



THE LIFE AND TIMES

of

JESUS OF NAZARETH



If You Missed a Week Where We've Been



A Late Night Visitor: Nicodemus and the Mystery of the New Birth

1. John 3 centers on Jesus' declaration: "You must be born again." Religion, morality, heritage, and status cannot replace new life received by faith.
2. Nicodemus was respected and religious, yet Jesus exposed his deepest need: sin and the need for spiritual rebirth through faith
3. The new birth is not self-improvement or religious activity. It is the Spirit's sovereign work, producing true faith and fruit.
4. Like the bronze serpent in Numbers 21, Christ was lifted up so sinners may look to God's provision by faith and live.
5. The gospel's heart: God loved, God gave, and whoever believes in the Son has everlasting life.
6. This confronts cultural Christianity. Admiring Jesus is not enough. True Christianity begins with new life - faith, repentance, humility, and Christ-centered living.
7. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16*

If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*

Zeal for His Father's House - Two Cleansings of the Temple - "Can You Hear Me Now?!"

1. Jesus performed His first miracle at Cana, turning shame into joy and revealing His divine glory
2. Mary said, "Whatever He says to you, do it," calling for immediate obedience
3. Jesus then went to Jerusalem, where the Temple, meant for prayer, had become filled with commerce and a *den of thieves*.
4. In zeal for His Father's house, He drove out the merchants and called for restoring the purpose of true worship
5. He declared the Temple to be "a house of prayer for all nations," not a place of profit
6. A second cleansing later in His ministry confirmed His sustained call to repentance and reverence
7. And His message still confronts the Church today. In the midst of programs, polished liturgies, carefully crafted music, and the quiet pull of commercial ambition, Jesus still stands before His people and asks: *Can you hear Me now?*





If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



Waters and Wilderness: Baptism's Blessing and Triumph over Temptation

1. At His baptism, Jesus publicly identified Himself with sinners and began His public ministry in obedience to the Father
2. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended like a dove, and the Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," providing one of the clearest displays of the Trinity in Scripture
3. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to face direct confrontation with Satan
4. Satan offered shortcuts to power, glory, and authority without obedience to the will of God
5. Jesus resisted every temptation by relying on the written Word of God, demonstrating faithful obedience where Adam and Israel had failed
6. The wilderness became the setting where the obedient Son showed His readiness to carry out the Father's mission
7. Before the ministry advanced publicly, the Messiah was revealed by God and proven faithful under testing.

If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



A Carpenter's Son in a Cradle: Genealogy, Mary, and Witnesses

1. The birth of Jesus is surrounded by a remarkable series of witnesses placed by God to confirm the identity of the promised Messiah
2. Angels announced the birth of the Savior, declaring peace on earth and glory to God in the highest
3. Shepherds became the first public witnesses of the good news after seeing the child in Bethlehem and spreading the report widely
4. Simeon recognized the infant Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise and praised God for allowing him to see the Lord's salvation
5. Anna, a faithful prophetess who had waited many years for redemption, witnessed openly about the child to all who were looking for deliverance
6. All these witnesses demonstrate that God revealed His Son publicly and through credible testimony, not quietly
7. The early years, including Jesus' growth in wisdom and presence in the temple, show His life unfolding under the hand of providence - *He must be about His Father's business*





If You Missed a Week Where We've Been *(continued)*



Before Bethlehem: The Word Before Worlds

1. John begins his Gospel not with the birth of Jesus, but with the eternal existence of the Word before creation itself
2. The Word is the agent of creation, through whom all things were made and by whom all things continue to exist
3. The term Logos was familiar in the ancient world and especially influenced by Stoic philosophy which spoke of the Logos as a rational principle governing the universe. John reveals that the Logos is not a force, but a living Person, Jesus Christ
4. John uses the language of the culture as a platform and expands it with divine truth, showing that the true source of life, order, and meaning is the Son of God
5. A central theme in John chapter 1 is witness: God sends witnesses to testify publicly to the truth about Christ
6. John the Baptist is a man sent from God to bear witness to the Light so that all might believe
7. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, meaning that the eternal God entered human history as a person.

If You Missed a Week

Where We've Been *(continued)*

Prophecy and fulfillment

1. The Old Testament contains a unified pattern of promises and prophetic expectations pointing forward to a coming Messiah who would redeem His people
2. These prophecies described His lineage, birthplace, mission, suffering, and ultimate victory long before He entered human history
3. Jesus Himself taught that the entire Old Testament points to Him, not merely in isolated predictions but in a coherent redemptive storyline
4. After His resurrection, Jesus declared in Luke 24 that everything written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled concerning Him
5. Christianity is not built on religious sentiment or moral aspiration, but on fulfilled promises anchored in real history
6. The coming of Jesus was not accidental or improvised, it was the unfolding of God's eternal plan in time
7. The Old Testament does not merely anticipate Christ, it testifies of Him.





