

# Following Jesus

STORIES OF DISCIPLESHIP  
AND DEVOTIONAL LIFE

**SCOTT R. WARD, DMin**

*AdventSource*

Following Jesus  
Stories of Discipleship and Devotional Life

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# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my students for inspiring me with their stories of discipleship and devotional life. As I read their essays, I knew their stories needed to be shared so others could be inspired as well. It seems discipleship is often cognitively understood as equipping for ministry but when challenged to look deeper into the heart by asking, “who?”, we all begin to discover those who have nurtured our spirituality along the way from our earliest years.

A special thanks also to the many teachers, pastors, and parents who have discipled me over the years—I have been blessed to be nurtured by so many of you that it would be impossible to try naming you all. Currently, my closest discipler is my wife, Sarah. Sarah, thank you for praying with me, sharing devotional thoughts with me, challenging me when needed, and for creating a wonderfully nurturing home where spirituality is infused in all we do.

I would also like to thank my friends and co-workers who read through the rough draft of this book, giving great feedback and writing endorsements to encourage others to read as well. Finally, I’d like to thank my research assistant, Nancy Meszaros/Kardos-Moldovan . Nancy has spent many hours editing and tracking down information from students, working diligently to make this book what it is today. Her experience as an Academy Bible teacher has proved invaluable to this project.

In the end, all the glory goes to God for inspiring us to be disciples and to disciple others through Jesus’ example and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. May this all be for his name’s honor and glory, Amen.

# Endorsements

“Dr. Ward writes in an authentic and practical style that puts the reader at ease like we’ve just sat down in a conversation together. It is an easy read, packed full of practical examples that teachers and principals can immediately apply. But more deeply, the transparency found within the plethora of rich stories feels like rare and honest insights that remind us of how human we are. In leadership, we so often fall into the trap of placing each other into quick categories or only seeing each other as our titles. This quick read takes us back to the humanness of who we are. What I appreciate most are the psychosocial developmental stages for adolescents that Dr. Ward applies to discipleship. He brilliantly demonstrates the necessity for creating your ministry within a youth’s need for autonomy, identity, belonging, and purpose.”

– *Angela White (Superintendent of School Growth, Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists)*

“Dr. Scott Ward shares principles and experiences that will inspire you. The testimonies contained in this book will empower you as you consider your ministry calling and practices.”

– *Dr. Tracy Wood (Youth & Young Adult Ministries Director, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists)*

“During my engagement with Dr. Scott Ward in an After School Program amid the Covid-19 period, I observed his profound dedication to fostering a profound and affectionate connection between children and Jesus Christ.

This book presents a pragmatic approach, serving as a valuable resource for parents seeking to enhance their children's relationship with Christ. Furthermore, it extends an invigorating call to pastors, teachers, and mentors, encouraging collaborative efforts to deliberate on the discipleship journey within their respective church and school settings and to evaluate its impact on the students and families under their influence."

– *Pastor Claval Hunter (Associate Director for the Center for Community Change, Andrews University Theological Seminary of Seventh-day Adventists)*

"I recommend this book to anyone raising or working with kids, as it presents a refreshingly practical approach to discipleship. I appreciate the stories woven throughout this book that not only illustrate discipleship principles, but also communicate that a relationship is at the heart of discipleship. As a parent this book gives the opportunity to be more intentional, what is working and what could be changed to better disciple our children? Take your time as you read through the chapters, fully engage in the activities, and embrace the discipleship journey that God is calling you on."

– *Ben Martin (Pastor of Children and Family Discipleship, Pioneer Memorial Church)*

"As an academy teacher who has collaborated between school, church, and home, I believe this book prepares us with the tools - both spiritually and organizationally - to create a foundation of discipleship, support, and love for the younger generation(s). Dr. Ward provides valuable steps

for personal spiritual development and discipleship which I can use in my school setting with my students. I am pleased to say that this book aims at a united ministry between these three spheres of influence, all while showcasing real examples of this collaboration and discipleship through stories. While it is a must read for everyone, I hope this book becomes a treasured staple for every teacher.”

– Nancy Meszaros/Kardos-Moldovan (*Religion/Bible Teacher, Andrews Academy*)

“We often seek to systematize discipleship into a program so we can ‘make more disciples’ in less time. But what if God never intended it to be that way? Scott Ward has recaptured the essence of discipleship as a personal journey with God that can be encouraged and explored as each individual deepens their walk by actually utilizing the very tools God has built into them. This book actually helped me discover a few more ways that I could ‘be still and know’ as I continue on my own journey.”

– Don Keele, Jr. (*Director of Young Adult Ministry and Adventist Christian Fellowship, Georgia-Cumberland Conference*)

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# Foreword

I have known Scott Ward for many years—first as one of my students in a doctoral Biblical Spirituality class and now, more recently, as a friend and colleague. Each fall we both teach sections of a required seminary course on the basics of Biblical Spirituality. I especially enjoy the joint spiritual retreats we have for all our students together at the beginning of the semester where we get to walk and talk and pray with each other and be together with our students for an entire day. I believe what he has written here will be an explanation on what we do to help our students know and love Jesus more intimately. Our students always tell us how much they have been blessed by the retreat, prayer walks, and the practices outlined in this book, and I know you too will be blessed as well.

