



 **DISCIPLES** PATH

THE MISSION

JOINING GOD IN HIS WORK

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DISCIPLES PATH

Disciples Path is a series of studies founded on Jesus' model of discipleship. Created by experienced disciple makers across the nation, it offers an intentional pathway for transformational discipleship and a way to help followers of Christ move from new disciples to mature disciple makers. Each study in the series is built on the principles of modeling, practicing, and multiplying:

- Leaders model the life of a biblical disciple.
- Disciples follow and practice from the leader.
- Disciples become disciple makers and multiply through the *Disciples Path*.

Each study in the series has been written and approved by disciple-makers for small groups and one-on-one settings.

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For helps on how to use *Disciples Path*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading this study, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/disciplespath

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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A NOTE FOR DISCIPLE MAKERS

Several years ago I was part of a massive research study that sought to discover how the Lord often brings about transformation in the hearts of His people. The study became a book called *Transformational Discipleship*. Basically, we wanted to learn how disciples are made. Based on the study of Scripture and lots of interactions with people, we concluded that transformation is likely to occur when a godly **leader** applies **truth** to the heart of a person while that person is in a teachable **posture**.

- **LEADER:** You are the leader. As you invest in the people you're discipling, they will learn much about the Christian faith by watching you, by sensing your heart for the Lord, and by seeing you pursue Him. I encourage you to seek to be the type of leader who can say, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."
- **TRUTH:** All six studies in the *Disciples Path* series were developed in deep collaboration with ministry leaders who regularly and effectively disciple people. The studies are designed to take the people you disciple into the Word of God—because we're confident that Jesus and His Word sanctify us and transform us. Our community of disciple-makers mapped out a path of the truths we believe are essential for each believer to know and understand.
- **POSTURE:** Hopefully the people you will be investing in adopt a teachable posture—one that is open and hungry for the Lord. Encourage them to take the study seriously and to view your invitation to study together as a sacred opportunity to experience the grace of God and the truth of God.

We hope and pray the Lord will use this study in your life and the lives of those you disciple. As you apply the truth of God to teachable hearts, transformation will occur. Thank you for being a disciple-maker!



In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Geiger".

Eric Geiger

Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources

Co-author of *Transformational Discipleship*

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Congratulations! If you've chosen to live as a disciple of Jesus, you've made the most important decision imaginable. But you may be wondering, *What does it mean to be a disciple?*

To put it simply, a disciple of Jesus is someone who has chosen to follow Jesus. That's the command Jesus gave to those He recruited as His first disciples: "Follow Me." In Jesus' culture, religious leaders called rabbis would gather a group of followers called disciples to follow in their footsteps and learn their teachings. In the same way, you will become more and more like Jesus as you purposefully follow Him in the weeks to come. Jesus once said, "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

On a deeper level, disciples of Jesus are those learning to base their identities on Jesus Himself. All of us use different labels to describe who we are at the core levels of our hearts. Some think of themselves as athletes or intellectuals. Others think of themselves as professionals, parents, leaders, class clowns, and so on.

Disciples of Jesus set aside those labels and base their identities on Him. For example:

- **A disciple of Jesus is a child of God.** In the Bible we find these words: "Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are!" (1 John 3:1). We are God's children. He loves us as our perfect Father.
- **A disciple of Jesus is an alien in this world.** Disciples of Jesus are aliens, or outsiders, in their own cultures. Because of this identity, Jesus' disciples abstain from actions and activities that are contrary to Him. Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, wrote these words: "Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you" (1 Pet. 2:11).
- **A disciple of Jesus is an ambassador for Christ.** Another of Jesus' disciples recorded these words in the Bible: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. ... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5:17,20). Ambassadors represent their king and country in a different culture for a specified period of time. Because we have been transformed by Jesus and are now His disciples and ambassadors, we represent Him to the world through our actions and by telling others about Him.

The journey you are about to take is one that will transform you more and more to be like Jesus. Enjoy! No one ever loved and cared for people more passionately than Jesus. No one was ever more sincere in His concern for others than Jesus. And no one ever gave more so that we could experience His love than Jesus did on the cross.

As you grow to be more like Jesus, you'll find that your relationships are stronger, you have more inner peace than ever before, and you look forward to the future as never before.