Come, Follow Me Twelve Ordinary Men One Extraordinary Call



We come to an important point in our study, because we begin to look more closely at the men Jesus called in His public ministry. Men who would figure prominently in His life and times. And who, after His ascension, would become instruments in the spread of His gospel to the world. In a real sense, they belong to His story.

In another sense, they press into our story. For as we study the men Jesus disciplined, we are also compelled to ask how those we encourage, teach, and disciple may fit into our own life and times. So this lesson is not merely about names on the pages of Scripture - although it is that. It is about the way Christ selects men, forms them and sends them into the lives of others.

No surprise our subject today is the 12 Disciples - and the title is, *Come, Follow Me: Twelve Ordinary Men, One Extraordinary Call*. That title captures something essential to the way the kingdom of God advances in this world. Jesus did not begin by recruiting the elite, the polished, or the social elite. The Disciples were ordinary not because they lacked intelligence, responsibility, or capacity - but because they were not recognized as part of the religious elite.

He called fishermen. He called a tax collector. He called men with rough edges, mixed motives, and incomplete understanding. There was no initial gravitas around them that would cause the world to stop and say, *Surely these will be the architects of Christian history*. And yet through those ordinary men, men very much like you and me, He turned the world upside down.





That should calm the heart and also challenge it. Your flaws do not disqualify you from the service of Christ. They do not place you beyond usefulness in the hands of the Master. Very often, in fact, our shortcomings become the threadbare remnants from which divine grace crafts a beautiful tapestry. Our weakness becomes the stage upon which His strength is displayed.

The calling of the Twelve reminds us that God delights to use unimpressive people so that the glory may plainly belong to Him. He fills pots with water and turns it to the best wine. He takes fishermen and makes them heralds. He takes flawed men and gives them work that outlives empires.

Much of modern life can quietly train us to think in the wrong categories. We begin to imagine that what matters most is scale, branding, visible growth - the sort of success the world applauds. But when we read the Gospels, we find that Jesus did not build His kingdom in that fashion. He preached to crowds, yes. He ministered publicly, yes.

But He also gave Himself patiently to a comparatively small band of men. He taught them, prayed for them, corrected them, comforted them, and sent them. Even within the Twelve, He gave particular closeness to Peter, James, and John. That was not accidental; it was the wisdom of the Master. He was not merely collecting hearers. He was shaping men.





We begin in **John chapter 1:35-51**; here the earliest encounters begin to unfold. John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples, and when he sees Jesus walking, he says, “Behold the Lamb of God!” That is one of the greatest introductions ever given. He does not say, Here is a fine teacher. Here is a moral reformer. Here is a spiritual leader. He says, “Behold the Lamb of God!” In those words he points to the One toward whom the sacrificial system had always been moving. Here is the One who will deal with sin. Here is the One sent by God for redemption. Here is the One in whom Old Testament type gives way to fulfillment.

Hebrews helps us feel the weight of John's introduction. The law, we are told, had a shadow of the good things to come. The blood of bulls and goats could never truly take away sins. Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises, and providing a better hope. "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Hebrews 10:14. (NKJV) So when John says, "Behold the Lamb of God," he is setting before them the very center of redemptive history.





Two of John the Baptist's disciples hear that introduction and begin following Jesus. One of them is Andrew. (The second, though unnamed in the text, is widely understood by commentators to be the evangelist John himself). And one of the earliest marks of discipleship appears almost immediately in him. Andrew first finds his own brother Simon and says, "We have found the Messiah."

Then he brings him to Jesus. It is simple, but it's profound. Andrew had not attended seminary. He had not taken a course in evangelism. He had not accumulated decades of Bible study. But he had found Christ, and the first thing he wanted to do was bring someone else to Him.

That is often how true discipleship begins. A man who has genuinely met Christ does not remain content to say, Well, that was meaningful for me and my private spiritual life. No, he wants his brother to come. He wants his friend to come. He wants the world to come.

Then comes one of the striking moments in this entire section. Simon is brought to Jesus, and Jesus looks at him and says, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas,” which is translated, *A Stone*, or in Greek, *Peter*. That raises an important question. Why the name change?

