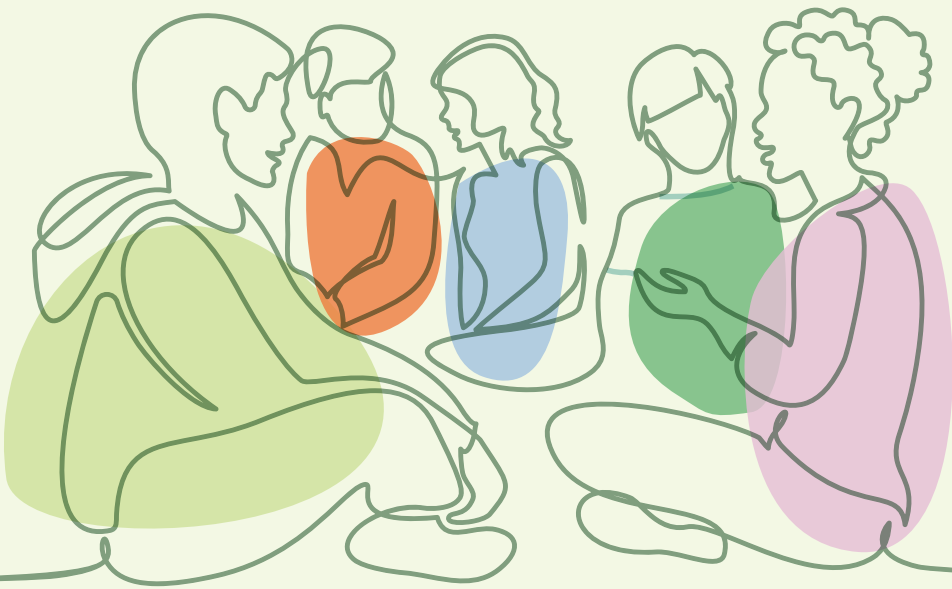


A Discipleship Experience for Teens

MasterLife Together



MATT & ALLISON WILLIS

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MATT & ALLISON WILLIS

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About the Authors



Matt and Allison Willis met each other in college on an international mission trip. Serving the Lord together began their relationship and has continued to be its foundation and deepest joy for the last twenty years. They currently serve at Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where Matt is the Associate Pastor of Missions and Evangelism. They previously served as International Mission Board missionaries for seven years in South Asia with their three kids—Josh, Jenna, and Ethan—who are now all teenagers. Matt coauthored *Learning to Soar: How to Grow Through Transitions and Trials* (NavPress, 2009) with his granddad Avery Willis. Matt has a master's of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allison authored a simplified version of *Be Transformed: Discovering Biblical Solutions to Life's Problems* (SCOPE Ministries International, 2016), which she helped translate into South Asian languages and used to train women overseas. Allison is a registered dietitian with a master's degree in dietetics and serves as a nutrition counselor. Matt and Allison enjoy spending time outdoors, playing games, and laughing together.

Getting Started

God's Word says He has given you everything you need for life and godliness (see 2 Pet. 1:3). Do you ever wonder why it doesn't feel that way? Do you love Jesus but find that much of your real life is untouched by Him? Have you ever thought, "Is this all there is to following Jesus?" What's missing in your life's puzzle? God says He hasn't withheld any of the pieces from you. Could you be withholding pieces of yourself from Him?

MasterLife Together is more than a Bible study focused on knowing—it's a transformative discipleship journey focused on being and doing. If you fully engage in it, you will experience God and His people in a way you never have before.

Over the next eight weeks, you'll grasp who you really are and what you were made to do. You'll discover what it looks like to follow Jesus with your whole spirit, soul, and body.

More than anything you can do for God, He just wants you—all of you.

Finding a Group

This discipleship experience was created for both seekers and believers to experience together as a small group. While individuals can benefit from going through this book alone, the experience will be much more transformative if done with a small group as it was designed.

Finding a Rhythm

You can expect to spend about ten minutes each day, five days a week, investing in this experience. Optional Scripture passages for Days 6 and 7 are provided in case you are already in the habit of meeting with God every day or would like to begin this habit (which we highly recommend). The foundation of this discipleship experience involves you spending time with God reflectively in His Word, so you will need a physical Bible and a journal or notebook in addition to this book. We encourage you to have a designated space to have your conversation with God. If possible, have this conversation with Him in the morning. Many people turn to a dose of caffeine each morning to get their bodies going. How much more do we need to hear from God every morning before we engage with anyone or anything else?