In this book, *Following Jesus: Stories of Discipleship and Devotional Life*, Scott does an outstanding job helping us understand what discipleship is and how it works. Taking his cue from Jesus who taught biblical values and theology through stories, he illustrates the concepts of discipleship and devotional life by telling heartwarming stories from his life and the lives of many of his students. There is a variety of stories showing how discipleship can take place in multiple ways and under different circumstances in natural settings. Ultimately, discipleship is about someone loving another person and taking the time to invest his or her life in that individual. The genius of this book is that

discipleship is not a program or complicated lifestyle, it is living out the Christian life with love and intentionally and passing it on to the next generation.

I loved reading his biblical insight on discipleship based on John chapter 1. There is much to learn and apply as we commit ourselves to grow in Jesus and help others do the same.

Here is the basic discipleship process as Scott sees it in John 1:

1. Dissatisfaction with life and seeking something better.
2. Listening to the testimonies of others for answers and a better life.
3. Looking for consistency, authenticity, and meaning: Watching to see if the actions of others match the testimonies.
4. Challenging them to try what others say and do.
5. Committing and engaging in community if they see that it works and makes a difference.
6. The result is a call to care and share what has happened.

This chapter lays the ground for the rest of the book by illustrating these concepts thorough many testimonies. Scott also gives us the tools to do the same in our own context.

Pastors, teachers, and parents will find many helpful tips on how to share their faith and values with the new generation. Scott really captures the instruction outlined in Deuteronomy 6, the Shema, of how to seize every opportunity of how parents, teachers, and pastors can disciple their children.

If parents, teachers, and concerned church members are serious about passing on the torch of faith to the next

generation, this book is a must read—I enjoyed reading it and received a rich blessing from its many concepts and stories, and I know you will too. And just as I look forward to continued prayer walks and conversations “along the way” with friends, colleagues, and with my students, I pray that what is written in these pages will help you be inspired and equipped to have more conversations about spiritual matters and share many testimonies with the fellow travelers that you meet along life’s way.

—*S. Joseph Kidder, DMin*

*Professor of Discipleship and Applied Theology, SDATS,  
Andrews University*

*Author of: “Journey to the Heart of God,” “The Big 4,” “Living With the Mind of Jesus,” “Moving Your Church,” “Majesty,” and “Out of Babylon.”*



# Preface

I have just spent one week teaching an intensive class on Foundations of Biblical Spirituality to a group of pastors. Some came in burned out and feeling like they were on the brink of quitting, but we all left our week together feeling encouraged by the Holy Spirit and having found some new friends.

Pastors aren't the only ones; I know there are teachers and parents who feel this way sometimes and need encouragement too. This book on discipleship is not to give you one more task or another method of how to do your work. Hopefully it will be an inspiration to live life in ministry just a bit differently, whether it's pastoral ministry or teaching ministry or ministry in the home. I have found that if we can connect our hearts to God more fully, and be disciplined by him on a daily basis, we can allow that nurturing relationship to freely flow to those within our sphere of influence, disciplining them to Jesus as well. As Jesus disciplines us, we pass that along and disciple others. And when we see the fruits of our labor growing in those we disciple, it encourages us and lifts our spirits, giving us hope and carrying us forward. This is how Jesus intended ministry to be, as we work through the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. And this, for me, is what puts the joy into the journey of ministering to others as both a pastor and a teacher.

What you will find in the pages ahead is all about relationships and all about stories. It includes many stories from my students sharing testimonies of who discipled them so you can see examples from a wide variety of people from around the world. It also includes stories of individuals' devotional lives so you can see some examples and ideas and be inspired that some of those same things may work for you.

So take heart and read on, praying for the Holy Spirit to inspire you along the way and to guide you in your search for deeper meaning and purpose in your spirituality and in your mission to those you serve. I pray that one of the results of you spending time in this book will be to have a closer walk with Jesus, and a closer walk with your fellow pastors, teachers, and parents as you learn how to better disciple each other as you disciple the younger generations which surround you as well.

## The Shema

<sup>4</sup> “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup> And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. <sup>6</sup> And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. <sup>7</sup> Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

# Introduction

It seems to me that a lot of what has been written about discipleship is for those who attend church regularly. But can discipleship be for the outliers? For those who are struggling in the messiness of life and losing their way every other day? Can discipleship be evangelistic? Reaching to the margins? Can it be for all the young people who we see not only in our homes, churches, and schools, but also in the community?

Too often we assume that the children born into our own homes are Christian, but they are not. Not yet. I believe one of the biggest mistakes is not taking the time to disciple our own children according to the ancient tradition of the Shema. The Israelites knew it, but many Christians have somehow forgotten. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his book, “Lessons in Leadership,” states:

“So Jews became the only people in history to predicate their very survival on education. The most sacred duty of parents was to teach their children. Passover itself became an ongoing seminar in the handing on of memory. Judaism became the religion whose heroes were teachers and whose passion was study and the life of the mind. The Mesopotamians built ziggurats. The Egyptians built pyramids. The Greeks built the Parthenon. The Romans built the Coliseum. Jews built schools. That is why they alone, of all the civilizations of the ancient world, are still

alive and strong, still continuing their ancestors' vocation, their heritage intact and undiminished."<sup>1</sup>

Schools were the way the Jews disciplined young people while they were “on the road” throughout the day. The goal of this book is to lay out ideas which can be helpful in getting back to that model and discipling the young people born into Adventist homes, as well as those born into homes in the communities around our churches and church schools.

