

Sunday

# What Is a Disciple?



**T**he Gospel of Mark records this well-known, yet unique, story: “They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly” (Mark 8:22-25, NIV).

In every other healing account, Jesus heals by one touch or one command. Why were two interactions needed before this man was healed?

Consider the sequencing of the stories in Mark 8. Prior to this narrative, Jesus had miraculously fed the 4,000; however, the Pharisees still wanted a sign. In response, Jesus warned His disciples regarding the “yeast” of the Pharisees, symbolically referring to their lack of faith (verses 1-21, NIV). Then, after restoring the blind man’s sight, Jesus asked the disciples the ultimate question of faith: “Who do you say that I am?” (verse 29). Thus, the context of this story is faith. Note that it was others who brought the blind man to Jesus. It was these people, not the blind man, who had faith in Jesus.

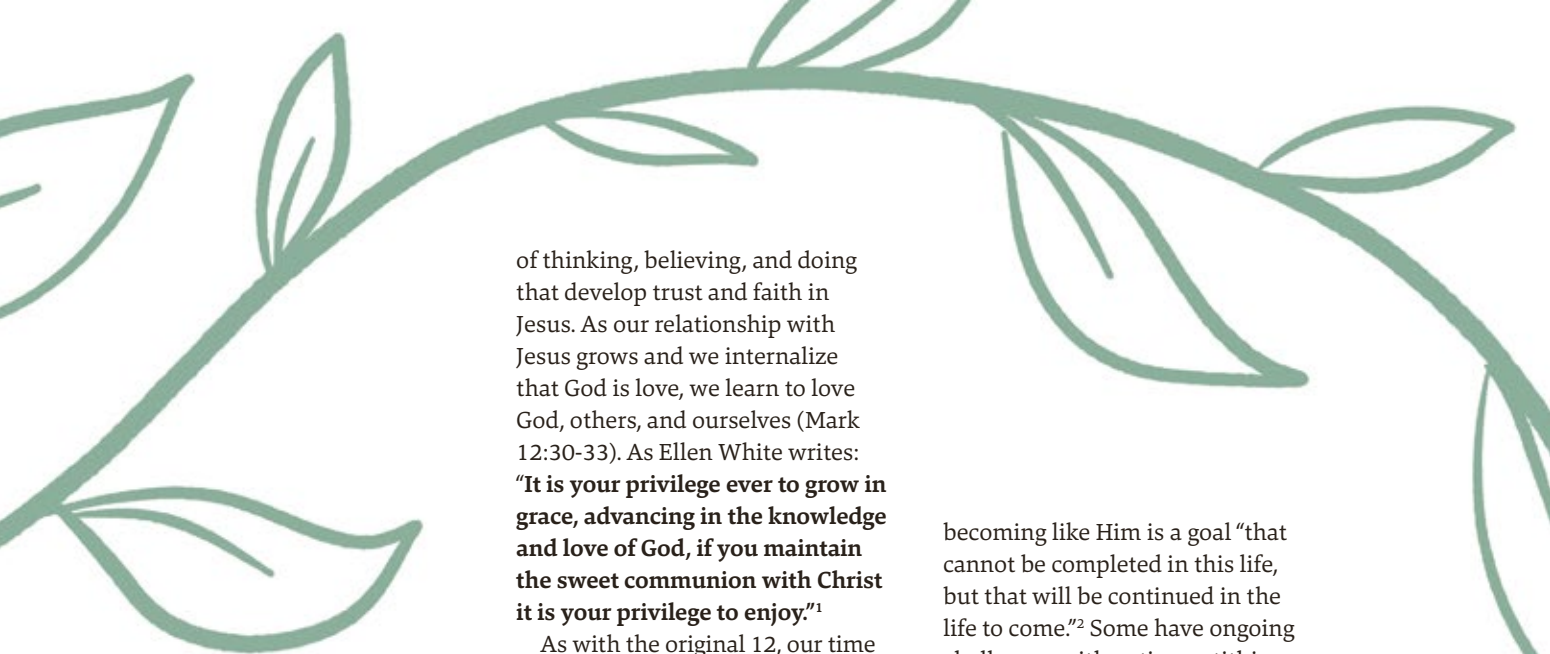
As a 10-year-old boy, I was blind for a short time after watching welding, despite being told not to. I woke the next morning and couldn’t see—it was frightening. I had to depend on my family to feed, wash, dress, and lead me. I had to trust them to be my eyes.