Daily Conversations with God

In your journal or notebook, draw a vertical line down the middle of the page, forming two columns. Write **God** at the top of the left column and **Me** at the top of the right column. Write the date at the left side, along with the Scripture passage that you will find at the top of each day's experience. See the example on page 7.

Begin each day by reading the assigned Scripture passage. Write what God says to you from His Word in the left column, then write your response to what He says (in essence, your prayer to Him) in the right column. If you aren't sure what He is saying to you, don't worry—listening to His voice gets easier with practice. Just write something you learned or that stood out to you from the Scripture passage, writing to God with “You” instead of “He” to make it more personal. If you have a phone, we recommend that you don't use it while you're reading either the Bible or this book so that you won't get distracted. Place it on “do not disturb” or leave it in another room. Minimize distractions and focus fully on this experience to get the most out of it.

GOD	ME
<p>June 1st – Luke 5:1-11</p> <hr/> <p>Don't be afraid. I want to bring other people to Me through your life.</p>	<p>I will follow You and learn how I can grow as Your witness.</p>
<p>June 2nd – Luke 6:1-16</p> <hr/> <p>When will you spend an hour or more with Me in prayer?</p>	<p>Lord, I will gladly spend an hour with You in prayer this Saturday.</p>

Readings & Exercises

After having your daily conversation with God, read the day's content and complete the questions and/or experiences included. One of the experiences you will have each week is memorizing God's Word. For your convenience, verse cards that can be cut out are included at the back of this book. At the end of this discipleship experience, you will have memorized ten verses that will help you follow Jesus more closely.

Group Sessions

You will meet with your group each week for about one hour to discuss the content you completed individually over the previous week. You will need to bring this book and your journal or notebook to group sessions. The format of group sessions will be the same each week and will include prayer, reviewing the verse(s) you memorized, sharing highlights from your conversations with God, discussing the questions you answered throughout the week, and sharing how you plan to apply what you've learned. You will also preview the next week's time together.

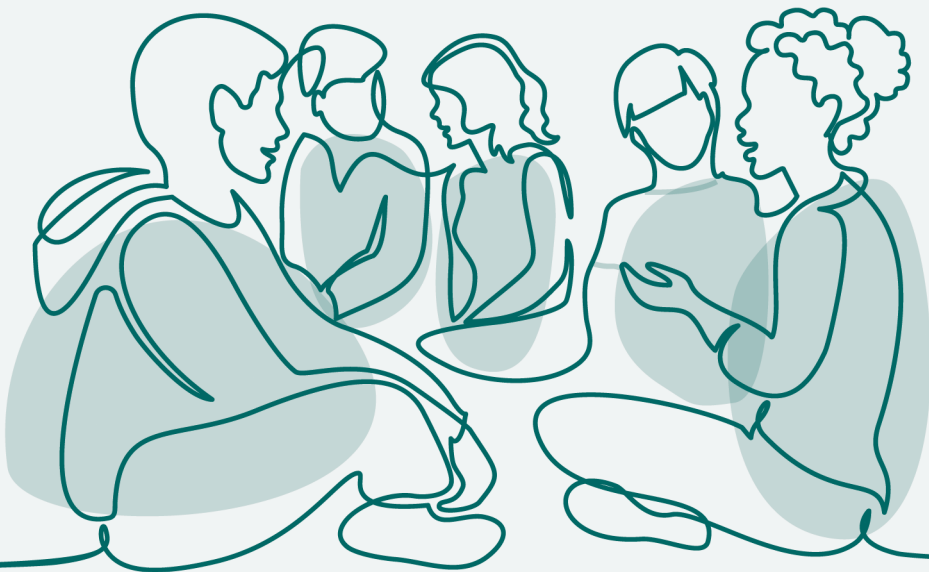
SECTION ONE

How We Relate to Jesus



WEEK ONE

Being All In



Week 1 Introduction

Being All In

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind and with all your strength.”

—MARK 12:30

In this very moment, the God who created you is actively loving you. His love for you has nothing to do with what you have or haven't done. God is loving you right now because of who He is. God is love.