The target audience for this book is pastors, teachers, and parents. The main approach I am advocating is campus-based ministry—especially where parents, pastors, and teachers have the opportunity to co-minister to young people, either in Adventist church school or on public campuses—and the discipleship principles which can be applied to other contexts as well. One such example is the story Kalisa shares about how discipleship shaped her to be the person she is today:

## KALISA

My church family, the local pastors, and my parents had made a large enough impression on me that I wanted to be like them. Therefore, my parents dropped me off at the office of a chaplain named Dilys. From eighth grade through twelfth grade, I watched her engage with students who would come by and find her. She would sit them down and pour into them, allowing me to see her personal conversations with students and faculty members. As I sat there over the years, I noticed a pattern. She was

<sup>1</sup> Sacks, Jonathan. “Lessons in Leadership”. (2015) Maggid Books An imprint of Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd. POB 8531, New Milford, CT 06776-8531, USA & POB 4044, Jerusalem 9104001, Israel, p. 74  
Also in: [https://www.santafejcc.com/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2430669/jewish/The-Far-Horizon.htm#utm\\_source=domain&utm\\_medium=domain&utm\\_campaign=chabadsantafe.com](https://www.santafejcc.com/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2430669/jewish/The-Far-Horizon.htm#utm_source=domain&utm_medium=domain&utm_campaign=chabadsantafe.com)



always genuine in how she spoke. She would look at the student(s), engaged. She would ask questions that made one ponder what they thought or felt about their situation. Most importantly, she was always talking about this Middle Eastern rabbi, Jesus, like he was someone she really truly believed in and had a relationship with.

When she wasn't engaging with students, she would ask me questions about my own life: what I thought about God, ministry, and my emotions, how I would evaluate my life currently with Jesus, why I evaluated my life that way, and she would give me books to read to learn more about Jesus and myself.

When I left for college, she kept tabs on me, and when I came back for breaks, she opened her home for me to visit anytime. She had a community that met at her home every Tuesday and she invited me to join. I was able to create an adult community with doctors and Ph.D. students, and engage with them in how they live adult life and do Christianity. I was able to become close to her family, which in turn, put me in position to do my first pastoral internship at her husband's church and meet a new community. While I was figuring out how to be a Christian without my parents, her home gave me a safe community to evaluate what I had been doing each semester and encourage me to try again.

I have the most profound respect for the woman who disciplined me, and I have also seen my theology of God change because of the love she has shown me. When people ask me the story of Jesus, I get teary-eyed, because this is true: Jesus' love is precious to me. When I tell people about Jesus, I always tell them

about a God who has stuck by my side and moved me into his family, because that is what has been disciplined to me.

Multiple studies conducted over the past decade or two within Christianity (including Adventism) show that we are losing more and more of our children from attending and being involved in church.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we could say the problem began when we raised our kids in a Christian environment but failed to effectively introduce them to ways of developing their own relationships with Jesus. Growing that deep, personal relationship is the only way of being authentically tied to the church in the healthiest way.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the goal here is to look closely at what discipleship really is and to chart a course that will help us get on track with reaching our own children for Jesus.

In Chapter 1, we will lay the foundation for this book by looking at a discipleship process based on the writings of the apostle John. I love anything and everything that was written by John, who was a son of thunder, the youngest and most intimate disciple of Jesus, the great lover of souls, the disciple who couldn't be martyred, and the prophet of Patmos.

I love how he talks to us—even today—as little children.

I love how he chose to record Jesus telling us to love one another and included the beautiful prayer Jesus offered for each of us in John 17.

I love how he decides to include the parable about the intimate connection of the vine and the branches and the fruit that can flow from that relationship.

<sup>2</sup> Dudley, Roger L. "Youth Religious Commitment over Time: A Longitudinal Study of Retention." *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 41, no. 1, Oct. 1999, pp. 110–21.

<sup>3</sup> Jiménez, Obed. "The Relationship Between Parental Influence and Christian Spiritual Practices Among Adventist Youth in Puerto Rico." *Dissertations, Digital Commons @ Andrews University*, 2009.

I love how he silently underscores the miracles when Jesus never physically touched anyone, to reassure us that our physical separation from Jesus today doesn't hinder our lives from being touched by him we can still be in an intimate relationship with him every day.<sup>4</sup>

I also love how John—unlike the other gospel writers—chose to include the story about Jesus, after his resurrection, asking Peter three times, “Do you love Me?”

I learn a great deal about God from the entire body of scripture, but my heart is the most deeply touched by this book from John. Within his writings, I have found a discipleship process that not only helps me find my own personal relationship with Jesus but also demonstrates how to most effectively share that with the world around me. I believe John's great focus on becoming a loving gospel testimony for the world around us is even more relevant today than ever before: he paired discipleship and evangelism.

