

# *Discipleship (L1):*

## *A Study in Being Called to Follow the Master*

In the twenty-first century church, there is much emphasis on following the Master, Jesus Christ. But few know where to start or how to undertake such a journey. Following Jesus is so much more than what we do in gathering for worship. *It is following Jesus Christ that inspires us to worship.* Worship is praise and adoration of the living savior, who now sits at the right hand of the Father preparing for his return. However, there is an in-the-mean-time. This is the time that we prepare ourselves, others and the world for his return. To do so, we implement the discipline known as discipleship. In short, this is the essence of living life, beyond the sanctity of worship, on a daily basis. When Jesus would leave the mountain after prayer and worship, he would descend into the valleys, town, villages and country sides to declare word of God, and that we are to love and live for Him. It is the *living for him* to which we will direct our learning in this study of Discipleship. *Living for Him*, is evidence of your love for him.

In this lesson, we will begin with the person of the Disciple. Before discipleship begins, one must first become a disciple. Here, we will explore the historical and biblical perspectives of the disciple. This history will first define what / who a disciple is. Once we have addressed the perspective as a disciple, then we will broaden the lesson towards the life of the disciple, what the disciple does, the lifestyle, the implications and applications alike.

### **A Disciple**<sup>1</sup>

Follower of Jesus Christ, especially the commissioned Twelve who followed Jesus during His earthly ministry. The term “disciple” comes to us in English from a Latin root. Its basic meaning is “learner” or “pupil.” The term is virtually absent from the OT, though there are two related references ([1 Chron. 25:8](#); [Isa. 8:16](#)).

In the Greek world the word “disciple” normally referred to an adherent of a particular teacher or religious/philosophical school. It was the task of the disciple to learn, study, and pass along the sayings and teachings of the master. In rabbinic Judaism the term “disciple” referred to one who was committed to the interpretations of Scripture and religious tradition given him by the master or rabbi. Through a process of learning which would include a set meeting time and such pedagogical methods as question and answer, instruction, repetition, and memorization, the disciple would become increasingly devoted to the master and the master’s teachings. In time, the disciple would likewise pass on the traditions to others.

In the New Testament, the term “disciple” is used in the Gospels and Acts. In nearly all instances it is a technical term in reference to a follower of Jesus, although John the Baptist, the Pharisees, and Paul are also said to have disciples (Matt 9:14; 11:2; 22:16; Mark 2:18; John 1:35–37; Acts 9:25). In John, a group of Jews call themselves the disciples of Moses (John 9:28).

In the Gospels, Jesus creates His own group of disciples by calling individuals to follow Him. He also calls disciples that do not seem to qualify for the task (e.g., Matthew who is a tax collector—an occupation that was shunned and considered sinful in the land of Israel).

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<sup>1</sup> —Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

In the development of the Jesus movement, the term disciple becomes synonymous with those who believe and confess that Jesus is the Messiah. This is reflected in Acts, where the term regularly refers to a believer in Christ, regardless of whether one had known Jesus during His earthly ministry.<sup>2</sup>

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### A. Disciples in the New Testament(esp. the Gospels)

In the New Testament, disciples do not seek out Jesus; rather, they answer when He calls them. Twelve disciples with different backgrounds are called into a special relationship with Jesus. According to Matthew and Mark, these twelve are the only disciples of Jesus.

Their role is especially clear in Matthew’s Gospel, where the expression “the twelve disciples” is used more often than “the Twelve” (e.g., Matt 11:1). Jesus’ disciples were not to choose another master, or become masters themselves. Instead, Jesus’ disciples were told to go and make disciples of the nations—to teach them what Jesus had taught them.

In the NT 233 of the 261 instances of the word “disciple” occur in the Gospels, the other 28 being in Acts. Usually the word refers to disciples of Jesus, but there are also references to disciples of the Pharisees ([Matt. 22:16](#); [Mark 2:18](#)), disciples of John the Baptist ([Mark 2:18](#); [Luke 11:1](#); [John 1:35](#)), and even disciples of Moses ([John 9:28](#)).