Scripture teaches that you are His masterpiece. He has engraved you on the palms of His hands. Your life is infinitely valuable because God, the Master, says so.

In Matthew 4:1-11, Satan says to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God . . .” and tells Jesus to prove His identity. *Make the stones bread. Throw yourself down. Bow down to me.* Satan will likewise tempt you to prove your identity by what you do for God. Jesus didn't give in to the temptation to prove Himself; He rebuked Satan with truth from God's Word and commanded him to flee. Jesus wants you to imitate Him by rooting your identity in the love of God.

You are only able to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself because God first loved you. The genuine quality and overflying quantity of God's abundant love for you is the foundation of the gospel as well as the foundation of your relationship with God. His love is true, generous, personal, and faithful. (See Isa. 49:16; Eph. 2:10; 1 John 4:16,19 to read more about these truths.) Our best response is to love and follow Him wholeheartedly in return—not half-heartedly.

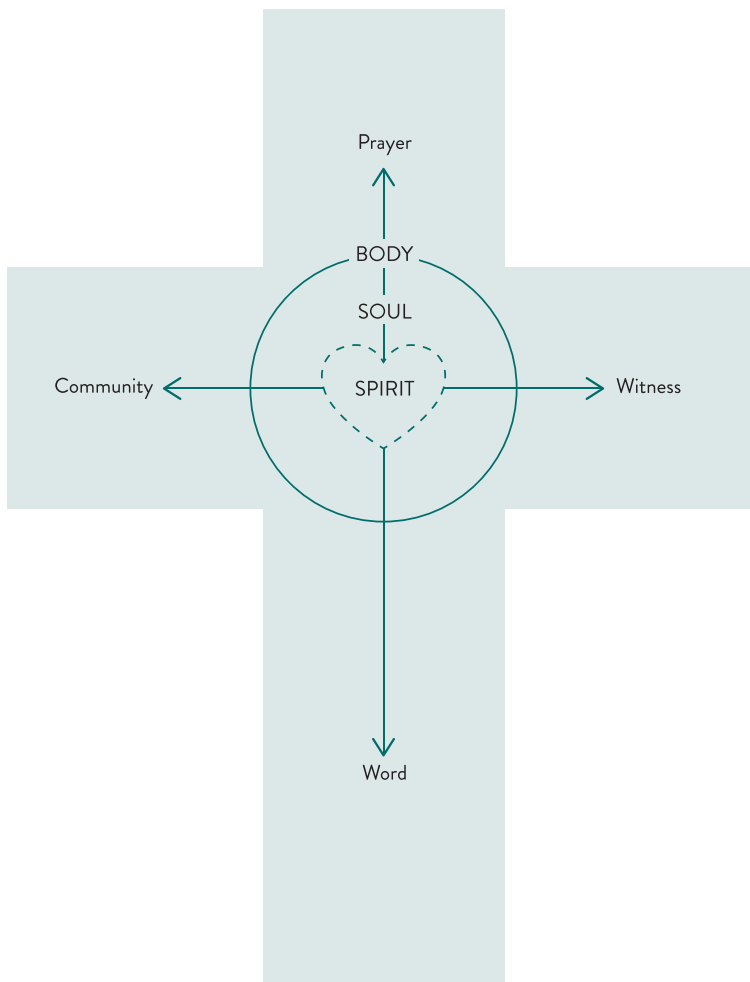
If you're like me, being loved can feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. I'm better at giving love than receiving it. But God took the initiative and first loved us, so you and I must receive His love empty-handed, over and over again.

Everything you have you received from God, so what can you even give Him that He doesn't already have? The answer is both simple and radical: all of you. He doesn't want your acts of service, your money, or your time as much as He wants you. All of you: your heart, soul, mind, and strength, as the verse you will memorize this week highlights.

Each week of this journey, you will look at one aspect of the diagram on the next page, which will help you picture what it means to be all His. Get ready to explore the God who created you and to figure out how your whole self can be a fully-alive participant in His unfolding story.

Prayer

Father, I thank You for loving me, even in this very moment. This week, show me all the ways You are actively pursuing me with Your love. Lord, help me not to fear, and give me the desire to belong fully to You. Show me how to surrender my whole being to You, and give me and my group the courage to do so as we journey together. In Jesus's name, amen.