I don't believe in the separation of discipleship and evangelism.<sup>5</sup> The 72 disciples whom Jesus sent out to do ministry in Luke 10, were sent before their relationship with Jesus was well refined. They were called to go and share, as they were, so they could understand and draw closer to him. To understand this properly, we must understand what evangelism really is. I would like to offer that evangelism is simply sharing our testimony of what Jesus has done and is doing for us on a daily basis. This is gospel evangelism in its truest form. We have scriptural examples of this with the woman at the well and the demoniac who was freed from oppression. After being accepted, loved, and freed, they

<sup>4</sup> Idea borrowed from Dr. John Paulien, in his Bible Amplifier book on the gospel of John.

<sup>5</sup> Discipleship and evangelism together. This is not common in many discipleship models, but in youth ministry, it is rather common to keep the two together. The D6 model, etc.

immediately went and shared their testimony with others—they were so full of gratitude and joy they couldn't help but share what Jesus had done.

This is the relationship theology that has always driven my campus-based ministries with children, youth, and young adults. It's about living out the Shema, hearing and obeying, and taking appropriate action every day. Discipleship doesn't work as a weekend-only event; it can only work if it's the daily norm. Without access to our kids throughout the week, we just don't have the opportunity to fully engage in this type of discipling and leading our children to Jesus.

The reality of the statistics is that leaving discipleship up to the parents alone isn't working because so many parents have not been discipled themselves. Even in Jesus' day, it took a village to raise and nurture the children and youth, and ideally, today we all need a spiritual community helping each other by doing our best to help each other follow Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 2 is a collection of stories from my seminary students which answers the question, "Who discipled you?" You have just read one of these discipleship stories, and there are many more in store within this chapter. These stories are from around the world and illustrate some of the vast diversity of culture and experience represented here at Andrews University—one of the most diverse campuses in the world. My prayer is that in these stories you'll find inspiration and examples for identifying your own story of discipleship and how you can pass that on by seeing new and fresh ways to disciple within your sphere of influence.

In Chapter 3, we will look at the power of story. People across the world and throughout time have passed on their values, beliefs, and love by telling stories. The Shema, Jesus'

<sup>6</sup> Beagles, Kathleen. "Growing Disciples in Community." *Christian Education Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 148–64.

parables, the vine and the branches, and the many lessons learned by observing sheep serve as examples of discipleship that centers on inviting others into the shared story of the group. It's an invitation to belong, take part, contribute, and take ownership of an important role in the community.

Community and church roles vary greatly depending on talents, interests, and needs. True heartfelt belonging will never be experienced by those coming in if they don't find that place of meaning and contribution. All too often, if this belonging aspect of the church experience is missing, many will likely leave. It is vitally important each person sees how the story of their life fits into the story of Jesus and his mission to the world.

In Chapter 4, we look at the Three-Story approach to sharing worship thoughts. I was introduced to this concept by Steve Case many years ago in the Connecting seminars he conducted to help youth pastors in Northern California teach youth how to share worship talks. This is still a powerful tool for connecting with youth—sharing funny stories and matching the moral of that story to the moral of a Bible story, telling them one after the other, and then helping your audience to make application to their own lives. It may sound slightly complicated here but after you finish the chapter, I'm sure you'll be excited to give it a try!

In Chapter 5, we will discuss the importance of campus-based youth ministry. If we don't have access to our children during the week, it is very hard to teach them the ways of the Lord according to the great tradition of the Shema. If our children only experience church and Christian community on the weekends, we must ask ourselves what influences are informing our children's worldviews the other five days per week (hint: that device in their pockets is one of the most powerful influences in their lives and it's discipling them to rival God's).

First, we will look at maximizing the potential of having our children attend church schools to make sure true discipleship goes beyond mentoring and is happening there and then. We will discuss some options for supporting our children who do not have access to Christian education. We will also discuss how to help our children make sense of the worldview presented to them in non-Christian schools, and how to do our best to bring a Christian worldview into whatever setting our children may find themselves now and in the future, whether it be a public school or a secular workplace after graduation.

In Chapters 6-8, we will take a look at devotional life as the core of Christianity and the primary foundation for discipleship. In these chapters, we will be revisiting and renewing concepts of commitment to Jesus and devotional practices I first laid out in my book, “Authentic: Where True, Life-Changing Christianity Begins” (R&H 2012). I believe the ultimate goal of raising our young people is to help them go beyond admiring the devotional lives of others to developing their own life-changing relationships with Jesus. This personal connection, in my experience, is the truest way to living lives of meaning and purpose filled with all the fruits of the Spirit.

One of the biggest challenges of being a spiritual leader and influencer in the lives of children is for pastors, teachers, and parents to do their best to live and model this as much as possible for them. For inspiration on this challenging topic, I will be sharing some details of who I am as a person—hobbies, interests, talents, and temperament. All of these things impact how I personally nurture my relationship with Jesus. I have also asked others to share who they are and how that impacts how they relate to God. Hopefully this will help each reader to find the ways they

can best nurture their personal relationship with Jesus, which will then impact how they disciple others.