Similarly, as Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, the blind man began to trust Jesus to be his eyes. As Jesus put spit on the man’s eyes and asked, “Do you see anything?” the man replied, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” His faith in Jesus increased. Finally, as Jesus placed His hands on the man’s eyes and he saw clearly, his faith in Jesus as a person, healer, and life changer was complete. Through this process of developing trust, Jesus took a man with little or no faith and led him to a place of trust and faith, thereby restoring the man’s life.

## **LEARNING TO BE A DISCIPLE**

This is how Jesus works with each one of us. He knows where we are in our personal faith journey; even if we have only a little faith but are willing, Jesus can lead us and give the right evidence to develop trust and faith in Him, for the restoration of our life. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The word translated “disciple” in the New Testament is *mathetes*, which is derived from the Greek verb “to learn.” Thus, a disciple of Jesus is a person who is learning to develop trust and faith in Him, and to be restored by Him.

This was the process Jesus’ 12 special disciples followed. Jesus chose them to be with Him and then to send them out (Mark 3:13-15). As they spent time “with Jesus,” they learned to trust Him. They saw how He related to others with dignity, compassion, and truth—children, foreigners, lepers, Scribes, women, those seeking help and those intent on harm. From their time “with Jesus,” they were “sent out” to do what Jesus did and intervene, healing relationships,



## “A disciple is a person who in every way is becoming more like Jesus.”

disease, disability, and death.

They were to teach forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and internal heart change rather than external rule following. They, like Jesus, were to minister and lead with a heart for service rather than ego, focusing on the inherent value and potential of each person. Ultimately, because of Jesus' coaching and mentoring, all but one of these disciples became leaders of a multiplying disciple-making movement.

### **SPERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP IS A PROCESS**

The process of discipleship is much the same for us today. As we intentionally spend time “with Jesus”—through intentional habits of reading and reflecting on Scripture, talking to, and listening to God, spending time in nature, resting on the Sabbath, cultivating gratitude. . . we are learning habits

of thinking, believing, and doing that develop trust and faith in Jesus. As our relationship with Jesus grows and we internalize that God is love, we learn to love God, others, and ourselves (Mark 12:30-33). As Ellen White writes: **“It is your privilege ever to grow in grace, advancing in the knowledge and love of God, if you maintain the sweet communion with Christ it is your privilege to enjoy.”**<sup>1</sup>

As with the original 12, our time “with Jesus” results in our being changed into His likeness. But while this work of God’s grace may not be complete, we, too, are “sent out” to reflect the character of Jesus with empathy, truth, and courage. We live for Jesus in the home, school, workplace, and community, to bring about change there.

This story from Papua New Guinea illustrates the process. Two elders in the Madang Town church observed that a group of high school-educated, unemployed young men was growing, as was crime in the area. They decided to provide these “Madang Street Boys” with food once a week. The church rallied with not only food but care. After a short time they asked the boys if they would like to join a Bible reading group. They provided the Gospels of Mark and Luke and the book of Acts for the boys to read, along with some basic self-discovery questions. Over time, these interactions led to greater compassion and vision in the church people, less crime in the town, and some of the street boys becoming disciples of Jesus.

### **CONCLUSION**

The South Pacific Division has a mantra: “A disciple is a person who in every way is becoming more like Jesus” (based on Eph. 4:15). We recognize that disciples of Jesus are all works in progress, because

becoming like Him is a goal “that cannot be completed in this life, but that will be continued in the life to come.”<sup>2</sup> Some have ongoing challenges with patience, tithing, language, healthful eating, attitude . . . However, we are not to judge each other; rather, we are to love, encourage, and build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11) to become disciple-making disciples of Jesus. ©

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1973), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 19.

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## Questions for Reflection

1. Describe an experience in your life in which Jesus helped you develop greater trust and faith in Him.
2. Which devotional habits have particularly helped you be “with Jesus”? Which devotional habits do you find more challenging and why?
3. What do you like about following Jesus? How would others know that you follow Jesus?
4. How have you experienced being “sent out”—in your home, school, workplace, community—to bless others?