Part of the answer, and certainly a rich application from which we can draw, lies in the nature of Christ’s transforming call. Simon is not merely given a fresh label. He is being called out in view of what Christ intends to make of him. Simon, as he stands there, is impulsive, uneven, often rash, often overconfident, often speaking before thinking. Yet Jesus sees more than Simon at that moment. He sees what Simon will become by grace. He names him in the light of His own purpose and calling him to a new life - hence a new name.





That is deeply encouraging. Christ does not look at a man merely in terms of what that man is or has been. He looks at him in light of what divine grace intends him to be. Peter did not become a finished man in a moment. He remained capable of folly and fear. But he belonged to Christ in a new way, and the direction of his life had changed. Christ would now define him.

This is why 2 Corinthians 5:17 speaks to us so clearly. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Conversion does not mean instant perfection. But conversion begins the path of discipleship. And that means a change of identity. If you are in Christ, you are no longer defined by your past sin, your failures, your DNA. You are Christ’s at conversion and as you become a disciple, Christ begins to remake you.





The passage continues. Jesus finds Philip and says to him with stunning simplicity, “Follow Me.” Philip then finds Nathanael and says, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael’s response is blunt and memorable: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Nathanael knew the reputation of Nazareth. It was not a celebrated center of power or prestige. It was not New York. It was not London. It was not Beijing. In a way we might say today that Nazareth was a bit like Garfield Heights, Cleveland, that small town in Pakistan, it was like Homa Bay Kenya, or that average street in Hyderabad. It was the sort of place the world simply takes for granted.

And that is the power of the point. God often works through what the world overlooks. God delights to overturn worldly assumptions. The Messiah would not come in a way that confirmed human thinking. Nathanael raises the question, but Philip gives the right answer. He does not start an argument. He says simply, *Come and see*. There is wisdom and power in that simple phrase. There are times when the best answer by a disciple to skepticism is not endless debate, but simply presenting a person with Christ as He is revealed in Scripture.





When Nathanael approaches, Jesus says, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” The King James says, “no guile.” Jesus noticed Nathanael’s character. He singled out sincerity. He singled out honesty. Literally the word guile means bait or lure; the trickery a fisherman uses to deceive and catch. It speaks of hidden motives meant to manipulate or take advantage of someone.

In John 1:47, Jesus is saying Nathanael (the to be disciple) is a genuine guy with no hidden agenda, zero cunning, no bait-and-switch. He is a man whose words and heart line up. In a world filled with posturing and branding - Christ points to a man who would be selected for discipleship and says he is a man without guile.

From John 1 we move into Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20, where the call takes on a more public and decisive form. Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee. He sees Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

He says to them, *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* There are few statements in Scripture more arresting than that. Not admire Me. Not add Me to a portion of your life. Not fit Me in where convenient. But simply - *Follow me.*





Then comes the commitment joined to the command: “*and I will make you fishers of men.*” Notice that Jesus does not merely save. He also forms. He does not say, Make yourselves into fishers of men. He says, “I will make you fishers of men.” Jesus' wording is very important.

Discipleship is not merely an obligation - it is transformation under the hand of Christ. He calls, and He shapes. He commands, and He forms. He does not merely tell men what they ought to become. After we commit to following Him then He takes the initiative to make them into what He wants them to become.

We are told, “They immediately left their nets and followed Him.” *Immediately*. That word matters to a disciple. The Greek word here is εὐθύς. It means: straightway, at once, without delay, a direct, unhesitating response.

Jesus then sees James the son of Zebedee and John his brother in the boat with their father, mending their nets. He calls them, and immediately they leave the boat and their father and follow Him. We are comfortable in evaluating and keeping options open, all the while delaying costly obedience. But when Christ calls, the expected answer is not extended negotiation. It is commitment.

We have seen this before. Mary said at Cana, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” And the servants obeyed. That pattern runs through Scripture. Where the will of Christ is clear, obedience is not meant to be postponed while we preserve our options. His call presses the disciple for response.





And one of the clearest signs that a man has really come under the authority of Christ as a disciple is that he begins to care about souls. Jesus says, “I will make you fishers of men.” That is what He turns His disciples into.

Not every disciple serves in identical ways. Yet the words of Jesus are too clear to be emptied of their edge. If Christ truly has a man’s life, concern for others’ souls will be the result. He will not be content with a private religion that ends with himself. He will want men and women to come to Christ. He will want to be about his Father’s business.