That's the blessing of living as a disciple of Jesus.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Welcome to *The Mission*. By exploring the journey of Jesus' earliest disciples, both new and established Christians will gain a better understanding of what it means to follow Christ. As you get started, consider the following guides and suggestions for making the most of this experience.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Because the process of discipleship always involves at least two people—the leader and the disciple—each session of *The Mission* includes a practical plan for group engagement and discussion.

This plan includes the following steps:

- **GET STARTED.** The first section of the group material helps you ease into the discussion by starting on common ground. You'll begin by reflecting on the previous session and your recent experiences as a disciple. After spending time in prayer, you'll find a practical illustration to help you launch into the main topic of the current session.
- **THE STORY.** While using *Disciples Path*, you'll find opportunities to engage the Bible through both story and teaching. That's why the group time for each session features two main sections: **Know the Story** and **Unpack the Story**. **Know the Story** introduces a biblical text and includes follow-up questions for brief discussion. It's recommended that your group encounter the biblical text by reading it out loud. **Unpack the Story** includes practical teaching material and discussion questions—both designed to help you engage the truths contained in the biblical text. To make the most of your experience, use the provided material as a launching point for deeper conversation. As you read through the teaching material and engage the questions as a group, be thinking of how the truths you're exploring will impact your everyday life.
- **ENGAGE.** The group portion of each session ends with an activity designed to help you practice the biblical principles introduced in **Know the Story** and more fully explored in **Unpack the Story**. This part of the group time often appeals to different learning styles and will push you to engage the text at a personal level.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each session of *The Mission* also includes content for individual use during the time between group gatherings. This content is divided into three categories:

- ↑ **Worship:** features content for worship and devotion. These activities provide opportunities for you to connect with God in meaningful ways and deepen your relationship with Him.
- ➡ ◀ **Personal study:** features content for personal study. These pages help you gain a deeper understanding of the truths and principles explored during the group discussion.
- ◀ ➡ **Application:** features content for practical application. These suggestions help you take action based on the information you've learned and your encounters with God.

Note: Aside from the **Reading Plan**, the content provided in the Individual Discovery portion of each session should be considered optional. You'll get the most out of your personal study by working with your group leader to create a personalized discipleship plan using the **Weekly Activities** checklist included in each session.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- You'll be best prepared for each group discussion or mentoring conversation if you read the session material beforehand. A serious read will serve you most effectively, but skimming the **Get Started** and **The Story** sections will also be helpful if time is limited.
- The deeper you're willing to engage in the group discussions and individual discovery each session, the more you'll benefit from those experiences. Don't hold back, and don't be afraid to ask questions whenever necessary.
- As you explore the **Engage** portion of each session, you'll have the chance to practice different activities and spiritual disciplines. Take advantage of the chance to observe others during the group time—and to ask questions—so that you'll be prepared to incorporate these activities into your private spiritual life as well.
- Visit lifeway.com/disciplespath for a free PDF download that includes leader helps for *The Mission* and additional resources for disciple-makers.



SESSION 1

CHRIST CAME TO US

We are His mission; He is our solution.

REFLECT

Welcome to *The Mission*. This resource will help you gain a deeper understanding of your mission as a follower of Jesus who lives, works, and plays in a world that's often opposed to Him. Not surprisingly, your study will begin with Jesus Himself.

The first half of this study will explore Christ's incarnation in the world, His mission for the world, and His death to save the world. The second half will outline our responsibilities as disciples: We're called to die with Christ, to go with Christ as individuals, and to go with Christ as a community to advance His kingdom in our world. That's our mission.

Use the following questions to begin this session with discussion.

How would you describe your goals as a disciple of Jesus?

What do you hope to learn or experience in the weeks to come?

PRAY

Stop for a moment to pray, either individually or as a group:

- Thank God for your own salvation and for the salvation of your friends and family who have joined you in following Christ.
- Ask Him to fill you afresh with awe and wonder over His gift of salvation.
- Ask God to provide meaningful connections between you and those in your path who have yet to commit their lives to Him.

INTRODUCTION

“Here I come to save the day!”

Do you remember the old *Mighty Mouse* cartoons? The main character was an animated, anthropomorphic mouse in a suit and cape. He had a wide range of powers—flight, super strength, x-ray vision, telekinesis, and more—all of which he used to free victim after victim from the clutches of evil foes.

Each time Mighty Mouse achieved victory over his adversary, an unseen audience would erupt in loud applause as orchestral music played in the background. Then the narrator would say, “What a mouse. *What* a mouse!”

