully steward what He has entrusted to us, and participate in His work in the world.

Purpose is not limited to pastors, missionaries, authors, leaders, or people with visible ministries.

God works through parents.

Workers.

Neighbors.

Friends.

Business owners.

Teachers.

Caregivers.

Volunteers.

Retirees.

Students.

People serving quietly where almost nobody notices.

This final week asks:

What does it look like to faithfully live the part God has given me within His larger story?

BIG IDEA

God gives our lives purpose as we know and glorify Him, become more like Christ, love and serve people, faithfully use what He has entrusted to us, help others follow Jesus, and live our ordinary lives as part of His larger story of redemption.

Read Before You Begin

Key Scriptures

Genesis 1:26-28 - Human beings are created in the image of God and given meaningful responsibility within creation.

Ephesians 2:8-10 - We are saved by grace and created in Christ Jesus for good works God has prepared for us.

Romans 12:3-8 - God gives different gifts to His people for faithful service.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - Followers of Christ are entrusted with the ministry and message of reconciliation.

Matthew 28:18-20 - Jesus sends His followers to make disciples.

Colossians 3:17, 23-24 - Ordinary work can be done faithfully as service to the Lord.

Opening Question

When you hear the words "God's purpose for my life," what do you imagine that means?

Do I tend to think purpose must involve doing something unusually important or visible? Why?

Teaching Summary

Your Story Begins Inside God's Story

A common way of thinking about purpose begins with ourselves.

What is **my** dream?

What is **my** calling?

What will make **my** life significant?

Scripture begins somewhere else.

With God.

Before we ask:

What is my story?

we need to understand:

I have been invited into God's story.

God is Creator.

God is Redeemer.

God is King.

God is restoring what sin has broken.

Jesus stands at the center of that story.

Our lives gain meaning as they become aligned with Him.

You Were Created in God's Image

Genesis says humanity was created in the image of God.

That gives every human being profound dignity.

Your value does not begin with:

Achievement.

Income.

Influence.

Education.

Success.

Appearance.

Recognition.

Your value begins with God.

Human beings were created to reflect something of His character and represent His rule within creation.

That means purpose begins long before we ever discover a career or ministry assignment.

We were created to know God and live as people who reflect Him.

Your First Calling Is to Jesus

Before asking:

"What am I called to do?"

begin with:

"Who am I called to follow?"

Jesus' first invitation remains:

"Follow Me."

Our deepest calling is not to a profession.

A platform.

A ministry title.

A particular accomplishment.

Our first calling is to Christ Himself.

Every other calling must remain beneath that one.

Jobs change.

Seasons change.

Responsibilities change.

Health changes.

Opportunities change.

But the invitation to follow Jesus remains.

Every Christian Shares a Common Calling

Not every believer has the same assignment.

But every believer shares important responsibilities.

We are all called to:

Love God.

Love people.

Grow in Christlikeness.

Pursue holiness.

Serve.

Forgive.

Practice generosity.

Live truthfully.

Care for people.

Participate in the life of Christ's Church.

Make disciples.

Bear witness to Jesus.

These are not secondary until we discover our "real calling."

They **are** part of our calling.

God Has Prepared Good Works

Paul writes:

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."
Ephesians 2:10

Notice the order.

We are not saved **by** good works.

We are saved **for** good works.

Grace comes first.

Then faithful living.

God gives us opportunities to participate in what He is doing.

Some will seem large.

Many will seem small.

A conversation.

A visit.

A gift.

A prayer.

A meal.

An encouraging word.

A difficult act of forgiveness.

A faithful day of work.

A child patiently taught.

A hurting person noticed.

Do not underestimate ordinary faithfulness.

Your Work Matters

Sometimes Christians imagine that only explicitly religious work matters to God.

But Scripture gives dignity to ordinary labor.

Work can become a place to:

Serve people.

Practice integrity.

Create.

Solve problems.

Provide.

Lead.

Encourage.

Bring order.

Make things better.

Treat people with dignity.

Represent Christ.