In Chapters 9 and 10 I want to take some time to look at action plans for creating a well-rounded and balanced approach for interaction with children within a K-12 church school setting. It is important to understand that devotional time with an 8-year-old will look different than devotional time with an 18-year-old. In my experience, there are many teachers, pastors, and parents who make efforts toward leading young people spiritually but become frustrated because they feel they are not connecting well nor being effective through the same approaches they use for themselves or perhaps with other adults. In these chapters, I will present key elements I believe help form intentional discipleship experiences: bonding, teaching doctrine, teaching devotional life, outreach, evangelism, and worship.

In Chapter 11, I will take some time to look at action plans for creating a well-rounded and balanced approach for discipling children in settings *other* than church schools. This will include the public high school setting, and we will look at the potential for developing Christian preschools and after-school tutoring programs to reach urban populations and other communities where finances and other resources can be a challenge.

Finally, Chapter 12 is the wrap-up and send-off for the entire book so you can start trying out what you've learned here and discipling the young people within your sphere of influence.

The overall goal of this book is to find as many ways as we can to raise all God's children so they can experience for themselves how wide, how long, how deep, and how high God's love really is for each of them. In Ephesians 3, Paul

talks about this experience of loving and being loved by God as not reserved for God's chosen people alone, but for everyone, no matter what home, culture, environment, or situation they were born into. The mission of the first angel of Revelation 14 is to take the Gospel to every tribe, tongue, nation, and people—to give everyone, everywhere the best chance possible for knowing Jesus and becoming his disciples. This is also known as the great gospel commission laid out in the four gospels. If we can learn to share this most important message more effectively with our own children, perhaps this will help us be more effective in sharing the gospel with those outside our own homes and churches as well.



# Part 1

## Understanding the Critical Importance of Discipling Young People

Discipleship involves relationship. Merely giving information rarely changes people and we can only be heard at the deepest levels of the heart when we first show that we care. President Theodore Roosevelt is famously quoted as saying, “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” This is still true today—especially in discipling young people.

As a youth pastor and teacher, I found that it was critically important to find ways to connect with young people outside of church and outside of the classroom to build relationships for my ministry to be effective. In the Blueprint film on Adventist Education one educator said, “There is no significant learning without a significant relationship with the teacher.” Jesus modeled this throughout His time on earth and it is testified to by His own disciples. In 1 John 1 the apostle states that his goal is to share what he and his friends had, seen, heard and touched with their own eyes, ears and hands. And he says that it was through their relationships with Jesus that he and the other disciples knew that eternal life was only through Jesus! Stories told in the context of relationship can be some of the most powerful influences known to humankind, and transformative testimonies about the love of Jesus help to form a powerful context where discipleship can flourish.



# Chapter 1

## The Discipleship Process According to John 1

I was born into an Adventist home near Loma Linda, California, in the 1960s. At that time and place, there were so many Adventists living in such a concentrated area that, if I remember right, even the mail was delivered on Sunday instead of on the Sabbath! I remember thriving churches and overflowing church schools. I remember this new sensational singing group that appeared called the Heritage Singers. Those were the days!

I was, and still am, an introvert. I could, and still can, entertain myself for hours while getting lost in my own thoughts and dreams. My own imagination was better than anything TV or books had to offer when I was a kid. This was during the time when LEGOs came in only square and rectangular shapes and you had to make up your own creations. This I eagerly did: no directions, no plans, no one else creating for me. It was all up to each child to create and bring into existence their dreams.

After finishing second grade at the Loma Linda church school, my family moved to Minnesota, next door to my grandparents and back to where my dad had grown up. There we lived in the country rather than on a city block, and I had free roam of the farm. My grandfather had converted the land into Ward's Auto Sales, a used car

and farm machinery business, back in 1949. He also sold parts from broken cars, tractors, and machinery. I lived my childhood dream on that land—exploring the swamp, herding cows, trapping pocket gophers, riding minibikes (child-sized motorcycles), and generally getting lost in the clouds of my thoughts and adventures every day. Dirt, mosquitos, wood ticks, cuts, and bruises were not a problem for me. I eagerly embraced them all!

My first year in Minnesota, there was no church school, so I attended public school in the 3rd grade. The teacher was nice, but for some reason I just felt out of place. Third grade is the first time I remember getting punched by another kid. By the time the next school year started, my little church had decided to open their own school for me and my older brother, and a family with four kids that had recently moved to town. This happened in the early 70s—at the peak of enrollment in Adventist church schools in North America.

I graduated from 8th grade at that little church school and ended up going to a public high school for a couple of years. I eventually left home to attend a boarding academy in Hutchinson, Minnesota, just a few hours south of where we lived. After graduating, I attended an Adventist college for three years before finishing my Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Nebraska.

I loved my years in church school, and I loved my church family, because I felt deeply they were my family. We did everything together: grade school, Sabbath School, summer camp, Pathfinders, sleepovers at each other's houses, potlucks and church picnics, Saturday night table games with loads of desserts. Genuine love and community surrounded me. What is astonishing to me is that despite this wonderful, accepting environment created by loving Christian parents and church leaders, I launched into college

and still fell into the worldly party scene which welcomed me as a young adult. I was not rebellious or looking for trouble; I was that “good” kid that always did what he was told. But as an introvert, I simply went the way of the people who reached out and befriended me. In my situation, it wasn’t the religious or spiritual people; it was the partiers.