The Gospels often refer to Jesus as “Rabbi” ([Matt. 26:25,49](#); [Mark 9:5](#); [10:51](#); [11:21](#); [John 1:38,49](#); [3:2,26](#); [6:25](#); [20:16](#) NIV). One can assume that Jesus used traditional rabbinic teaching techniques (question and answer, discussion, memorization) to instruct His disciples. In many respects Jesus differed from the rabbis. He called His disciples to “follow Me” ([Luke 5:27](#)). Disciples of the rabbis could select their teachers. Jesus oftentimes demanded extreme levels of personal renunciation (loss of family, property, etc.; [Matt. 4:18-22](#); [10:24-42](#); [Luke 5:27-28](#); [14:25-27](#); [18:28-30](#)). He asked for lifelong allegiance ([Luke 9:57-62](#)) as the essential means of doing the will of God ([Matt. 12:49-50](#); [John 7:16-18](#)). He taught more as a bearer of divine revelation than a link in the chain of Jewish tradition ([Matt. 5:21-48](#); [7:28-29](#); [Mark 4:10-11](#)). In so doing Jesus announced the end of the age and the long-awaited reign of God ([Matt. 4:17](#); [Luke 4:14-21,42-44](#)).

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### B. The Twelve.

As the messianic proclaimer of the reign of God, Jesus gathered about Himself a special circle of 12 disciples, clearly a symbolic representation of the 12 tribes ([Matt. 19:28](#)). He was reestablishing Jewish social identity based upon discipleship to Jesus. The Twelve represented a unique band, making the word “disciple” (as a reference to the Twelve) an exact equivalent to “apostle” in those contexts where the latter word was also restricted to the Twelve. The four lists of the Twelve in the NT ([Matt. 10:1-4](#); [Mark 3:16-19](#); [Luke 6:12-16](#); [Acts 1:13,26](#)) also imply from their contexts the synonymous use of the terms “disciples”/“apostles” when used to refer to the Twelve.

<sup>2</sup> The Lexham Bible Dictionary, Discipleship.

The Gospels describe how Jesus called disciples to follow Him. Many of them came from villages in Galilee, especially Capernaum and Bethsaida. They had diverse backgrounds, including fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, and John), a tax collector (Matthew), and a revolutionary (Simon the Zealot). To see the diversity of Jesus' Disciples, let's take a closer look at each of them.

**1. Peter<sup>3</sup>:** Also known as Simon, Simon Peter, or Cephas (Rock), Peter was a gregarious, natural leader, and an obvious spokesperson for the twelve. Peter's name is mentioned far more in the New Testament than any other of the disciples. He was the older of the two brothers and the only married disciple. ([Luke 4:38](#)) His wife was known to travel with him when he was on mission. ([1 Cor. 9:5](#)) His assignment was to bring the Gospel to the circumcised. ([Gal. 2:7](#))

Peter is well known for denying Christ three times after Christ was arrested. After his own arrest many years later he requested to be crucified with his head down. He didn't believe he was worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. He died a martyr's death in Rome during the reign of Nero. Some speculate around the same time as Paul was being beheaded.

**2. Andrew:** An early disciple of [John the Baptist](#), Andrew, and John, the Son of Zebedee were present when John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ([John 1:35](#)) Andrew was the first to follow Jesus and his enthusiasm was evident as his desire to introduce his older brother to Jesus revealed what was already in his heart—a deep love for God.

He was not a dominant person next to his outspoken brother. He was a passionate preacher and shared the gospel boldly and was a significant contributor to the early church. Andrew died a martyr's death. He faced crucifixion with boldness and courage. He [said](#), "Oh, cross most welcome and longed for! With a willing mind, joyfully and desirously, I come to you, being a scholar of Him which did hang on you, because I have always been your lover and yearn to embrace you."

**3. James:** James is the elder brother of John. He is a rather quiet part of the team of disciples in that we don't read much about him in Scripture. As part of Jesus' "inner three" he was permitted to be present along with Peter and John when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead ([Mark 5:37](#)), he witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the Mount of Olives ([Matthew 17:1](#)), and he was in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. ([Mark 14:33](#)). James was the first disciple to be martyred (he was beheaded) and the only disciple to have their martyrdom recorded in Scripture. ([Acts 12:1-3](#))

**4. John:** Known as the "disciple Jesus loved," he was also a part of the inner three. ([John 3:23](#)) He wrote a large portion of the New Testament—The book of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. He wrote more about love than any other New Testament author. His close proximity to Jesus taught him much about love. He was [exiled](#) to the island of Patmos under Domitian, but after his death, John was allowed to return to Ephesus where he governed churches in Asia until his death at about A.D. 100.

