



GOSPEL
&
GRACE

*Discovering the Heart
of Discipleship*

ALBERT SHIM

Volume 1 of Grace, Kingdom, Mission:
Small Group Studies for Missional Engagement

Gospel and Grace

Grace, Kingdom, Mission - Vol. 1

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Introduction

Series Overview

It was perhaps predictable that Mission to the World should eventually come to publish *Grace, Kingdom, Mission: Small Group Studies for Missional Engagement*. After all, Mission to the World exists to see Christ-exalting churches planted among the least reached peoples of the world. Our passion is to plant churches that plant churches that plant churches that plant churches. We are convinced that the lifeblood of church-planting churches are disciple-making disciples, so it is toward this end that we have endeavored to create this curriculum. Discipleship is both our passion and our call.

Our sincere hope is that these lessons become much more than simply a *resource* for the teaching and equipping of the local church. Rather, we yearn to see these sometimes clumsy words on these pages become by God's grace and the Spirit's power, a *tool* for life-on-life discipleship, a *vehicle* for the creation of mission communities, and a *catalyst* for inspiring ever-deepening, sacrificially-intensifying missional engagement.

These admittedly ambitious goals have guided the creation of this series consisting of three volumes all intended to be used in small group settings but each with a distinct focus:

Volume 1 | Gospel and Grace. We begin with gospel and grace without which there is no mission, no good news. In this volume, we seek not only to nurture a deeper *understanding* of the gospel of grace but also to cultivate a *life* animated and sustained by its depth and richness.

Volume 2 | Kingdom and Mission. Upon this sure foundation, we next survey the biblical and theological foundations for mission and explore its nature, not primarily as a mandate or "to do," but as central to God's own nature and his Church's identity. We will further introduce significant issues in contemporary mission.

Volume 3 | Culture and Context. Finally, we close with those concepts and challenges that bear significantly on the practice of gospel witness to human contexts, namely, culture, worldview, and contextualization. While especially critical to cross-cultural ministry contexts, we believe they are no less relevant to effective witness in our native culture.

Volume	Objectives	Distinctives
Gospel & Grace	Present the gospel of grace as the operating principle for Christian life and mission	Discipleship focus "Heart"
Kingdom & Mission	Explore the biblical foundations for mission and introduce contemporary issues in mission	Teaching focus "Head"
Culture & Context	Explore concepts of culture, worldview and contextualization	Equipping focus "Hands"

A Vision for Discipleship

Why discipleship? Fundamentally, it is simply because Jesus commands us: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. . .” (Matt. 28:19). We are called to be disciples and make disciples. And movements of church-planting churches in the least reached corners of God’s world will never be realized without the grounding, training, and equipping of disciple-making disciples.

What is a disciple? Somewhere along the way, we have come to associate the word “disciple” with those who are really serious about their faith; they are the more committed, more mature followers of Christ. Yet in Scripture, we find no evidence of this tiered spirituality. A disciple is simply someone who is learning how to follow Jesus. And it is not how far along we are, it is whom we are following. So as our working definition, *a disciple is an apprentice of Jesus who is actively engaged in learning how to live by the grace of God under His rule and authority.*

How are disciples made? We believe disciples are not mass-produced in a program or a classroom since brute information unpracticed and unapplied does not beget changed and changing lives. Rather, we believe disciples are made in community, through the disciplined application of the gospel both to our own hearts and also our relationships. As others have put it, discipleship is life-on-life and not curriculum-on-life. The vehicle is relationship with the gospel as its bond.

Then why a curriculum? Despite the relational context within which true discipleship occurs, there still remains a significant teaching-learning component to discipleship. We are called to “make disciples, *teaching* them to observe” all of Christ’s commands. So yes, curriculum—and doctrine—matter. But it is in the application of that teaching in the nurture of disciplines and the confession of sin, in peacemaking and reconciliation, and in mutual accountability and bold witness, that we grow as Christ’s disciples. We therefore view this curriculum simply as a *tool* with which the true work of life-on-life discipleship may occur.

How to Use This Study

Small Groups. We have designed these studies for use in small, intimate groups of three or four people who are dedicated to one another for a season of growth. Why such small groups? Because it is the safety of a small, mutually committed group that allows for greater degrees of honesty, accountability, and spiritual engagement.

Reading. Each lesson begins with a reading. Here, the main points of each lesson are variously defined, explored, or illustrated in a hopefully accessible manner. The reading for each lesson should be read *prior* to the group meeting.

Bible Study. Scripture is our ultimate authority and so we have designed each gathering to begin with a Bible study from which the key concepts are derived.

Discussion Questions. Following the Bible study, discussion questions are provided to help guide your sharing and reflection. Here, our aim is to invite honest self-examination and provide opportunities to speak grace and truth into each other’s lives.

Exercise. Each lesson concludes with an exercise that is intended to help apply the concepts covered in each lesson specifically to one relationship, one sin pattern, or one aspect of our lives in Christ.

Homework. Finally, a summary appears at the end of each lesson with the week's memory verse and to serve as a reminder to read in advance of the next meeting.