Who were some of your favorite heroes growing up?

What powers or characteristics in these heroes did you appreciate most?

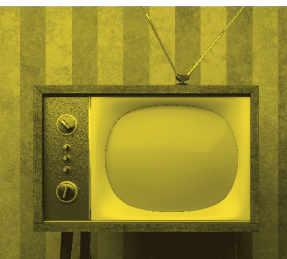
Most people enjoy hero stories. Whether real or imagined, we appreciate the thought of someone powerful coming to the rescue of those in need. We’re also grateful for the compassion, or even the sense of duty, that would compel one person to help another.

Perhaps what we like best about hero stories, however, is the way rescue always seems to occur just in the nick of time. Can you picture that moment in your mind? The situation is grim. The forces of evil are on the cusp of accomplishing their goals, and the very lives of innocent people are about to be thrown away.

Then, right at the moment when the last of our hope slips away, we hear it: “Here I come to save the day!” Salvation has come.

This session is a reminder that all of us who have trusted in Christ have experienced that moment. When humanity was hopelessly snared in sin—when we had no hope of pulling ourselves away from the forces of evil inside our own hearts—God sent His Son to meet our most pressing need.

Christ came to us with a mission, and He has won the day.



KNOW THE STORY

In today's culture, we're often tempted to think of the Christmas story as a self-contained event. We celebrate the birth of Jesus, but we don't always remember that He was born with a purpose. Christ came on a mission to save us from our sin.

¹⁸ The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

²⁰ But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name Him Immanuel,

which is translated "God is with us."

²⁴ When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵ but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus.

MATTHEW 1:18-25

What thoughts or memories come to mind when you read these verses? Why?





UNPACK THE STORY

SALVATION COMES THROUGH A PERSON

We can't properly appreciate the concept of salvation until we think deeply about the Person of Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus is more than the One who accomplished our salvation; He's not simply the Being who made salvation possible.

Instead, Jesus *is* our salvation.

When you embraced the call to follow Christ, you didn't respond to a concept or a message. You responded to a Person. You followed Jesus—the same Jesus who was born of a virgin, grew, learned, lived, and died almost 2,000 years ago. The same Jesus who is Lord of God's kingdom and Master of your life.

When you consider your coworkers, friends, and family members who have not yet experienced salvation, you want that to change. You want them to experience the joy that comes with the forgiveness of sin—and that's good. That's natural. But they won't experience that joy by better understanding a doctrine or by reciting a prayer.

They need to meet Jesus. They need to experience Him.

What do you remember about the first time you encountered Jesus in a personal way?

When was the last time you enjoyed a personal encounter with Jesus?

The Gospel writers understood the importance of Jesus' existence as a living, breathing Person. That's why Matthew made a point of starting his record of Jesus' life by writing about His miraculous birth. Luke did the same. And John opened his Gospel with a similar truth expressed in a more abstract form: "The Word became flesh and took up residence among us" (John 1:14a).

How does Jesus' Personhood help you follow Him?

When you embraced the call to follow Christ, you didn't respond to a concept or a message. You responded to a Person.

SALVATION COMES WITH A PLAN

The message of the gospel is simple: By sending Jesus to us, God made a way where there was no way. God has a plan of rescue for all humanity. God's plan is not just a good plan, or even the best of many plans—it's the *only* plan sufficient to meet the most pressing need in our lives: the need to be rescued from our sin.

We've seen that salvation is anchored in the Person of Jesus Christ. But simply knowing who Jesus is and what He's done isn't enough to actually accomplish the forgiveness of our sins. God's plan involves each person encountering Jesus in a way that leads to a relationship with Him.

And still there's more. Once we encounter Jesus, we must respond to Him with faith, which is an act of the will in which we place our trust in Him.

What are some common misconceptions about salvation?

To think about salvation in another way, God's plan requires that all people:

- **Realize:** The first step in being rescued is to realize we're in trouble. God's plan is for everyone to realize that they're not sufficient to save themselves—that Jesus is the only way of rescue from the corruption of sin.
- **Repent:** Once we realize our situation, we must repent. To repent involves being genuinely sorry for sin. It means changing our minds about our behavior and actively turning away from sin and toward God.
- **Receive:** Salvation comes as an offer—a gift—of God's grace. And that gift must be accepted as an act of faith.