I ran with that crowd for a few years until I became disgusted with myself and all that I was doing; and yet, there didn’t seem to be anything in the church to catch my attention as meaningful or helpful to bring me back. So, one night after drinking and dancing at a local college bar, God told me, “You are coming with Me.” He gave me a grand vision that I would be working for Him in some special way. And He began to open doors before me.

He led me into student colporteur work for a summer. I then led those programs for six years. Afterward, I attended seminary, and for 20 years I served as a youth and young adult pastor before being invited to move to Michigan to teach at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on the campus of Andrews University.

As I have thought about my experiences over the years, it seems to me that the missing piece in my spiritual experience was that I wasn’t introduced to a personal relationship with Jesus. I wasn’t taught how to have meaningful devotional time. I was very well mentored and loved, but not discipled. I wasn’t challenged to do outreach or to go on mission trips because those were not common things at the time. My church and church community did everything the denomination outlined at that time on how to raise children to know God. There was a lot of teaching “about” God, but very little about “knowing” God.

By the time I began attending Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, we had a new pastor named Morris Venden

who was preaching a revolutionary new message called “righteousness by faith,” as opposed to righteousness by works. This was long before teaching discipleship became popular. In my experience, even today, I feel that Adventism still doesn’t understand discipleship very well. That is the reason for this book: to create better opportunities for all our children to find what seemed to be missing from the church during my childhood—a culture that nurtures a personal and intimate experiential relationship with Jesus all day, every day.

This is my story. It’s what I have, and it’s shaped who I am. It’s the background from which I approach scripture. My experience and temperament, have had a great impact on how I read the story of the calling of the first disciples, recorded in John 1. I hope the principles outlined in the following pages will be of help to anyone who is still searching for Jesus within their own story.

Because of my love for the writings of John, I find the discipleship model I relate to best is in chapter one of the gospel according to John. I’m sure there are other places for people with other personality types, learning styles, and love languages to find inspiration for reaching the world around them for Christ; this is simply the inspiration that makes sense to me as I journey through life. To condense things a bit, I’ll pull out the verses I focus on in the calling-of-the-disciples story, keeping in mind the circumstances of Roman oppression which surrounded Israel and the people of Jesus’ day at that time.

## The First Disciples

<sup>6</sup> God sent a man, John the Baptist, [c] <sup>7</sup> to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not

the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. <sup>9</sup> The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>35</sup> The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup> When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

<sup>39</sup> “Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup> Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”[a]).

As I have read, pondered, taught, and written on this passage within the context of my own story, I have put together a six-step “Discipleship Process” that emerged. It’s not a prescriptive formula or program; it’s not a “six weeks and done” event, it’s what I hope can be a simple descriptive guideline to help those with a desire to disciple others—especially young people—for Jesus.

The first step I see in this passage, and in my own story, is a dissatisfaction with life. The people in Jesus’ day were suffering under Roman oppression and looking for a way

out. The religious leaders taught about the prophecy of a coming Messiah who would be a military leader to conquer the Romans and free God's people. People were listening to John the Baptist along with other preachers in hopes that this Messiah was near.

In my own story, there was a sort of dissatisfaction as well. When I drifted from church, I was in transition from high school to college, moving to a new city and a new school. At that time, Daniel and Revelation seminars were very popular, but I couldn't find relevance. I told myself I would rather spend my time getting to know Jesus rather than spending my time trying to figure out exactly when He was coming. My rationale was that if I knew Him, I would recognize Him when He showed up.

The problem was that the only thing I remember people saying about devotional life was to read the Bible and pray. Well, I had no idea what part of the Bible to read, or how to engage with what the verses said. I had followed a "read your Bible in a year" program and occasionally read my Sabbath School lessons, but that's about it. As far as my prayer experience, we would pray for missionaries, pastors, and teachers around the world, with a few other requests, but there was no mention of talking to Jesus as you would to a friend.

So my story of dissatisfaction with life was really a typical young adult journey to find my own faith. It was up to me to navigate the challenges of the world within my own Adventist worldview, and I didn't feel prepared for that. I was lost and had no practical ideas about how the Bible could guide me through life or help me make good choices. I floundered like I still see so many young people doing today.

The second step I see in this passage, and in my own life, was that in the floundering and searching, people of



Jesus' day (and mine) are listening to the testimonies of others whom they meet, and they try to find a good path to something better. In the story of John 1, we see how John the Baptist had faithful disciples who listened to many preachers but who had settled in as his followers. Maybe they liked that he didn't claim to be the Messiah himself, but that he would help them find Him? What we do know for sure is that John the Baptist had done such a good job at discipling that when he pointed out the Messiah, at least a few of his followers believed his testimony and immediately left him to follow Jesus.

In my story, I listened to the testimony of my peers who were going out to the bars, dancing, drinking, and doing everything else that typically goes with that lifestyle. I was invited into that community and gladly went because the people were so nice and welcoming. I just wanted a place of belonging, and this was the only option being offered. They made the party scene seem really appealing. And then, of course, all the beer commercials on TV painted an even more compelling picture of how popular you can be if you just drink Bud Light®! And what is baffling to me is that even as a good, rule-following, non-rebellious kid, I didn't see anything wrong with what I was doing. After all, "everyone was doing it"—even all my Adventist friends.