Paul writes:

"Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord."

That transforms our understanding of work.

The question is not only:

"What job do I have?"

but:

"How can I faithfully follow Jesus within the work I have been given?"

Relationships Are Part of Your Calling

Purpose is not only about tasks.

It is also about people.

Spouse.

Children.

Parents.

Friends.

Neighbors.

Coworkers.

Church family.

People God brings unexpectedly into our lives.

Sometimes our most important ministry will never appear on a resume.

Listening.

Encouraging.

Caring.

Teaching.

Praying.

Mentoring.

Showing up.

Walking with someone through suffering.

The people in front of us are often part of the purpose God has already placed around us.

God Gives Different Gifts

Romans 12 describes believers receiving different gifts.

Teaching.

Serving.

Giving.

Leading.

Encouraging.

Mercy.

Other passages add additional gifts and abilities.

The point is not to obsess over finding a perfect label.

The point is that God has not designed every Christian to contribute in exactly the same way.

Some lead publicly.

Others strengthen quietly.

Some teach.

Others care.

Some organize.

Others encourage.

Some give generously.

Others extend mercy.

The Church needs different people faithfully using different gifts.

You do not have to become someone else in order to serve God faithfully.

Gifts Are Discovered Through Service

We sometimes wait to discover our gifts before we begin serving.

Often the process works in the opposite direction.

We serve.

We notice what seems fruitful.

Other people affirm something in us.

Needs become visible.

Abilities develop.

Patterns emerge.

Over time, we begin recognizing:

God seems to use me in this way.

Do not wait for perfect clarity before becoming useful.

Start serving somewhere.

Purpose often becomes clearer while moving.

Your Experiences Matter

God can use what you have experienced.

Success.

Failure.

Joy.

Loss.

Work.

Parenting.

Marriage.

Singleness.

Education.

Financial difficulty.

Grief.

Recovery.

Leadership.

Disappointment.

Years of ordinary life.

Experiences do not automatically make us wise.

But surrendered experiences can become places from which we serve others.

A person who has suffered may recognize pain others overlook.

Someone who has failed may develop compassion.

Someone who has been comforted may learn to comfort.

God does not waste anything surrendered to Him.

Failure Does Not Automatically Remove Purpose

Some people assume:

I made too many mistakes.

God cannot use me anymore.

Scripture tells another story.

Peter denied Jesus.

Moses had a deeply broken past.

David experienced catastrophic moral failure.

Paul had persecuted the Church.

Failure has consequences.

Sin must never be minimized.

But grace can restore.

Repentance matters.

Humility matters.

Transformation matters.

Your worst chapter does not necessarily have to become the final chapter.

God can redeem what we surrender to Him.

Weakness Does Not Eliminate Usefulness

We often imagine God could use us more effectively if we were:

Younger.

Healthier.

More educated.

More confident.

More talented.

More outgoing.

Less limited.

Paul learned something different.

God's power can become visible through weakness.

Limitations may shape what we can do.

But they do not mean our lives have no purpose.

Sometimes weakness produces:

Dependence.

Compassion.

Humility.

Patience.

Prayer.

A deeper awareness of grace.

You do not need to become invulnerable before God can use you.

Seasons Change

Purpose does not always look the same throughout life.

A season of raising children differs from retirement.

A season of intense work differs from illness.

A season of leadership differs from a season of caregiving.

Some seasons are expansive.

Others become very small.

But small does not mean meaningless.

You may once have served hundreds and now serve one person.

That one person still matters.

Faithfulness is always measured within the season God has actually given you.

Comparison Distorts Purpose

Comparison makes us look sideways instead of toward Jesus.

Someone else appears to have:

More influence.

Greater gifts.

A larger ministry.

More opportunities.

More recognition.

A more exciting story.

Then we begin undervaluing what God has placed in our own hands.

Peter once asked Jesus about another disciple.

Jesus essentially redirected him:

"What is that to you? You follow Me."

That remains powerful guidance.

Someone else's assignment is not yours.

