

Discipleship Handbook

*A Resource for
Seventh-day Adventist
Church Members*



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About the *Discipleship Handbook*

“The practical and succinct nature of this *Discipleship Handbook* will be a tremendous blessing to new and older members alike. What a delight to see resources such as this handbook that affirm and educate church members in the Seventh-day Adventist faith while also mobilizing them for personal evangelistic outreach! This is what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy instruct and encourage.

“Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, this important *Discipleship Handbook*, adding to the many wonderful resources produced by the church, will help fulfill God’s great commission to ‘Go . . . and make disciples’ (Matthew 28:19). What a privilege to be part of this great commission and final loud cry to the world, sharing the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14! This handbook puts into action the marvelous counsel from the Spirit of Prophecy, ‘The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers’ (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 117). Jesus is coming soon! So lift that banner high and tell of the One who has given us salvation and who will soon return to take us home! Maranatha!”

— Ted N. C. Wilson, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

“One of the greatest needs in Seventh-day Adventist evangelism today is nurturing new converts. The Great Commission is to ‘make disciples’—not merely to baptize. Without a well-thought-through, intentional strategy of discipleship, new converts will often be spiritually weak or leave the church altogether. The *Discipleship Handbook* is a practical guide for new converts. It shares how they can grow in Christ and provides an understanding of the life and culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This ready reference guide for new converts provides the biblical foundation for them to be strong in the faith themselves and also be Spirit-filled witnesses for Christ. I highly recommend it for pastors and evangelists and plan to provide it to the newly baptized converts in our evangelistic meetings.”

— Mark Finley, International Evangelist

“Continuing to grow in faith is the privilege of all believers. The *Discipleship Handbook* will encourage your growth as a disciple of Christ, connecting you with the powerful principles of God’s Word and leading you deeper into a fulfilling relationship with Jesus.”

— John Bradshaw, Speaker/Director, *It Is Written*

“This *Discipleship Handbook* is a powerful tool for the gospel commission of ‘making disciples.’ It is very balanced, and extremely practical, and I hope it becomes widely available around the world church to help leaders and members carry out the Lord’s commission.”

— Jerry Page, Ministerial Secretary
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

“I have never read anything better on discipleship than this *Discipleship Handbook*. Its organization, completeness, faithfulness to the Bible, and clarity are remarkable. But its best jewel is its content. Nothing important to being a good Seventh-day Adventist disciple is missing. Every Adventist should read and practice its content. Personal spiritual growth and the growth of the church in membership would be a permanent reality. God will bless everyone who practices its teachings.”

— Mario Veloso, Former Associate Secretary
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

“The valuable information and practical instruction given in this *Discipleship Handbook* will prepare the church to engage in the joyful experience of making disciples who make other disciples. As you read this new resource, my hope is that the conviction of the Holy Spirit will burn in your heart and mind, leading you to become a living link in the great chain of disciples described in Matthew 28:19, 20. Following our Lord’s command, we can reach the world with the message of the gospel, grow in grace, and one day enjoy the hope of heaven that today vibrates in our hearts!”

— Guillermo Biaggi, Vice President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

“Few books present in such a clear, practical, and well-rounded way as this *Discipleship Handbook* what it really means to take the Great Commission to the world. If you want to understand the mission of the church, and true discipleship, you need to read this book.”

— Robert Costa, Associate Ministerial Secretary
World Evangelism and Church Growth Coordinator
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

“With the passing of time Christian denominations tend to secularize and institutionalize, losing much of their original identity and missionary passion. The *Discipleship Handbook* can be extremely useful in transforming old and new believers into active missionaries of the Adventist message. This book should be required reading for every Seventh-day Adventist who would like to see the preaching of the everlasting gospel accomplished in this generation.”

— Alberto R. Timm, Associate Director
Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

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Introduction

There is no higher calling than to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Nothing compares to knowing and following the Savior of the world. To know Him is to love Him, and to follow Him is a wonderful adventure. Still, the discipleship journey is full of pitfalls and snares that threaten to lead us away from the narrow path that leads to heaven. If the devil had his way, every Christian would be lulled to spiritual slumber or led into forbidden paths that would steal the heart away from God. Therefore, even after we are baptized, it is imperative that we continue to grow into active and mature disciples of Christ.

The *Discipleship Handbook* will benefit anyone seeking such an experience with Jesus. It may be used for personal study or in Sabbath schools, prayer meetings, small groups, or one-on-one settings. It is more than a book *about* discipleship. Rather, it contains everything needed for a six-month, Bible-based discipleship plan for Seventh-day Adventist churches and their members. The *Discipleship Handbook* was developed to ensure that the most essential areas of discipleship are covered. The devotional life, personal witnessing, church life, Christian lifestyle, and evangelism each receive special emphasis.