Day One

Being in His Story

Today's Scripture passage for your conversation with God: John 1:1-18

In your own notebook or journal, write what God says to you and what you say back to God. Refer to the "Daily Conversations with God" instructions on pages 6–7 for more details.

GOD	ME
John 1:1-18	

Like all good stories, God's story begins at the beginning.

In the beginning, only God existed. Nothing else. He created the universe and everything in it by speaking it into existence over five days. Then, on the sixth day of creation, God made man and woman in His image (see Gen. 1:26). He loved the people He created and lived in peace and a perfect relationship with them in a beautiful garden.

Life continued this way until Adam and Eve broke their relationship with God by disobeying Him. Their disobedience, called sin, separated them from their Creator, and God banished them from the garden. Adam and Eve had children and grandchildren, and all of these children and all people since have shared a sinful nature that turns their hearts toward their own desires and away from God.

But God's love never stopped, and He still desired to be in a relationship with the people He created. So He made a promise to a man named Abraham to give him many descendants, through which all the peoples on earth would be blessed (see Gen. 12:3).

Abraham believed God. God kept His promise to Abraham, and his descendants were numerous. Some of them followed God, but most of them wanted to rule over their own lives. They did evil and suffered its consequences. But God's love for them never stopped, so He sent messengers to tell the people how to be restored to Him.

One of these messengers was named Isaiah. He told them that their evil was sin against God but that God would send them a Savior who would take all of their sins on Himself. Isaiah taught that this Savior would be killed because of their sins, but he promised them that God

would raise Him back to life. Through the Savior, Abraham's descendants could be restored to a relationship with God. After hearing this, Abraham's people began waiting for this promised Savior.

God kept His promise. Years later, He sent this promised Savior—His Son, Jesus, as you learned in your reading today. Many people did not recognize who Jesus was, but some people did. Jesus traveled around, teaching truth and demonstrating His love and power through miracles and healings. Jesus came so that they could have everlasting peace with God. While some believed and followed, many violently opposed Him and convinced the government to have Him killed. Just as God had said through Isaiah (see Isa. 53), Jesus was beaten and killed. Three days later, God raised Him back to life in victory over sin and death!

Jesus appeared to His followers, proving that He was alive again, and gave them a mission: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Then you will tell people about me . . . from one end of the earth to the other" (Acts 1:8). He sent His followers into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them. A "disciple" is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and joining the mission of Jesus.

The day finally came when Jesus returned to heaven. Two angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus would one day come back the same way He left. Jesus's followers began expectantly waiting for Him to return as they were His witnesses and made disciples to the ends of earth. The disciples made disciples, and their disciples made disciples, who later made more disciples. One day, one of these disciples told you about Jesus. You were chosen by a God who loves you and have been given the same mission as all the disciples who came before you.

Today's Scripture passage summarizes some truths about God and His story. Reword John 1:18 in your own words below.

Practice this week's memory verse, Mark 12:30, by writing it a few times.

Day Two

God's Being

Today's Scripture passage for your conversation with God: Colossians 1:15-23

Read Colossians 1:15-23, then journal your conversation with God. Continue this pattern each day throughout this discipleship experience.

Jesus was with God in the beginning, as you read yesterday in John 1. This is clear in Genesis 1:26, where God says, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us" (NLT, italics mine). In His very being, God the Father exists in a supernatural three-in-one relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 3:16-17). This relationship is known as the Trinity and is essential to God's being. Since before time began, God has been in relationship with Himself. And since you were created to reflect God's image, you were created to be a part of this eternal relationship with God.

The relationship within the Trinity is a loving relationship. God loves and delights in Jesus (see Isa. 42:1). You saw in today's Scripture passage that Jesus is the exact likeness of the unseen God. The fullness of God lives in bodily form in Jesus (see Col. 2:9), who said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Jesus is both fully human and fully God, and Jesus saw God as Father and taught His disciples to as well.

STUDENT TO STUDENT, FROM ETHAN WILLIS, AGE 14

When you read the word *Father*, that can cause a lot of different feelings. The emotions you feel probably reflect most on your relationship with your earthly dad. Our experiences with earthly fathers can be great, or challenging, or many places in between. I am grateful for a loving and caring dad, but every earthly father is far from perfect.

Describe who your earthly father is or was to you.

Envision the most wonderful earthly father you can imagine. Describe him here.