Your responsibility is to follow Jesus faithfully within your own.

Purpose Is Not the Same as Fame

God's kingdom does not measure significance the way the world does.

Visibility is not the same as fruitfulness.

An unknown person faithfully discipling one child may have enormous kingdom influence.

A caregiver loving someone through illness may be living profound purpose.

A quiet volunteer may change another person's life without ever knowing it.

A faithful friend may help prevent someone from giving up.

God sees what others never notice.

You do not need an audience for your life to matter.

Steward What God Has Given You

Purpose includes stewardship.

Ask:

What has God entrusted to me?

Time.

Money.

Abilities.

Experience.

Relationships.

Opportunities.

Influence.

Possessions.

Education.

Health.

A home.

A career.

A story.

Stewardship means recognizing:

These things are not mine merely to consume. They can be used for God's purposes.

The question becomes:

How can I faithfully use what is already in my hands?

Work Can Become Mission

We sometimes think mission begins only after leaving ordinary life.

But mission often happens within ordinary life.

Your workplace may include people who would never attend church.

Your neighborhood contains real human needs.

Your family provides daily opportunities for discipleship.

Your friendships create spaces of trust.

Your ordinary routines bring you into contact with people.

Mission is not merely going somewhere far away.

It is also learning to live as a representative of Jesus wherever you already are.

Jesus Gives His Followers a Mission

After His resurrection, Jesus says:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Every Christian belongs to this mission.

That does not mean everyone must become a missionary in the vocational sense.

It means we begin asking:

Who can I help follow Jesus?

Maybe:

A child.

Friend.

Neighbor.

Coworker.

New believer.

Small group member.

Person going through crisis.

Discipleship often begins through ordinary relationships.

The Church Is Part of God's Plan

Christian purpose is never merely individual.

Jesus forms a people.

The Church.

Each believer contributes.

No one person carries the whole mission.

Some teach.

Some care.

Some lead.

Some give.

Some welcome.

Some pray.

Some organize.

Some serve behind the scenes.

Some encourage.

Purpose becomes healthier when we stop asking only:

"What is my personal mission?"

and begin asking:

"How can I faithfully contribute to what Christ is doing through His people?"

Your Life Can Point Beyond Yourself

Paul describes Christians as ambassadors for Christ.

An ambassador represents another kingdom.

That means our lives can point beyond ourselves.

Our character.

Words.

Choices.

Compassion.

Integrity.

Hope.

Faithfulness.

The way we suffer.

The way we forgive.

The way we love.

All can become part of the witness of Christ.

Purpose is not drawing attention to ourselves.

It is faithfully representing Him.

You Are Part of God's Work of Restoration

The biblical story moves toward restoration.

God is not abandoning His creation.

He is redeeming.

Reconciling.

Restoring.

Making all things new through Christ.

Whenever Christians participate in:

Reconciliation.

Justice.

Compassion.

Truth.

Healing.

Discipleship.

Care.

Service.

Gospel proclamation.

Faithful work.

We participate in ways that point toward the kingdom God is bringing.

We cannot restore the world ourselves.

But we can faithfully participate in the work of the King.

Do Not Search for Purpose Backward

Sometimes we approach purpose this way:

If I can discover one perfect assignment, then my life will finally matter.

Scripture reverses the order.

Your life matters because you belong to God.

Purpose flows from that relationship.

You do not have to achieve significance.

You receive identity in Christ and then live faithfully from it.

Purpose is not something you manufacture. It is something you live as you follow Jesus.

There May Not Be One Perfect Assignment

Some Christians become paralyzed looking for the one thing they were "born to do."

God may indeed give someone a very clear lifelong assignment.

But many faithful Christians will serve in multiple roles across multiple seasons.

You may be:

A parent.

Worker.

Volunteer.

Teacher.

Caregiver.

Leader.

Neighbor.

Friend.

Mentor.

And those roles may shift.

Purpose does not require identifying one perfect title.

It requires faithful discipleship wherever God places you.