These concepts may seem basic, but it's vital to have a firm foundation as we continue to explore our mission as disciples of Jesus.

How can we help others recognize and follow these steps?



Once we encounter Jesus, we must respond to Him with faith, which is an act of the will in which we place our trust in Him.

ENGAGE

To live as a disciple of Jesus means joining Him in accomplishing His mission for the world. As we'll see throughout this study, we have a part to play in helping others recognize the reality of their sin and turn to Jesus for salvation. Sometimes that part includes directly sharing the gospel message. Other times our contributions are more subtle.

For example, prayer is one of the most important things we can do for those who have yet to experience salvation in Christ.

Make a list of at least five people in your spheres of influence who are not yet disciples of Jesus. Commit to praying daily for each of these people by name. Ask God to send His Spirit and convict them of their sin.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

PRAYER REQUESTS

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In addition to studying God's Word, work with your group leader to create a plan for personal study, worship, and application between now and the next session. Select from the following optional activities to match your personal preferences and available time.

↑ **Worship**

- Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 16.
- Connect with God each day through prayer.
- Spend time with God by engaging the devotional experience on page 17.

➡ ← **Personal Study**

- Read and interact with "Identifying with Jesus" on page 18.
- Read and interact with "Preparing to Be a Witness" on page 20.

← ➡ **Application**

- Make an effort to deepen your relationship with an acquaintance this week. Seek out someone you'd like to know better and start a conversation.
- Memorize Luke 19:10: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."
- Continue praying daily for the people in your life who need to experience salvation. Seek opportunities to speak with these people in meaningful ways—and especially keep an eye open for chances to share the gospel message.
- Dig deeper into the doctrine of salvation by listening to a podcast on that subject from a respected teacher. You could also read a book, listen to a sermon, or study an article.
- Other:



WORSHIP

READING PLAN

By describing the earliest days of the church, the Book of Acts offers helpful information and inspiration for joining God in His mission. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses as you read.

Day 1

Acts 1:1-14

Day 2

Acts 1:15-26

Day 3

Acts 2:1-36

Day 4

Acts 2:37-47

Day 5

Acts 3:1-26

Day 6

Acts 4:1-22

Day 7

Acts 4:23-37

THE WORD

The central truth of this resource is that God came to earth with a mission to redeem His people through the forgiveness of their sins and that He has called His followers—those who’ve already experienced forgiveness—to participate in that mission. This is the gospel, the good news.

As you contemplate the gospel and prepare to engage in the mission of sharing that truth with others, remember that everything begins and ends with Jesus. He is the embodiment of the gospel. He is the Word made flesh, as the apostle John reminded us:

The Word became flesh
and took up residence among us.
We observed His glory,
the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14

Jesus is God and was God from “the beginning” (John 1:1). He is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. Remaining God, not becoming anything less than fully God or anything other than God, Jesus took on human flesh. Why did He do this? Because all flesh was corrupt. Only a complete and perfect sacrifice could satisfy forever God’s righteous requirement for justice against sin (see Rom. 3:25).

At the same time, Jesus exists as a man. He came into the world as a baby, born of a virgin (see Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Jesus lived a span of decades as a person and experienced life as we do. Fully identifying Himself with us, He experienced the normal process of growth and development. He encountered the full breadth of human experiences: heat and cold, hunger and thirst, work and rest.

Jesus had to be made like us in all things in order to qualify as the substitute for our sins—and to help us when we’re tested (see Heb. 2:17-18). He was one with us in every way, except that He did not sin. Jesus lived a perfect life and offered Himself as a sacrifice in order to save us from our sins.

What have you learned about Jesus through your own experiences?

How would you like to experience Jesus in the days and years to come?

IDENTIFYING WITH JESUS

Here's a truth that's worth repeating: Jesus didn't come to earth simply to secure our salvation; He *is* our salvation. His mission involved making Himself available to all people as the solution to our primary problem. He came so that we could believe in Him and therefore receive forgiveness from our sin.

As we saw in Matthew 1:18-25, the way Jesus came into our world was totally unique in the scope of history. While any other king would have been born in a palace, Jesus was born in a stable. While any other king's coming would have been heralded throughout the kingdom and widely publicized to all available subjects, the announcement of Jesus' birth was given only to a few humble witnesses (see Matt. 1:20-23; Luke 1:26-35; Luke 2:9-14). While other children are given names that shape who they will become, the name given to Jesus declared who He already was.