Your heavenly Father is so much better than any earthly father can be. God is perfect and wants to make sure you have the right understanding of Him as Father. In Psalm 103, David explains some of God’s characteristics as our heavenly Father: He is compassionate, gracious, righteous, and oversees all things. He heals, redeems, satisfies, renews, and forgives. He is full of love and kindness.

You can understand the character and heart of your Father God better by studying the life of Jesus, who said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). You can best see Jesus through reading the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—where you will hear the most important words Jesus spoke and discover the most important events in His life. But also notice His nature, His being, His personality, His emotions, and His desires. There is much more to a person than what he or she says and does, and Jesus is no exception.

Jesus has a body, soul, and spirit, just like you do. Luke 2:52 says that as a child, Jesus “became wiser [soul] and stronger [body] . . . [and] more pleasing to God [spirit] and to people.” Before His death, you can again see these distinct parts of His being as He says from His soul, “It is finished,” and then bows His head [body] and gives up His spirit (see John 19:30).

Jesus fully gave His spirit, soul, and body to His Father (see Luke 23:46). He desires that you do the same.

Practice this week’s memory verse, Mark 12:30, by saying it or writing it a few times.

Day Three

Receiving God

Today's Scripture passage for your conversation with God: John 13:1-17

The God who created you by and for His love has a gift for you: He is reaching out to give you Himself. To accept the gift, you have to receive all of Him. It's all or nothing. God is a generous giver, but you cannot pick and choose the parts of Him you want. You must receive all of Him.

Until you receive His Holy Spirit, you are spiritually dead because of sin. Sin is anything in you that misses the mark of God's perfection. Because of Adam and Eve's original sin and the curse it brought, you've needed a new spirit from the time of your conception. Jesus died on a cross to pay the price for your sin. In His resurrection from the dead, Jesus offers you the chance to become a new creation through His Holy Spirit living inside of you (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

God wants a loving relationship with you personally. You. Receiving life from God is what the Bible calls *salvation*, but salvation is more than just a thing—salvation is a Person: Jesus!

Jesus stands before you with His arms stretched wide, but you have to actively receive Him. As you read in today's Scripture passage, Peter found it hard to receive God's love. Days before Jesus's death, Jesus gathered His twelve closest disciples to show them the full extent of His love (see John 13:1). Jesus began to wash and then dry each of their feet. Peter was so uncomfortable he initially refused—until Jesus told him, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (v. 8). He wanted Peter—and you—to receive the full extent of His love.

To receive God, you will first need to admit to Him that you are a sinner and need a Savior. Then you must believe Jesus died to save you from your sin and commit to making Him Lord of your life. You must make the decision to turn from the path of sin you have been on and walk on the path of new life that Jesus offers. The Bible calls this process *repentance*: turning from sin and toward life in God. The Holy Spirit will immediately come to live in you forever and empower you to be a disciple.

Even after you receive His salvation, it can still be hard to receive from God. We see examples of this in Scripture. A woman named Martha invited Jesus into her home and was busy preparing a meal to serve Him. Her sister Mary sat at Jesus's feet, listening to all He said. Martha was angry at Mary for not helping prepare the meal. Jesus responded, “Martha, Martha . . . you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed. Really, only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better. And it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). Being with Jesus was better than Martha's busyness and doing. Receiving Him and all He offers is the one thing you need—especially when doing feels more comfortable.

What do you need to receive from God? Write it down and take time to receive it!

If you have never received God's gift of eternal life with Him through salvation from your sins, do you want to ask Him to save you today? To do so, you need to believe Jesus died for your sins and that God raised Him from the dead, then confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (see Rom. 10:9).

If you made this decision to receive God's salvation, write down the name of at least one person you will tell here:

If you are interested in making this most important decision of your life but need some help, ask a follower of Jesus whom you trust, such as your group leader.

Practice saying this week's verse, Mark 12:30, from memory without looking at it.

Day Four

Giving Yourself

Today's Scripture passage for your conversation with God: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Try to quote Mark 12:30 aloud right now. If you can't, keep practicing until you can.

When asked about the most important commandments, Jesus gave a simple answer. The first is the verse we've been memorizing this week. Mark 12:31 says, "Here is the second one. 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' There is no commandment more important than these."