Begin Where You Are

If you are unsure what your purpose looks like, begin with three questions.

Who Is in Front of Me?

Who needs love?

Encouragement?

Truth?

Help?

Prayer?

Mentoring?

What Is in My Hands?

What abilities?

Resources?

Experience?

Time?

Relationships?

Opportunities?

What Is God Already Asking Me to Do?

Is there a clear act of obedience you have delayed?

A relationship?

Service opportunity?

Conversation?

Gift?

Responsibility?

Start there.

BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE

Purpose often becomes visible when we faithfully respond to what is already around us.

A Simple Purpose Framework

1. Know God

How am I continuing to know and follow Jesus?

2. Become Like Christ

What part of Christ's character is God currently forming in me?

3. Love and Serve People

Who has God placed around me?

4. Steward What I Have

What gifts, experiences, resources, and opportunities have I been given?

5. Help Others Follow Jesus

Who might I encourage, teach, mentor, invite, or walk beside?

Personal Reflection

1. What have I previously believed about my purpose?

2. Does the idea that Jesus - not me - is the center of the story feel freeing or challenging?

3. What roles has God already entrusted to me?

4. What gifts or abilities seem to appear repeatedly in my life?

5. What experiences has God used to shape me?

6. Is there a past failure that I have allowed to convince me that God cannot use me?

7. What people has God placed directly in front of me?

8. What resources or opportunities are already in my hands?

9. Where am I most tempted to compare my life with someone else's?

10. Who could I intentionally help follow Jesus?

11. What would ordinary faithfulness look like in my current season?

12. What is one purpose-filled step I could take this week?

Group Discussion

1. Why do people often connect purpose with career, achievement, or recognition?
2. What changes when we begin with God's story rather than our own story?
3. Why is our first calling to Jesus more important than discovering a particular assignment?
4. How can ordinary work become meaningful Christian service?
5. Why are relationships part of our purpose?
6. How do we discover and develop spiritual gifts?
7. How can God use past experiences - including painful ones - to help us serve others?
8. Why does comparison make purpose harder to see?
9. What is the difference between significance and visibility?
10. How can someone participate in the Great Commission without becoming a vocational missionary?
11. What do you currently have "in your hands" that God might use?
12. What does faithful purpose look like in your present season?

Look More Closely

Ephesians 2:8-10

Read the passage slowly.

Notice the progression.

Grace

"By grace you have been saved through faith."

Christian purpose does not begin with achievement.

It begins with grace.

We do not work our way into God's acceptance.

We receive what Christ has done.

Gift

"It is the gift of God."

Salvation is received.

That destroys boasting.

Our lives begin with gratitude, not self-congratulation.

Workmanship

Paul says:

"We are His workmanship."

Your life is not meaningless material.

God is at work.

He is forming His people in Christ.

Good Works

Then Paul says we are:

"Created in Christ Jesus for good works."

Grace does not produce passivity.

Grace creates a new life that can be lived for God's purposes.

Prepared Opportunities

God prepares good works for His people to walk in.

This does not necessarily mean one dramatic assignment.

It means there are faithful things to do.

People to love.

Needs to meet.

Truth to speak.

Responsibilities to fulfill.

Gifts to use.

Opportunities to embrace.

GRACE AND PURPOSE

You are saved by grace, formed by God, and invited into a life of faithful participation.

What good work might already be directly in front of me?

Prayer

Father, thank You for giving my life meaning within Your story. Forgive me for the times I have made purpose primarily about recognition, success, or finding one perfect assignment. Help me remember that Jesus is the center. Teach me to know You, become more like Christ, love people, use what You have entrusted to me, and help others follow Jesus. Show me the people in front of me, the gifts in my hands, and the faithful opportunities already around me. Redeem the experiences I have surrendered to You, use even my weaknesses, and keep me from comparison. Give me courage to faithfully live the season You have given me. Amen.

This Week's Next Step

Begin Where You Are

Do not wait for a dramatic revelation about your entire future.

Look at what God has already given you.

Who is in front of me?

What is in my hands?