That brings us to **Luke 5:1-11**, and the full scene of the miraculous catch. The fishermen have toiled all night and caught nothing. They know the lake. They know the trade. They have worked hard but have nothing to show for it. Jesus steps into Simon's boat, teaches the multitudes, and then says, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answers, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."





That sentence reveals a great deal. Peter is honest about failure. He does not hide the empty nets. He does not pretend effort alone has produced results. He names the futility of the night. But then comes that decisive phrase, “nevertheless at Your word.” That’s discipleship in action. Not because the command makes immediate sense. And not because my experience confirms it. But because He said so. His wisdom outruns ours. That is the response of a disciple.

This should not make us passive. The fishermen still worked. They still launched. They still let down the nets. Obedience is active. But all true fruitfulness in gospel labor is dependent upon Christ's authority and Christ's power. That is a needed corrective in an age captivated by formulas and methods. The lesson of Luke 5 is plain. The difference is not merely effort. The difference for the true disciple is immediate obedience to Christ.





Peter's response to the miracle is equally instructive. He does not stand up and say, "This is incredible, look what God is doing through me." He falls down on his knees before Jesus and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" That is the instinct of a disciple that has seen something of Christ's glory. A sharpened awareness of personal sinfulness. Peter, often bold and forceful, is brought low in the presence of Jesus. That is not weakness. That is the growth of the disciple.

In **Mark 3:13–19** and Luke **6:12–16**, the circle of His disciples is finalized. Jesus has many followers around Him, but now He formally appoints the Twelve as apostles. And do not miss how Luke introduces this pivotal moment. Before Jesus makes this selection, He “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”

The Son of God spends the night in prayer before choosing the men who will carry His message to the world. Then Mark tells us, “He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.”





“That they might be with Him.” That is the very heart of discipleship. Before preaching there is presence. Jesus appointed them first to be with Him. This was so they could live in close fellowship with Him and would know Him. And that is the same call He gave at the very beginning when He said, “Follow Me.”

Years later, the religious leaders in Jerusalem would look at Peter and John (“uneducated and untrained men”) and marvel at their boldness. They recognized the source of it, “they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Their authority did not come from credentials or polish. It came from being with Christ. Presence with Jesus is fundamental to discipleship and always comes before ministry.

Discipleship is not a program or a curriculum. It is life with Christ, and life shaped by Christ in such a way that one is able to help others into deeper obedience. The Twelve were trained not merely by hearing Jesus speak, but by being with Him. They watched Him. They listened to Him. They were corrected by Him. They were sent by Him.





Now their names should be known to us. The apostolic lists are given in **Matthew 10:2–4**, **Mark 3:16–19**, **Luke 6:14–16**, and again, after Judas Iscariot's fall, in **Acts 1:13**. They are Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, traditionally identified with Thaddaeus; and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

We ought to know these names because these men were foundational in the earthly ministry of Christ and to the Church.

One simple way to remember them is this: **Pretty Awesome Jelly Jam** Peter, Andrew, James, and John. **Pretty Big Mango Tree** Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas. **Just Super Tasty Jam** James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus, and Judas Iscariot.

The larger point is to remember that these were real men, with real lives and real weaknesses. **Peter** was a fisherman, a small businessman of sorts, impulsive and forceful by temperament, yet powerfully used by God. **Andrew** was his brother, and often appears as the man bringing others to Jesus.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were from a fishing family business. Jesus called them “Sons of Thunder,” suggesting boldness, zeal, and intensity. John would later become the beloved apostle and a long-lived witness.





Philip was from Bethsaida, the same city as Andrew and Peter, and in John's Gospel he appears as a practical and connecting figure. In John 1, he brings Nathanael to Jesus. In John 6, Jesus tests him with the practical question of how the crowd will be fed. And in John 12, when Greeks want to see Jesus, they first come to Philip to bring the matter to Jesus. Philip is often the connecting point where people and practical concerns are brought to Christ.

Nathanael/Bartholomew is the man of whom Jesus said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” He is less prominent than Peter, James, or John, but no less personally seen and known by Christ.

Matthew came out of the hated world of tax collection, similar to a government employee or contractor for the IRS. Very early after his call, he invited many tax collectors and sinners (his friends) to a meal with Jesus. The converted tax collector immediately becomes an evangelistic host, bringing his old circle into contact with the Savior.





Thomas is often remembered for his doubt, though on the final trip to Jerusalem he also said, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him,” showing a bold loyalty that should not be missed.

James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and **Jude** are less prominent in the record, but no less chosen by Christ.

And **Judas Iscariot** remains a solemn warning that nearness to holy things is not the same as conversion.