It is no coincidence that the two commands God says are most important cannot be fully accomplished or completed. As long as you are still alive, you have more love to give. Love is described in today's Scripture passage as "the best way of all" and the greatest gift (see 1 Cor. 12:31; 13:13).

Have you noticed that our memory verse this week uses the word "all" four times? Love is not easy to measure, but the measure Jesus gave was "all." Giving just a part of Himself would not have been perfect love. Loving someone well requires a sacrifice of all of oneself. And that's what God wants from you. What God wants from you, no one else can give on your behalf.

We have three teenage children whom we love. I cannot give them my love without also giving them myself. I cannot give a hug that doesn't include my body. If my son Josh, whose love language is gifts,¹ finds a treasure wrapped in a box in the forest, will he feel loved? Happy—yes. But loved? Probably not. However, if I wrap this same treasure in a box and give it to him, will he feel loved? Absolutely. The difference is me.

The title "lord" means someone who has ultimate power, authority, and influence. God is Lord over the entire universe. When you receive Jesus as both your Savior and Lord, you can be sure He stands ready to reign over every aspect of your life.

Your life is best when Jesus rules over every area of it. How much of yourself are you giving to Jesus now? Mark where you are at.

0%

100%

What needs to happen in your life to give Him one hundred percent?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, we find a prayer: “May he make you holy *through and through*. May your *whole* spirit, soul and body be kept free from blame . . . from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes” (italics mine). In the New Testament’s original language of Greek, the word that Paul used for spirit, *pneuma*, means “that which gives the body life.” The Greek word Paul used for soul is *psyche* and can be defined as the part of you that includes your thoughts, desires, feelings, passions, and dislikes.

The **SPIRIT** is the part of you that will last eternally and that lets you to relate to God.
The **SOUL** is what you think, what you want to do, and how you feel.
The **BODY** is what houses your spirit and soul. It is temporary, but those who have received Jesus will receive a new body after death that will never get sick or deteriorate.

What are the original words for heart, soul, mind, and strength in this week’s memory verse? The word for soul in Mark 12:30 is the same as in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. The Greek word for heart—*kardia*—means “inmost part.” The word for mind—*dianoia*—means “thoughts,” and the word for strength is *ischys* and means “force,” “power,” or “ability.”

In other words, Jesus says in Mark 12:30, “Love the Lord your God with all your inmost being, with all your desires and feelings, with all your thoughts, and with all your ability.” And Paul prays that the Thessalonian church will be made whole and holy through and through so that their spirits, desires and feelings, and physical bodies will be kept blameless until Christ returns. Jesus said, “Suppose your whole body is full of light. And suppose no part of it is dark. Then your body will be full of light. It will be just as when a lamp shines its light on you” (Luke 11:36).

Describe someone you know or can imagine whose whole life shines brightly with the love of God.

In the space below, or in your journal or notebook, write out a prayer asking God to help you give any dark corners of yourself to Him and for Him to begin bringing light to all parts of you.

Day Five

Being His Disciple

Today's Scripture passage for your conversation with God: Luke 9:18-27

The word “disciple” means someone who follows a leader. As you saw in today's Scripture passage, Jesus told His disciples that those who follow Him must deny themselves and take up their crosses daily. Then He said, “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it” (v. 24).

If you had to identify yourself using just one word, what would it be?

Maybe the word you wrote is tied to your family, ethnicity, age, or gender, or maybe it's a word that hints at an interest, passion, or skill of yours. Did it occur to you to write “disciple”? If not, I hope that by the end of this discipleship experience, it will.

Following Jesus means relinquishing control of your temporary life in view of your eternal life with God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”² To be clear, your salvation comes by grace through faith and not by your own works (see Eph. 2:8-10). But don't get mixed up: You are saved by grace for the purpose of following Jesus. You weren't saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. Both your salvation as well as the good works you do bring Him glory. Jesus saved you to be His disciple. It is impossible to truly love Jesus and not be His disciple.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP is a personal love relationship with Jesus Christ that results in a lifelong journey of obedience. As you follow Christ, He transforms you to be like Him. He changes your values to kingdom values, and He involves you in His mission in your home, church, and world. As His disciple, you will progressively know Him more deeply, obey Him more quickly, reflect Him more accurately, and invite others into His kingdom more regularly.