Discipleship Covenant

As a written expression of what I have committed to in my heart, both to God and to my discipleship group, I pledge to:

1. Be present and engaged for all group meetings.
2. Complete the assignments as faithfully as possible.
3. Contribute to an atmosphere of trust, honesty, love, vulnerability, and accountability.
4. Refrain from sharing with others that which is shared in confidence.
5. Pray for my group members.
6. Prayerfully consider reproducing this group with others upon completion.

Signed _____ Date _____

LESSON 1

Called to Discipleship

Overview

Key Concept: Discipleship | **Bible Study:** Luke 9:18–27 | **Memory Verse:** Matt. 28:18–20

Objectives:

- To learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ
- To see how the gospel leads us to joyful surrender to Christ and his lordship
- To confess those areas of our lives where we are not following Christ

Called to Discipleship

Christian philosopher and author Dallas Willard laments “it is almost universally conceded today that you can be a Christian without being a disciple.”¹ The word *disciple* has for many become associated with the spiritual elite, those who are “serious” about their faith, for whom following Jesus is a matter of wholesale devotion. Tragically, this move has created a space, and a wide one at that, for scores of others to profess to be Christians without actually following Christ.

Now this problem is not a new one. Even in Jesus’ day, many professed Jesus as Lord, identified themselves as his followers, and yet did not follow his commands. Jesus calls out, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). If you are a Christian, you are called to be a disciple. And what is a disciple? A disciple is simply *an apprentice of Jesus who is actively engaged in learning how to live by the grace of God and under His rule and authority, all toward ever-growing conformity to the Master.*

There is much more that can be said and needs to be said about the priority of discipleship, the mandate to make disciples, the troubling prevalence of “cheap grace,” and the general neglect of discipleship in the modern church. Here, we simply reflect on what it means to be apprenticed to Jesus by looking at Luke’s account of Jesus’ call to his first disciples in Luke 5:1–11:

5:1 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, **2** and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. **3** Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. **4** And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep

and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Disciples learn from Jesus. Luke points out that the whole “crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God” (5:1) and that Jesus “sat down and *taught* the people from the boat” (5:3). Luke thus unequivocally identifies the teachings of Jesus with the “word of God” (5:1). Here then is the context for the calling: they are gathered around the *teaching* of Jesus. There is a didactic component to discipleship. And like the typical master-disciple relationships of the day, the learning did not take place in a classroom or through a book, but in the context of a relationship, life on life, shoulder to shoulder, so that they might be apprenticed to him in every way. To be a disciple is to learn from Jesus and to submit to a teaching and an authority external to ourselves.

Disciples obey without condition. As Jesus concludes, he very matter-of-factly commands Simon in verse 4: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” This was not a question or a suggestion, and of course, Simon has just about every reason *not* to obey. He’s exhausted. He had “toiled” all night. He is cleaning his nets, nets which incidentally were only to be used at night because in the light of day they would be seen by the fish. But not only this, this lake was fished out! They hadn’t caught a thing. And in the Gospels, it’s interesting that the disciples are never able to catch any fish without Jesus’ help! Still, the card that Simon never plays is this: “I’m the fisherman, you’re the preacher. Aren’t you the son of a carpenter? You might have used this boat as a pulpit, but I actually use it to fish! This is my domain. Jesus, I think I know better.” It is in the area of his life that Simon is most inclined to believe he knows best that he is asked to relinquish control, trust, and obey.

So when Jesus asks Simon to let down the nets, he responds in obedience against his “better” judgment: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” (5:5). At your word. There’s your word and there’s mine, and I choose to obey yours. Simon does not condition his obedience or argue with Jesus. Disciples are called to live under the authority of another and submit to the wisdom of another. They are quick to say “Master” despite their “better” judgment (*but I’m a fisherman!*), their own desires (*but I’m tired!*), and seemingly hopeless situations that Jesus couldn’t possibly understand (*but I worked all night and caught nothing!*).

To be a disciple is not to make Jesus your consultant. A consultant gives recommendations that you can choose to follow or not, since *you* retain authority over your life.² But disciples renounce their autonomy, yield final authority to Jesus, and obey. Disciples have masters. So the question that we who profess to follow, trust, and obey Christ must ask is this: Do we have a client-consultant relationship with the Creator of the Universe, the Author of Life, and the Savior of our Souls?

Disciples are called by grace. When the nets begin breaking from the catch and the boats start to sink, Simon immediately recognizes the miracle and falls at Jesus' feet. Simon might be a simple fisherman, but he's smart enough to know that he is now in the presence of one who is wholly *other* than him. And so in that moment, unable to bear the divine presence, gripped by holy fear, convicted of his sinfulness, it is now the disciple-apprentice that instinctively begs, rather *commands* his teacher-master, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (5:8).

What then is the master's response? Jesus doesn't do Simon harm or send him away. He doesn't acquiesce to Simon's demand. He doesn't leave the sinner alone in his sin. Instead it's, "Don't be afraid." Simon doesn't find condemnation, but rather acceptance, security, and assurance.