Long before our age began speaking constantly about diversity, Jesus gathered men of very different backgrounds, temperaments, social positions, and political instincts. Christ was showing the world that He would overcome differences and build a people centered on Himself. Christ creates a new community in which former diverse identities are brought under His lordship.

In the realm of discipleship, we now turn to one of the strongest and most difficult texts in Scripture, **Luke 14:25–33**. Great multitudes were following Jesus - if we were thinking in modern ministry terms, this might seem like the moment to capitalize on the momentum and keep building the audience. But Jesus does the opposite. He turns to the multitudes and says, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

Those are hard words. Jesus is not commanding sinful hatred toward family. Scripture commands we exhibit honor toward parents, love toward spouse, care toward children, and respect in family life. So what does He mean? He is speaking comparatively. He is saying that our allegiance to Him must be so supreme that every other love, even the most tender and legitimate earthly love, falls decisively beneath it. Comfort, reputation, and family must not outrank fidelity to Him.





Think in terms of a society where commitment to Christ may cause a family to disown one of its own members. That is the kind of cost Jesus is placing before the crowd. He is not lowering the bar to attract more followers. He is telling the truth about what it means to be a disciple.

Luke says, “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” In the parallel language of **Matthew 16:24**, Jesus says, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

In the first-century world, the cross was not jewelry, nor was it a decoration. It was an instrument of suffering, shame, execution. To take up one’s cross was to accept the path of discipleship, of self-denial, public reproach, and if necessary, martyrdom. Jesus is saying plainly that discipleship is costly.

He then illustrates this same principle in **Luke 14** with two pictures. A man building a tower must count the cost. A king going to war must assess his strength. In both cases, the point is a sober consideration. Emotional enthusiasm for Jesus without settled conviction for discipleship will not suffice. Some begin with zeal and then run out of gas because they moved on sentiment or excitement rather than on a deep and considered surrender to Christ. Jesus, in mercy, warns us before we begin. He does not attract under false advertising.



Apostle	How Called (Biblical)	Primary Missionary Field (Tradition)	Manner of Death (Tradition)
Simon Peter	Fishing on Sea of Galilee – “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men”; name changed to Cephas/Peter (John 1:42; Matt 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18; Luke 5:1-11)	Rome	Crucified upside-down in Rome
Andrew	First via John the Baptist (“Behold the Lamb of God”), then Sea of Galilee with Peter (John 1:35-42; Matt 4/Mark 1/Luke 5)	Greece (Patras)	Crucified on X-shaped cross
James (son of Zebedee)	Sea of Galilee while mending nets with John and father; “immediately they left the boat and their father” (Matt 4:21-22; Mark 1:19-20)	Jerusalem / Judea	Beheaded by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12)
John (son of Zebedee)	Sea of Galilee with James (same call as above)	Ephesus / Asia Minor	Natural death in old age (after Patmos exile)
Philip	Jesus found him and said, “Follow Me” (John 1:43)	Phrygia	Martyred by crucifixion
Bartholome	Brought by Philip; Jesus saw him under the fig tree and	India / Armenia	Flayed alive then

Bartholomew (Nathanael)	Brought by Philip; Jesus saw him under the fig tree and declared “no deceit” (John 1:45-50)	India / Armenia	Flayed alive then beheaded
Matthew (Levi)	At the tax collector’s booth – Jesus said “Follow Me” (implied in the appointment of the Twelve; full account in Matt 9:9)	Ethiopia	Martyred by sword
Thomas	Chosen on the mountain after Jesus prayed all night (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16)	India	Speared to death
James (son of Alphaeus)	Chosen on the mountain after Jesus prayed all night (Mark 3/Luke 6)	Syria	Stoned then crucified
Thaddaeus (Jude)	Chosen on the mountain after Jesus prayed all night (Mark 3/Luke 6)	Persia	Clubbed to death
Simon the Zealot	Chosen on the mountain after Jesus prayed all night (Mark 3/Luke 6)	Persia	Crucified or sawn in half
Judas Iscariot	Chosen on the mountain among the Twelve (Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16)	(Betrayed Jesus – no mission)	Suicide by hanging