This leads us to step three in the discipleship process. After hearing the testimonies of those around me, and in Jesus' day the testimonies given by various leaders, we all looked at the lives of those sharing the testimonies. John's disciples obviously saw something in him that made them think his testimony was working for him. He seemed happy, fulfilled, and on a meaningful mission. That's what they were apparently searching for because that's what they eventually embraced as followers of Jesus. The people sharing their testimonies with me were good-looking and well-dressed,

smiling, laughing, and talking about all the fun they were having, so why not try it?

This third point is a very important one as we think about how we are discipling young people today—do the religion and spirituality we proclaim actually make us happy and nice? Young people can see from a mile away if you practice what you preach and whether this makes you angry or happy. I think we've all met angry religious people who are not practicing what they expect others to, and most kids today won't have anything to do with this approach. (Let's be honest—most adults won't, either!)

This brings us to step number four. This is the point to which people have to get for them to be willing to try what you are inviting them to try. They typically need to be (1) searching for something new, then (2) listening to what you're promoting and (3) seeing if it actually makes you happy before (4) jumping in and trying it for themselves. I persistently kept trying the party life for almost three years. At first, it seemed really fun, but rather quickly I started feeling guilty about the things I was doing. I felt conflicted about hangovers and hookups, but everyone kept saying it was so great and fun. We all want to live a good life, right? And many times, it seems easier to pretend it really is good when it isn't, because then we would have to start the search all over again if we really haven't found The Good Life. The delusions and deceptions begin and continue until something extreme happens to shake us up and shake us out of whatever deception we are living in.

We see this regularly in the news—the Hollywood elites acting as though they have it all and are happy beyond belief, but for some reason are actually addicted to drugs and alcohol to cope with it all. Tragically, sometimes someone who appears to have it all takes their own life

amidst the misery they can no longer endure. It's sad that this is reality for so many.

This all leads to step five. When we believe that this really does look like The Good Life, we commit to that lifestyle and to the community which supports it, oftentimes to the point of accepting deceptions as reality. For me and many others who have tried the ways of the world, we go from one worldly deception to another in search of the happiness which is promised but never fully received. There may be fun for a season, but the lasting joy never comes.

In the story of John 1, there is a better result for those who listened to John's advice and followed Jesus. They followed Him to "see where He was staying," and they found His life was consistent with His teachings. They found that when they left everything to be in community with Him, they experienced meaning, purpose, and joy. They found new identities in Him and in His mission.

This consistency between talk and walk leads to step six: they spontaneously go out and share what they have found with their friends. In John 1, the disciples go and tell everyone about the Messiah—not out of legalistic obligation, but out of uncontrollable joy at having found true meaning and purpose during troublesome times. This is the step I was missing in my own story – at least at first.

So, here is the basic discipleship process model as I see it:

1. **Context of Searching:** Dissatisfaction with life and seeking a sense of belonging
2. **Natural Curiosity:** Listening to the testimonies of others for answers
3. **Looking for Consistency, Authenticity, and Meaning:** Watching to see if actions match the testimonies

4. **Challenge to Try:** Trying what others say and do
5. **Commit to Community:** Engaging in community if it seems to be working
6. **Called to Care:** Spontaneously serving and sharing what has happened

Based on the model above, this is how I see my mission in life:

1. Learn to recognize those who are searching
2. Share my testimony openly
3. Do my best to live a Godly example consistent with what I claim to believe
4. Invite others to try what I believe in and provide opportunities for them to do so
5. Accept others into a welcoming and healing community that includes humanitarian and gospel outreach
6. Encourage others to become disciple-makers, sharing what has happened in their lives

The last step is to make application of this model to disciple children in our church schools and to lay that spiritual relational foundation in their lives which can see them through the troublesome times we all face. We will flesh this out in the school discipleship plan, but for now, this is the outline according to the model we are establishing here:

1. **Recognize students' struggles.** Erik Erickson's stages of psychosocial development and Kara Powell's research both identify that the primary task for adolescents is to be in search of autonomy, identity, belonging, and purpose.<sup>1</sup> This means that the primary tasks of the church during these years are to help

<sup>1</sup> McLeod, Saul. "Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development." (2013).; Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. "Growing young: Six essential strategies to help young people discover and love your church." Baker Books, 2016.

young people (1) find their identity in Christ, (2) belong within the church community, and (3) have a meaningful purpose with which to be engaged. If we fail to offer meaningful answers and opportunities to our children and youth, there are a plethora of others eagerly attempting to disciple our children by offering competing answers to this search.