Discipleship exists by this encounter. It is not dutiful volunteerism (as if God *needed* our help). Jesus promises, "though because of your sinfulness you desire for me to depart, I will not; I will remain, and you with me." And what Simon doesn't quite yet know is what it would cost Jesus to say that. God's acceptance of sinners is not sloppy. He is not an incompetent judge or a weak-willed father. That acceptance would cost Jesus his life on the cross, crucified for their sins and ours. The call to discipleship is not just to intellectual enlightenment or moral transformation. It is not reserved for spiritual prodigies. It is a gracious call to be with Jesus, unworthy yet accepted, sinful yet beloved.

Disciples are sent on a mission. In the same breath that Jesus says to Simon, "Do not be afraid," he goes on to say: "from now on you will be catching men" (5:10). And here, in this enacted parable, the setting is apt. Jesus could have performed any miracle to get Simon on his knees, but for this moment, and for this call, it is a miraculous catch of fish. The call comes with a commission and the mission is guaranteed a success beyond all reasonable hope or expectation.

Discipleship is never an end unto itself. It is not to nurture a private life of obedience and faith. Simon and others after him would be the agents whereby multitudes would be drawn to their gracious Master. And how is this to be done? It would not be done by the ingenuity of the fishermen, but by the authority, power, and word of God: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (5:4). God will do it. It is his mission and by it unprecedented multitudes, enough to break nets and sink boats,³ even in the most desolate of lakes, will be brought into the boat that bears the divine presence so they too might hear the words: "Do not be afraid."

Perhaps like Simon, we too have a lot of reasons not to obey and to refuse our call. There aren't any fish here! Certainly not way over there! It's hopeless. I couldn't live there. I'm tired and I'm busy. I like it here in this boat and I don't much care for fishing. Can't I just have my personal Jesus and a nice Sunday service with my nice Christian friends? And to this Jesus says, "Let down your nets."

Disciples treasure Jesus above all else. The new disciples are said to have "left everything and followed him" (5:11). This is such an understated verse, so terse in its narration yet so immense in its implication. On this the most successful day of their career, upon reaching the shore, they leave everything to follow Jesus. They leave their nets, their boats, and two boatloads of fish (really, two boatloads of money, two boatloads of security, two boatloads of prestige, or whatever you'd like to call it) all to follow Jesus. From this we might correctly gather that the call to discipleship is not taken lightly, for it demands everything. They left everything! And while true, that might not even be the point.

The disciples do not leave everything because of their piety. They do not suddenly discover themselves to be ascetics. No, they leave everything because Jesus is better. Jesus is better, more valuable, and more precious than all they left behind. And even as they leave *everything* behind on that shore, they aren't getting the short end of the stick. No, they are the ones making out like bandits.

Jesus is more to be treasured than anything we could ever leave behind. We talk a lot about the cost of discipleship (and rightfully so!), but let us also talk about the delight of discipleship, because Jesus is better than anything we could ever leave behind. It is to this we are called, not simply to a path, but to a person; a gracious Master who loves us more than we will ever know.

Group Discussion

Bible Study

Read Luke 9:18–27

1. What is the relationship between verses 18–22 and 23–27? How do verses 18–22 set the context for Jesus' discussion of discipleship?

2. What does the metaphor of the cross convey? Why would Jesus utilize such a repugnant image in describing discipleship?

3. In what sense is following Christ a kind of death? What does it mean to die daily?

4. How does the metaphor of the cross also evoke hope for would-be disciples? What happens when we follow Jesus into this “death”?

Discussion Questions for This Week's Reading

Refer to "Called to Discipleship."

1. Was there anything from the reading that was particularly challenging or helpful for you?
2. In what area(s) of your life do you most resist surrendering to the authority of Christ? Where are you not following Him? Where in your life do you exhibit a client-consultant relationship with God?
3. In what area(s) of your life are you growing as a disciple of Christ? Where have you seen greater surrender, trust, and obedience?
4. The reading describes Peter's encounter with Jesus as a moment in which the presence of Christ brings him to his knees in conviction over his sin, but in which he still finds acceptance. Take a moment to briefly share your testimonies with one another. When and how did you first become aware of your sinfulness and Jesus' acceptance?

Exercise: Christ, Lord of All

Consider the following areas of your life:

- Career and/or academic achievement
- Money, wealth, and possessions
- Self-image and reputation management
- Sexual integrity
- Marriage or dating relationships
- Friendship, community, and forgiveness

Select one area from the list above and apply the following questions:

1. In what ways do you still live out a client-consultant relationship in this area of your life?

2. What would it look like to deny yourself and take up your cross in this area?

As God reveals the areas in your life in which you need to submit to the lordship of Christ, try for the moment to resist the temptation to make resolutions to try harder and spring into action. Instead, simply confess to one another and repent before God. Ask God to reveal to you why it has been so difficult for you to surrender in this area and finally, ask that God would free you to yield to the lordship of Christ.

At Home after the Lesson

Prayer Requests

Assignments

- **Memorize** Matt. 28:18–20.
- **Read** “Gospel and Grace” in preparation for next week’s meeting.
- **Pray** for your group members.

Memory Verse

Matt. 28:18–20

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”