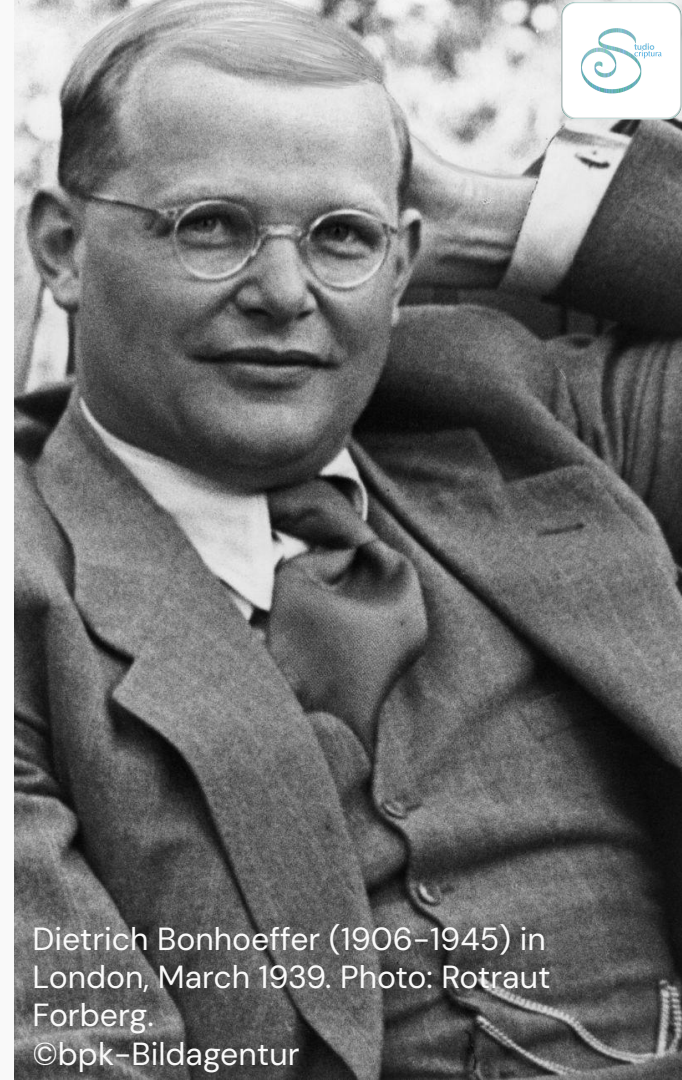
That brings us naturally, and very profitably, to exploring what others throughout church history have said about the 12 and discipleship.

One of the most powerful modern voices is Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 - 1945), in his classic work, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor and theologian who lived during the rise of Nazi Germany. He saw with unusual clarity how a church could retain Christian language while going light on Christian obedience. He resisted Hitler, helped train pastors through an underground seminary, and was eventually arrested. In April 1945, only weeks before the end of the war in Europe. He was executed by hanging. His words carry weight because he did not treat discipleship as a literary theme or a theological classroom exercise.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) in London, March 1939. Photo: Rotraut Forberg.

One of Bonhoeffer's warnings continues to be especially timely. He lamented that a whole nation could be baptized and catechized, and yet know very little of true discipleship. That observation should still unsettle the church today. It is entirely possible to have religious familiarity, Christian language, and church structure, yet very little following of Jesus.





Bonhoeffer remains compelling because he diagnosed what he called “cheap grace”: forgiveness without repentance, baptism without discipline. Grace without the cross.

His famous line is unforgettable: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Die to the flesh. Die to habitual sins. Die to selfishness.

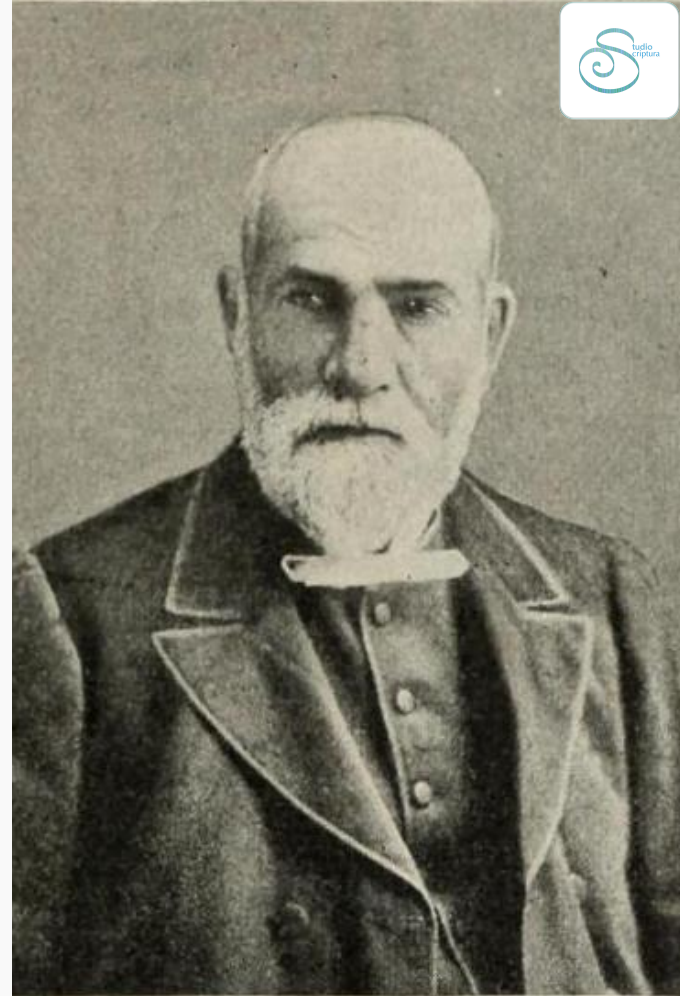
We live in a time when many want the consolations of Jesus - without the demands of discipleship. Bonhoeffer did not permit that illusion.