Given the uniqueness of Jesus' incarnation, it's no surprise that people reacted in a number of different ways to His presence in the world.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record the different ways people responded to Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2:13-18

Luke 2:8-20

Luke 2:36-38

Luke 4:16-30

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to participate in His mission to redeem the world. We have experienced Christ as our salvation, and therefore we work to help others experience Him as well. Yet, we must understand that joining Jesus in His mission means we will encounter a number of different reactions and responses, as He did.

There will be times when people respond to your work with joy. They will see your actions and hear as you proclaim the gospel, and they will be glad. They will welcome you into their lives even as they welcome Christ into their hearts.

There will be other times, however, when people respond to your work in negative ways, including bitterness, scorn, anger, and even rage. When you join Jesus in His mission to redeem the world, you will experience strife and strain in your relationships, both personal and public. You will experience persecution in different forms. You will be confused at times, frustrated and angry at other times.

And Jesus knew all of this when He called you to follow Him:

¹⁸ If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me before it hated you.

¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word I spoke to you: “A slave is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will also keep yours.

JOHN 15:18-20

When have you experienced negative interactions or negative emotions in your efforts to follow Jesus?

What rewards have you experienced while participating in Jesus’ mission for the world?

Jesus encountered trouble as He worked to redeem the people of this world. We will encounter the same. Yet, by following His example—by modeling His courage and reflecting His resolve—we can continue to persevere as disciples of Christ on a mission in our world.



PREPARING TO BE A WITNESS

The Bible teaches that there is no hope for anyone who doesn't believe and receive God's plan of salvation by accepting Jesus Christ. Think deeply about that for a moment. In the world today there are really only two groups of people: those who are saved and those who are lost. Yet, the wonderful news of the gospel is that Jesus came to save us all. Through a step of faith, the fate of lost people can be changed forever.

Those of us who have been rescued and reconciled to God have been entrusted with the message of salvation (see Matt. 28:18-20) and the ministry of reconciling others to Him (see 2 Cor. 5:18-20). How do we do that? Where should we start? How do we ready ourselves to be instruments for reconciling others to God?

Here are a few ideas to begin preparing yourself for life as a witness to God's plan of salvation.

1. Memorize and meditate on the Scriptures. Apart from knowing the Savior ourselves, there is little else that helps our confidence as witnesses more than knowing God's Word. Memorize a few verses and passages that explain what salvation is and why we need it. This discipline helps us be ready to share the truth whenever or wherever an opportunity presents itself.

If you're new to Bible memorization, the following Scripture passages are a great place to start:

- Romans 3:23-24
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 10:9-10

What Bible verses will you memorize in the coming weeks?

2. Move toward unsaved people. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, which means He sought to encounter them. He looked for ways to engage with them. Likewise, we should look for opportunities to develop relationships with unsaved people. Grocery store clerks, neighbors, homeless people, barbers, coworkers, coaches—all who are not yet following Christ—these make up our mission field. Consider ways you can get to know these individuals in your sphere of influence in order to impact their spiritual condition.

As you identify people who need to experience Jesus as their salvation, be proactive in deepening those relationships. Pursue them with love, friendship, and patience. Knowing the lost people in your community will help you understand how to share with them in a way that intersects with their lives.

Which people in your life need to experience salvation? Make a list.

3. Make prayer for lost people a priority. When we pray for those who need salvation, we stand as intercessors between God and them, seeking to bring God closer to them and them closer to God. As we plead for God's intervention in the lives of lost people, He begins to work in their hearts. Not only that, He also begins to sensitize our hearts to the point where we share His burden for them.

No one wants the lost to be saved more than God. By seeking Him, He also opens our eyes to opportunities to share with them.

Commit to praying each day for the people on your list (above).

4. Prepare your personal testimony. The story of what Christ has done for you personally is one of the greatest tools you have for leading others to an awareness of the Lord's calling on their lives. When people see and hear you, they encounter living proof of the power of Christ to save a soul and transform a life.

It's important that you're able to share your testimony in a concise, straight-to-the-point manner. Perhaps the simplest way to be sure that what you share is clear and concise is to write it out. Doing so helps make a long story short. And committing your testimony to memory helps you be able to share it whenever or wherever an opportunity arises.

How would you describe your testimony? See if you can record it in the space below.