Following Jesus is following a Person. Matt's dad, Randy, once visited Sonora, Mexico, and on moonless nights there, it is so dark you can't see your hand in front of your face. His group was driving from one town to another along winding, mountainous roads with no guardrails. His dad quickly realized that if he did not stay close to the lead car, he would soon be on his own. When he focused on the leader, he did not have to focus on the road. When the lead car slowed, he slowed. When it turned, he turned. He glanced at the road, but his focus was on

staying close to the lead vehicle. You follow Jesus the same way. If you stay close to Him, you can take your eyes off your circumstances, confidently trusting that He is leading you well. Because of God's grace, you are as close to God as you want to be.

As you follow Jesus, you will become fully alive and experience a deep satisfaction in Him, which will then enable you to bless others to the greatest extent possible. As John Piper said, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."³ Following Jesus is an active pursuit that is fueled by His love for you. It requires you to sacrifice, but He is worth all of you and more.

How thoroughly have you surrendered the parts of yourself to Jesus? How fully are you following Him? Take the following inventory to help you see opportunities for your growth as a disciple of Jesus. Rank the following with what is actually true for you instead of what you know it's supposed to be. Be honest; we're not perfect. Write your number next to each statement below.

1	2	3	4
never or disagree	occasionally or somewhat disagree	usually or somewhat agree	always or fully agree
_____	_____	_____	_____
1. I not only know but also experience the unconditional love of Jesus on a daily basis.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Spending time in God's Word is like eating food—I need it every day to sustain me.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Communicating with God through prayer comes easily to me and is something I do throughout each day.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
4. I experience the power of the Holy Spirit as He lives through me on a daily basis.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
5. When I experience unpleasant emotions, I share them with God and let Him comfort me and help me.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
6. The things I consume through my mouth and eyes and how I treat my body shows honor to God.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
7. I regularly engage with a small group of Christ-followers for Bible study, encouragement, and accountability.			
_____	_____	_____	_____
8. God has made me His witness, and I regularly share my faith with people who are far from Him.			

Now add the totals for each number to get your final score. Write your score here: _____. The highest possible score is 32.

Lastly, circle or highlight the statements that represent the top three areas of growth for you. The eight statements correspond with the eight weekly topics you will be exploring in this discipleship experience. Now invite God to transform you in these areas.

QUOTE THIS WEEK'S VERSE, MARK 12:30.

Then, pray it aloud to Him like this: Father, You are my Lord and my God. Help me to love You with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength. In Jesus's name I pray, amen.

Optional Scripture passages for more conversations with God:

Day 6: Luke 7:36-50

Day 7: Psalm 103



Get the most from your study.

Promotional video and other leader materials available at lifeway.com/masterlifetogether.



Spirit. Soul. Body.

We are all unique—wonderfully made by God and in His image. So when we follow Jesus, we must pursue Him with our whole being: our spirit, soul, and body. Thankfully, we don't have to do this alone. Jesus created the church so that we can pursue a relationship with Him together with other disciples. *MasterLife Together for Teens* is a discipleship experience designed to align our whole being—spirit, soul, and body—toward following Jesus. He sacrificed His whole self so that together, we can give our whole selves to Him.

OTHER RESOURCES FROM LIFEWAY STUDENTS

FOLLOWER

(005840978) An eight-session study for new believers. Available at lifeway.com/follower.

GIFTED

(005845747) A five-session study designed to help students learn about and use their spiritual gifts. Available at lifeway.com/gifted.

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Help students grow in their habit of daily time in God's Word and go deeper in their faith. Available at lifeway.com/teendeotionals.

OTHER MASTERLIFE RESOURCES FROM LIFEWAY

MASTERLIFE TOGETHER: A DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE FOR SMALL GROUPS

(005839199) A twelve-session discipleship experience for adults based on the same content as *MasterLife Together for Teens*.

Spirit. Soul. Body.

We are all unique—wonderfully made by God and in His image. So when we follow Jesus, we must pursue Him with our whole being: our spirit, soul, and body. Thankfully, we don't have to do this alone. Jesus created the church so that we can pursue a relationship with Him together with other disciples. *MasterLife Together for Teens* is a discipleship experience for small groups designed to align our whole being—spirit, soul, and body—toward following Jesus. He sacrificed His whole self so that together, we can give our whole selves to Him.

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