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**3 *Who Were the 12 Disciples and What Should We Know about Them?***  
Allyson Holland Crosswalk.com Contributing Writer, January 27, 2020

**5. Philip:** “The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, *Follow Me.*” ([John 1:43](#)) What do we know about Philip? Almost nothing. Although a Jew, we only know him by his Greek name, Philip. A heart for evangelism, he was anxious to tell Nathanael the One foretold by Moses and the prophets had been found. ([John 1:43-45](#)) They were close companions and possibly studied the Old Testament together. Philip was stoned and [crucified](#) in Hierapolis, Phrygia.

**6. Nathanael:** Also known as Bartholomew, Nathanael came from Cana in Galilee. ([John 21:2](#)) He expressed some local prejudice about Nazareth. ([John 1:46](#)) Jesus recognized how sincerely his love for God was from the beginning when He said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ([John 1:47](#)) Nathanael may have preached in [India](#) and translated the book of Matthew into their language. He was beaten, crucified, and beheaded. He died as a martyr while serving the people of Albinopolis, Armenia.

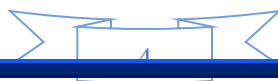
**7. Matthew:** Levi, the Son of Alphaeus, Matthew was a tax collector--the most despised people in all of Israel. They were known for taking extra money from the people of Israel to pay off the Romans and to pad their own pockets. Matthew brought the gospel to Ethiopia and Egypt. Hircanus the king had him killed with a [spear](#).

**8. Thomas:** Usually nicknamed “Doubting Thomas,” Thomas was also called Didymus, meaning The Twin. He was an outspoken skeptic to the point of being known as a pessimist. No details are given about Thomas in the first three Gospels other than the mention of his name. John’s first mention of Thomas is in [John 11:16](#). Lazarus had died and the disciples feared for the life of Jesus and themselves if they were to go back to Bethany. Thomas speaks up. “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” ([John 11:16 NASB](#)) Here we see the character quality of courage and loyalty to Christ, a quality not often attributed to Thomas.

His devotion to Christ is further displayed when Jesus told the disciples that He was going to go away and prepare a place for them. “And you know the way where I am going. Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” ([John 14:4-5](#)) Thomas didn’t want to be left behind. And then Thomas’ love for Jesus and his desire to see and touch before he believed and then his declaration, “My Lord and My God!” ([John 20:28](#)) Tradition strongly suggests that Thomas started the Christian church in India. Some suggest being run through by a spear killed him, ironically, similar to Jesus being pierced by a spear.

**9. James the Less:** He is the son of Alphaeus ([Luke 6:15](#)). His mother’s name is Mary ([Mark 15:40](#)) and he has a brother named Joseph ([Matthew 27:56](#)). Except for a few details about his family, there is nothing more mentioned about him in Scripture. Maybe this is why he is referred to as James the Less in [Mark 15:40](#). What is important to remember is although James was somewhat in the background, he was chosen by Jesus to be one of the [twelve disciples](#). He was trained and used by Christ in a powerful way to further the Kingdom of God. He was a valuable team member. Tradition says he was crucified in Sinai or possibly stoned to death in Jerusalem.

**10. Simon the Zealot:** Simon was probably a political activist in his younger years. Why would Jesus choose someone with this background? “It is amazing that Jesus would select a man like Simon to be an apostle. But he was a man of fierce loyalties, amazing passion, courage, and



zeal. Simon had believed the truth and embraced Christ as his Lord. The fiery enthusiasm he once had for Israel was now expressed in his devotion to Christ.” –(from the book: [Twelve Ordinary Men](#)). There is some speculation about what happened to Simon. Tradition says that after preaching on the west coast of Africa, Simon went to England where he ended up being crucified in 74 AD.

**11. Judas, son of James:** The eleventh name on the list of disciples is Judas. Also known as Jude, Thaddeus, and [Lebbaeus](#), Judas lived in obscurity as one of the Twelve. He did ask Jesus a question in [John 14:22](#), “Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large?” Judas seemed overly concerned with this question. Christ responded by saying He would reveal Himself to anyone who loved Him.

Most early tradition says that Judas, son of James, a few years after Pentecost, took the gospel north to Edessa. There he healed the King of Edessa, Abgar. Eusebius the historian said the archives at Edessa contained the visit of Judas and the healing of Abgar (the records have now been destroyed). The traditional [symbol](#) of Judas is a club and tradition says he was clubbed to death for his [faith](#).