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship)

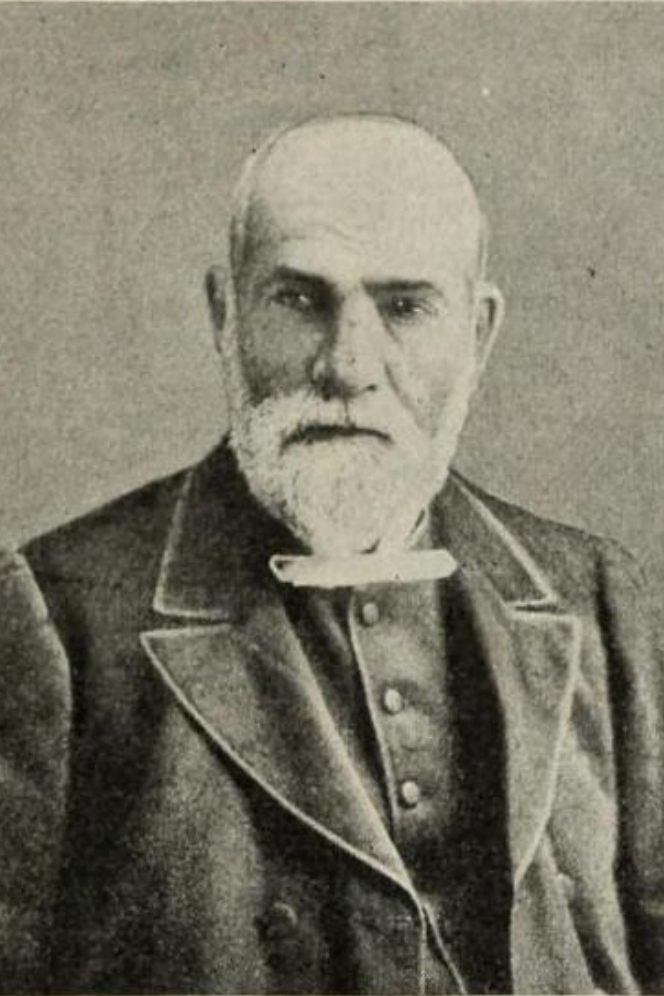
Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) in London, March 1939. Photo: Rotraut Forberg.
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On discipleship A. B. Bruce (1831 - 1899) becomes especially helpful. Alexander Balmain Bruce was a nineteenth-century Scottish theologian and minister, and his classic work is titled *The Training of the Twelve*. Since its publication in 1871, it has been regarded by many as perhaps the classic study of how Jesus formed His disciples. Bruce was not producing light devotional material. He was writing with theological seriousness and pastoral insight.

His great contribution was to show that Christ's training of the apostles was not mainly information transfer. It was patient shaping. Jesus trained them through shared life, unfolding truth, correction, rebuke, trial, mission, and repeated exposure to His own person. Bruce helps us see that the genius of Christ's method lay not in spectacle, but in sustained formation.



PROF. ALEXANDER BALMAIN BRUCE, D.D.



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From Bruce several lessons emerge. Jesus chose ordinary and flawed men, not because flaws are virtues, but because grace would be magnified through their transformation. The heart of training was being with Christ. Instruction was progressive, not dumped all at once.

Character defects were confronted, not ignored. Prayer surrounded the whole enterprise. Evangelism was learned by doing. Crisis became classroom. Counting the cost was built into the call. Multiplication was always in view. Endurance through suffering was assumed, not treated as an unfortunate exception.