What responsibility has God already given me?

What need do I keep noticing?

What ability could I use?

Who could I encourage in following Jesus?

Then complete this sentence:

My next faithful step within God's story is:

Choose something real.

Something specific.

Something you can actually do.

Then do it.

Optional Bible Reading

Five Days in Scripture

Day 1 - Genesis 1:26-31

Created with dignity and purpose

What does this passage reveal about humanity's place within God's creation?

Day 2 - Ephesians 2:1-10

Saved by grace for good works

What comes first - grace or works? What follows grace?

Day 3 - Romans 12:1-13

Different gifts, one body

What gifts and responsibilities appear in this passage? How are they meant to serve others?

Day 4 - 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Representing Christ

What has God entrusted to those who have been reconciled to Him?

Day 5 - Colossians 3:12-24

Faithfulness in ordinary life

How does following Christ affect character, relationships, and work?

For each day's reading, ask:

What does this reveal about God's purpose?

What responsibility has He given His people?

What has He entrusted to me?

What is one faithful response today?

REMEMBER THIS WEEK

Keep Following Jesus

You do not need to discover one perfect assignment. You need to faithfully follow Jesus wherever He has placed you.

Know God. Become like Christ. Love people. Serve faithfully. Use what is in your hands. Steward your opportunities. Walk with others. Help someone follow Jesus. Remain faithful in the season you have been given.

And remember: **Your life is not the center of the story. Jesus is. But by His grace, you have been given a meaningful place within it.**

So begin where you are. Take the next faithful step. And keep following.

The Journey Continues

Eight Weeks Are Complete. Following Jesus Is Not.

You have reached the end of this eight-week study.

But you have not reached the end of discipleship.

There will always be more to learn about Jesus.

More of Scripture to understand.

More areas of life to surrender.

More opportunities to trust God.

More people to love.

More ways to serve.

More moments when you will need wisdom.

More steps of obedience.

More grace to receive.

The invitation that began this study remains the invitation at the end:

"Follow Me."

Jesus did not call His first disciples to complete a course.

He called them into a life.

That same invitation continues for us.

Look Back Before You Move Forward

Think back over the eight weeks you have completed.

You considered what it means to follow Jesus.

You looked carefully at who Jesus is and why He matters.

You explored what it means to become His disciple.

You learned some of the rhythms through which God helps us grow.

You practiced a way of reading and understanding Scripture.

You considered what Jesus asks of those who follow Him.

You explored how to seek and follow God's will.

And finally, you considered your own place within God's larger story.

Now take a few moments to notice what God may have been doing along the way.

Final Reflection

What has God shown me about Jesus during these eight weeks?

What has changed in the way I understand discipleship?

What truth from this study do I most want to remember?

Where have I experienced the greatest spiritual growth?

What area of my life still needs greater surrender to Jesus?

What spiritual rhythm do I want to continue practicing?

Is there a relationship God may be asking me to repair, strengthen, or invest in?

Who might I begin helping to follow Jesus?

What is one faithful step I believe God is asking me to take next?

What I Want to Remember

Sometimes we finish a study with many good ideas but gradually forget what mattered most.

Before moving forward, write down three truths you do not want to lose.

Truth One

Truth Two

Truth Three

Following Jesus means:

My Continuing Discipleship Plan

Keep the Journey Simple

You do not need an elaborate spiritual program.

A sustainable life of discipleship can grow from several simple commitments.

Stay Close to Jesus

How will I intentionally make room for prayer and relationship with God?

Stay in Scripture

What Bible-reading rhythm can I realistically continue?

Stay Connected to God's People

Who will I regularly worship, learn, pray, and grow with?

Keep Obeying

What area of obedience currently needs my attention?

Keep Serving

Where can I use what God has given me to help another person?

Help Someone Else Follow Jesus

Who is one person I could encourage in his or her faith?

My Next Faithful Step

You do not need to know everything God will do with the rest of your life.

You only need to faithfully respond to what He is showing you now.