**12. Judas Iscariot:** The Traitor. Nothing is known about Judas’ background. His encounter and call by Jesus is not recorded in Scripture. He was not from Galilee--that much is known. He obviously became a follower and stayed with Jesus for three years. He gave Christ three years of his life, but he certainly didn’t give Him his heart, and Jesus knew this. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. ([Matthew 26:15](#))

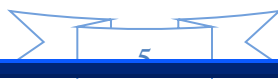
“The other eleven apostles are all great encouragements to us because they exemplify how common people with typical failings can be used by God in uncommon, remarkable ways. Judas, on the other hand, stands as a warning about the evil potential of spiritual carelessness, squandered opportunity, sinful lusts, and hardness of the heart. Here was a man who drew as close to the Savior as it is humanly possible to be. He enjoyed every privilege Christ affords. He was intimately familiar with everything Jesus taught. Yet he remained in unbelief and went into a hopeless eternity.”

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### C. A Larger Group of Followers.

The Gospels clearly show that the word “disciple” can refer to others besides the Twelve. The verb “follow” became something of a technical term Jesus used to call His disciples, who were then called “followers,” ([Mark 4:10](#)). These “followers” included a larger company of people from whom He selected the Twelve ([Mark 3:7-19](#); [Luke 6:13-17](#)). This larger group of disciples/followers included men and women ([Luke 8:1-3](#); [23:49](#)) from all walks of life. (Even the Twelve included a variety: fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot.) Jesus was no doubt especially popular among the socially outcast and religiously despised, but people of wealth and of theological training also followed ([Luke 8:1-3](#); [19:1-10](#); [John 3:1-3](#); [12:42](#); [19:38-39](#)).

The Twelve were sent out as representatives of Jesus, commissioned to preach the coming of the kingdom, to cast out demons, and to heal diseases ([Matt. 10:1,5-15](#); [Mark 6:7-13](#); [Luke 9:1-6](#)). Such tasks were not limited to the Twelve ([Luke 10:1-24](#)). Apparently



Jesus' disciples first included "a great multitude of disciples" ([Luke 6:17](#)). He formed certain smaller and more specifically defined groups within that "great multitude." These smaller groups would include a group of "70" ([Luke 10:1,17](#)), the "Twelve" ([Matt. 11:1](#); [Mark 6:7](#); [Luke 9:1](#)), and perhaps an even smaller, inner group within the Twelve, consisting especially of Peter, James, and John—whose names (with Andrew) always figure first in the lists of the Twelve ([Matt. 10:2](#); [Mark 3:16-17](#); [Luke 6:14](#); [Acts 1:13](#)), whose stories of calling are especially highlighted ([Matt. 4:18-22](#); [John 1:35-42](#) and the tradition that John is the "Other"/"Beloved Disciple" of the Gospel of [John—13:23](#); [19:26](#); [20:2](#); [21:20](#)), and who alone accompanied Jesus on certain significant occasions of healing and revelation ([Matt. 17:1](#); [Mark 13:3](#); [Luke 8:51](#)).

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#### **D. All Followers of Jesus.**

The book of the Acts of the Apostles frequently uses the term "disciple" to refer generally to all those who believe in the risen Lord ([6:1-2,7](#); [9:1,10,19,26,38](#); [11:26,29](#)). In addition, the verb form "to disciple" as it appears in the final commissioning scene of Matthew's Gospel (28:19-20) also suggests a use in the early church of the term "disciple" as a more generalized name for all those who come to Jesus in faith, having heard and believed the gospel.

**Conclusion** We have seen that, as references to the Twelve, the words "apostle" and "disciple" could be synonymous. However, just as the term "disciple" could mean other followers of Jesus than the Twelve in the time of His ministry, so also after His resurrection the term "disciple" had a wider meaning as well, being clearly applied to all His followers. Whereas the term "apostle" retained a more specific meaning, being tied to certain historical eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord, the word "disciple" tended to lose its narrower associations with the Twelve, and/or those who followed the historical Jesus, or who saw the risen Lord, and became a virtual equivalent to "Christian" ([Acts 11:26](#)). In every case, however, the common bond of meaning for the various applications of the word "disciple" was allegiance to Jesus. See [Apostle](#).

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