2. **Teachers/parents/pastors share testimony according to the Shema, all day, every day, whether they realize it or not.** In order for adults within the sphere of influence on our children's lives to have a deep and meaningful spiritual impact on young people, they must have found a relationship with Jesus themselves. Young people are very forgiving and generous in recognizing that adults are not perfect, but they can also tell if the search is important to those who are in positions of influence in their lives. If young people don't sense a genuine and sincere search and testimony of faith at even a very basic level, they recognize that and will question its importance in their lives.
3. **Parents/pastors/teachers model faith and the fruits of the Spirit.** This is a part of number two as described above, by going beyond words and looking closely at actions. Students will be especially turned off to spirituality when they see a big disconnect between strong spiritual talk and a completely different lifestyle in one's personal life. Students can also see and greatly respect an adult who is uncontrollably overflowing with love and kindness. When the adults who have influence in the lives of our children are overflowing with grace and love, this is very compelling and attractive to young people—and everyone else!

- 4. Mentoring/discipling relationships by pastors/teachers/parents.** When the fruits of the Spirit are flowing, young people are attracted to individuals demonstrating these fruits. This is a prime opportunity for those adults to offer “extra” conversations and time together with the young people who are craving positive spiritual influences in their lives.
- 5. Parents/teachers/pastors create community with students.** As the relationship develops as described above, there is the opportunity to create a strong community young people can commit to, in which they can find belonging as their identity is formed and they find their personal mission. This step is by far the most involved and complex in the discipling process and can include a wide variety of elements such as: nurturing opportunities, social connection, counseling and help with deep personal issues, outreach opportunities, gospel evangelism, etc. This is where the community can become a strong village which nurtures and cares for its members with great intentionality. Ideally, this is also where we can see holistic care for body, mind, and spirit, and where we see collaboration between the church, church schools, Adventist Health, and other organizations which are a part of the broader Adventist network.
- 6. Students will naturally share what impacts them.** When the first five steps above are positively impacting young people’s lives, they will naturally share their love for their church and community, providing opportunities for spiritual growth like we see in Acts 2 and 3.

I have created a model to show this progression and details in a table chart format; all on one page:

<b>A Discipleship Process Model</b>	<b>Jesus' Example</b>	<b>Worldly Discipleship</b>	<b>My Mission</b>	<b>My Church School</b>
<b>1. Dissatisfaction with life and seeking for something better</b>	People in Jesus' day are suffering from Roman oppression and zealots and messiahs are everywhere	People are dissatisfied and searching for meaning and purpose by letting the world disciple them	Learn to recognize people who are searching for something better	Recognize Struggles: Home life Friends Personal Faith Ex Self-esteem 1. Identity 2. Belonging 3. Purpose
<b>2. Listening to testimonies from others about what is working for them</b>	John B Testifies that Jesus is the Messiah and points Him out in the crowd  John 1:29-34	The world says alcohol, drugs, sex, power, control, money, possessions, entertainment, etc., will satisfy	Share my testimony of what I didn't find in the world and what I did find in a relationship with Jesus	Sharing Testimony: Teachers/Staff Pastors Peers Internet Social Media
<b>3. Looking at the lives of those who are testifying about what they believe in</b>	The disciples follow Jesus to see what he is like and Jesus says, "come and see"  John 1:35-51	We see wealthy, famous people who have all these things of the world and are depressed and unhappy	Live a godly example that bears the fruit of someone truly connected to the Vine  John 15:1-8  Gal 5:22-23	Modeling Faith: Integrity Fruits of the Spirit Consistency Truth Work ethic
<b>4. Trying what others say is working for them</b>	Disciples go with Jesus and live life together in dialogue and action together  John 13:34-35	You try it anyway and find it satisfies only for a little while	Invite others to community and show them how to have a personal relationship with Jesus	Mentoring/discipling By faculty/staff/pastors
<b>5. Engaging in community with those who testify and they help you to become more like them</b>	Disciples spend years in relationship with Jesus to learn of His beliefs and how to live them out (All 4 Gospels)	You try more because they tell you more is better and more will satisfy	Lead others into neighborhood outreach activities-both humanitarian and spiritual (Book of Acts)	Outreaches/ Community Service Evangelism Counseling Nurturing Small groups Hobbies Accepting community
<b>6. Sharing your testimony of what has worked for you and invite others to follow (You never know who may be searching...)</b>	70 Disciples are sent out and then at Jesus' ascension all disciples (present/future) are told to "Go" share a gospel testimony (1 John 1:1-4)	In your brokenness and emptiness you cry out for help and start the search again	Once others have encountered Jesus and His mission encourage them to become disciple-makers too	Organic sharing of testimony with: Peers Parents Testimony in church Social media Bring friends to groups and church

In my experience, a lot of what is written today about discipleship focuses primarily on step five outlined above, while missing some of the important elements listed there. In fact, much of discipleship has traditionally focused on Bible study, prayer, and maybe a few other spiritual disciplines, but I think it is very important to look at this whole process as part of *making disciples for Jesus*. This includes some elements that have traditionally been considered evangelism, but it also this involves a great emphasis on creating healthy relationships in our homes, schools, and churches, which will naturally flow outward to the community.

## Activity for This Chapter

With a friend or small group, go through the six-step discipleship process. Share how you have seen each step lived out/fulfilled in your own life. As you share, try to bring out some details of your personality including specific characteristics and experiences that have had significant influence on who you are today and how you relate to God. Then, begin thinking through how this discipleship process has shaped your life, and who may have actually been discipling you through this, or how you may be actively discipling yourself.