Complete this statement:

The next faithful step I believe Jesus is asking me to take is:

I will begin by:

I will take this step by:

Someone who can encourage or pray with me is:

Then pray about it.

And when the time comes,

take the step.

Where Do I Go From Here?

Keep Following Jesus

Finishing this workbook should lead into continuing discipleship.

Here are five directions worth continuing:

1. **Continue knowing Jesus.** Keep reading the Gospels. Pay attention to His words, His character, His priorities, and the way He treats people.

2. **Continue learning Scripture.** Read beyond isolated verses and increasingly understand the Bible as the unified story of God's redemption centered in Jesus Christ.
3. **Continue growing with other believers.** Be actively connected to a local church and to Christians who can encourage, challenge, pray for, and walk with you.
4. **Continue serving.** Look at the people around you and the resources God has placed in your hands. Ask how you can faithfully help.
5. **Begin discipling someone else.** You do not need to know everything. Invite another person to walk with you as you continue following Jesus.

You could even take someone else through **Following Jesus**.

Read one teaching each week.

Work through the study guide together.

Pray.

Talk honestly.

Encourage one another.

And take the next faithful step together.

That is how discipleship begins to multiply.

A Final Prayer

Father, thank You for calling me into relationship with You through Jesus Christ. Thank You for Your grace, Your Word, Your Spirit, and the people You have placed around me.

Thank You for everything You have shown me during these weeks. Do not allow what I have learned to remain only information. Let Your truth shape the way I think, the way I live, the way I love, the way I serve, and the way I respond to You.

Lord Jesus, I want to keep following You. Teach me when I do not understand. Correct me when I wander. Strengthen me when I am weak. Forgive me when I fail. Give me courage when obedience is difficult and humility when I need to change.

Help me remain close to You. Give me a growing hunger for Scripture and a deeper life of prayer. Help me love Your Church, serve people faithfully, use what You have entrusted to me wisely, and notice the people You place in front of me.

Holy Spirit, continue forming the character of Christ within me. Produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Give me wisdom for the decisions ahead and courage to take the next faithful step.

Use my life for Your purposes. Help me encourage others, serve those who are hurting, speak truth with grace, and help other people know and follow Jesus.

My life is not the center of the story. Jesus is.

Thank You that by Your grace You have given me a place within Your story.

Wherever You lead, teach me to keep following.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

ONE FINAL REMINDER

Follow Me

When Jesus first approached ordinary people beside the Sea of Galilee, His invitation was simple:

"Follow Me."

That invitation changed everything. It still does.

You will not always know what comes next. You will not always understand what God is doing. You will sometimes fail. You will sometimes become discouraged. You will experience seasons of tremendous growth and seasons when growth seems almost invisible.

Through all of it, the invitation remains.

Know Jesus. Trust Jesus. Listen to Jesus. Learn from Jesus. Obey Jesus. Become more like Jesus. Love people as Jesus loved people. Help others follow Jesus.

And when you are uncertain what to do next, return to the simplest question of discipleship:

What would it look like to faithfully follow Jesus here?

Then take that step. And the next. And the next.

Continue the Journey

Know Christ.

Understand Scripture.

Grow in Faith.

Love and Serve Others.

Help Someone Else Follow Jesus.

THE LIFELONG INVITATION

Following Jesus is not a course we simply finish. It is the lifelong invitation to know Him, become like Him, and faithfully live within His story.

Keep Following.

About Living Truth Ministry

Living Truth Ministry exists to help people know Christ, understand Scripture, and grow as lifelong disciples.

Our desire is to provide clear, Christ-centered biblical teaching and practical discipleship resources that help people understand the unified story of Scripture, grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ, and faithfully live what they believe.

Following Jesus: An Eight-Week Journey of Discipleship was created to be used personally, between two people in a discipleship relationship, in small groups, and within local churches.

Additional biblical teachings, discipleship resources, and ministry materials are available through Living Truth Ministry.

Living Truth Ministry

Helping people know Christ, understand Scripture, and grow as lifelong disciples.