J. I. Packer's (1926 - 2020) *Knowing God* also deserves attention. Packer is one of the most respected evangelical theologians of the modern era. Born in England, trained at Oxford, he served the church as a scholar, teacher, and Anglican churchman.

His academic work centered on historical and systematic theology, with particular attention to Puritan theology, and the authority of Scripture. His focus is simple: the highest calling of the Christian life is not merely to know about God, but to know God Himself. That is crucial for discipleship.

The Twelve were not being formed into religious functionaries. They were being brought into living knowledge of the Son. Discipleship without the knowledge of God slips into performance. Right theology must lead to worship, trust, obedience, and confidence.

Packer's emphasis on adoption is especially important: to be right with God the Judge is glorious, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater still.

A disciple follows, not as a hired servant fulfilling duty, but lovingly as a son by grace.



John Greenhill,
John Owen, c.
1668, oil on
canvas, National
Portrait Gallery,
London (NPG 115).



John Owen (1616 - 1683) adds another dimension to discipleship. Owen was one of the great Puritan writers, a man of depth and spiritual wisdom. His work *The Mortification of Sin* remains one of the most searching books written on the disciple's battle against indwelling sin. Owen reminds us that one of the greatest threats to discipleship is not merely the world outside us - it is the sin within us.

His famous warning remains unforgettable, *Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.*

Ambition, fear, pride, cowardice, unbelief, self-protection, and confusion all need to be mortified by the disciple. There is no serious discipleship without serious warfare against sin. We cannot settle for doctrinal precision in our statements while allowing inward sin to hide comfortably in our hearts.

Lastly John Bunyan (1628 - 1688), in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, gives us perhaps the most vivid picture of discipleship in the English language. Bunyan was an English Puritan preacher, not a university-trained theologian, but a man steeped in Scripture, sharpened by suffering, and formed by the doctrinal seriousness of the Puritan age.

He was imprisoned for preaching the gospel without state permission, and out of that imprisonment came one of the most influential Christian books ever written. For centuries, Bunyan has trained disciples by turning the Christian life into a journey that is both unforgettable and unsettlingly recognizable.



Thomas Sadler, John Bunyan, 1684, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1311).



Christian, the main character of the journey, represents the true disciple: burdened by sin, looking to Christ, stumbling at points, yet pressing on. He reminds us that discipleship is not casual affiliation. It is a sustained pursuit of Christ through difficulty. In a world that prizes immediacy and ease, Bunyan reminds us that following Jesus is a long road.

Faithful, Christian's companion, represents costly witness. His death at Vanity Fair teaches that faithfulness may require the loss of everything, even life itself.

Hopeful then joins Christian, and his very presence reminds us that no one walks well alone. God gives companions. He gives fellow believers who strengthen one another when despair presses in.

Thomas Sadler, John Bunyan, 1684, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1311).

Talkative represents empty profession. Bunyan's line is unforgettable: *a saint abroad, and a devil at home*. That danger is in every church, every home, and public ministry. Where a person may say all the right things and yet remain inwardly unholy. Bunyan will not let us hide behind religious language.

Then there is the **man in the iron cage**; one of the most sobering figures in the whole book. Once he had profession of faith. Once he had seriousness. But now he sits in dreadful hardness and despair, speaking of having grieved the Spirit, lost tenderness, and given himself over to sin until his condition feels locked and hopeless. His own confession is terrifying because it is not casual. He knows what he has done and what he has despised. The lesson - Do not trifle with grace. Do not mistake knowledge for a tender heart before God. Do not presume upon holy things.



Thomas Sadler, John Bunyan, 1684, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1311).

So where does all of this bring us?
It brings us back to the words of Jesus to His first disciples: *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.* Those words should give us pause. Christ does not call men to comfort, but to Himself. He does not call them to safe admiration, but to surrendered obedience. He does not call them merely to learn lessons, but to be changed from fishermen into fishers of men.





And each of us must consider where the call of Christ presses upon us personally. What is still too precious to us? What obedience have we delayed? Where have we been negotiating instead of yielding? Are we truly following, or merely orbiting Christian things? Is there evidence in our lives of concern for souls? Do we bear the marks of men and women in whom there is no guile? Have we counted the cost? Are we fighting sin? What characterizes our daily life? Are we growing in faith like the Apostles?

Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19

This class was prepared through personal study of Scripture and careful engagement with trusted scholarship on the Gospel of John. Generative AI tools were used to assist with research, organization, and the drafting of phrasing. All final interpretations, judgments, and content reflect the author's convictions.