For newer members, the 26 chapters of the *Discipleship Handbook* serve as the heart of 26 weekly meetings with a more experienced mentor. Appendix A, “The Discipleship Plan,” outlines a simple process to help local churches start using the

Discipleship Handbook to disciple every newly baptized church member. It includes weekly meeting outlines with simple, step-by-step instructions to guide mentors as they help newer members become more grounded in their faith and better integrated into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

No matter how long one has been a Seventh-day Adventist, the *Discipleship Handbook* can help in forming indispensable spiritual habits in the areas of prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and ministry. Without these vital components of the Christian life, we are in danger of having a form of godliness without the power (see 2 Timothy 3:5). When approached with a sincere heart, the *Discipleship Handbook* will lead its readers closer to Christ, His Word, and His church. It will bring revival and reformation to local churches and their members. It will help experienced members and those new to the faith keep their hearts burning with love for Christ and their lives active in ministry to others. That this might be the experience of everyone who reads this book is our sincere hope and prayer.

— The General Conference Sabbath School
and Personal Ministries Department

Section 1

Discipleship

To Be Like Jesus

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). This one short statement outlines the object of the Christian life. The goal of every true disciple is to be like Jesus.

When Jesus called the disciples, He said, “Follow Me”—not merely “Follow My teachings,” but “Follow Me.” We cannot truly follow His instruction apart from Him. A review of the earthly ministry of Jesus reveals that His disciples were with Him nearly everywhere He went. They learned to pray by listening to Jesus pray. They learned the importance of Scripture by seeing how Jesus depended on the Scriptures. They learned to love by seeing love in action in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). In other words: “When people see you acting like Me, they will know you are My disciples.”

Discipleship is the process of becoming like Jesus by spending time with Jesus. Discipleship classes alone won't do it. Religious forms won't do it. The personal relationship between disciple and Teacher is the heart of discipleship.

The Cost of Discipleship

While our relationship with Jesus brings us great joy, some of Christ's strongest statements emphasize the cost of following Him and of being His disciple. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25). "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

According to Jesus, discipleship involves self-denial and sacrifice. It is not for those seeking popularity or selfish pursuits. Jesus said that the gate is narrow and the way difficult for those who follow Him (see Matthew 7:14). He reminds us, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The true disciple will face opposition for standing out from the crowd.

Compelling Love

With such a cost, why would we want to follow Jesus? Quite simply, because we love Him! We surrender all to follow Jesus because we have found the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46). We have had our hearts changed by the unconditional love of a crucified Savior. "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The book *Steps to Christ* reminds us that "when . . . love springs up in the heart," it makes every burden light. "Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 59). Rather than following Jesus out of fear of loss or hope of gain, genuine Christians do so willingly and joyfully out of love for the One who, as Paul so beautifully stated, "loved me

and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). This great love far exceeds the attractions of this world.

When Jesus asked if the cost of discipleship was too high, Peter answered for every disciple down through the ages when he said, “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). And so He does. For He has promised that “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time

*“The love of Christ
compels us.”*

. . . and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29, 30). The benefits of following Jesus far outweigh the cost, not merely because of golden streets or immortal bodies, but because of the unsurpassed peace and joy found in fellowship with Christ. As the Lord assured Abraham, so He now assures us, “I am . . . your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

Surrounded by the Spirit

Jesus taught that the “first and great commandment” of the law was found in Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Immediately after this instruction in Deuteronomy, we find the secret to a victorious Christian life: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. . . . You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It was not enough to avoid the idolatry and worldliness

of the surrounding nations. God's people were also to guard their hearts by surrounding themselves with the law of God.

Following Jesus in true discipleship requires more than just removing that which is sinful. It must also include adding to our lives that which is spiritual. "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). We can never be like Jesus if we spend our time focusing on the things of the world. Just as the disciples were with Jesus nearly all the time, we must surround ourselves with spiritual rather than earthly influences. We must add to our lives nonnegotiable spiritual activities that will keep our minds set on "things above." Because our sinful natures are so weak, disciples of Christ will carry these out by *faith*—even when they don't *feel* like it. Establishing these consistent spiritual habits is a vital secret to spiritual power.

Practical Application

Below is a list of eight spiritual habits that are essential for the disciple of Christ:

1. Daily personal prayer
2. Daily personal study of the Bible
3. Daily morning and evening family worship
4. Weekly Sabbath school attendance
5. Weekly church attendance
6. Weekly prayer meeting or midweek small-group Bible study attendance
7. Regular personal witnessing
8. Regular involvement in local church ministry

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). If you invest time with Jesus, His people, and His work, your heart will be intertwined with His heart. Then, and only then, can you begin to experience the goal of discipleship—to be like Jesus. As you continue in this *Discipleship Handbook*, you will learn many important things about the Christian life. But above all else, you will establish essential spiritual habits that will transform your life and guard your soul.

Take time to evaluate the list on the previous page. What obstacles do you face in establishing these as regular habits? What rearranging might you need to do to your schedule? What do you need to remove from your life in order to add these spiritual components of prayer, study, fellowship, and ministry that also characterized the life of Jesus?



GROW Your Church is an initiative of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It highlights five essential phases of making disciples:

- 1) **PREPARE** the soil of the heart with friendship and service.
- 2) **PLANT** the Word with spiritual conversations or literature/media.
- 3) **CULTIVATE** spiritual interest with ongoing Bible studies.
- 4) **HARVEST** decisions with appeals to follow Christ and be baptized.
- 5) **PRESERVE** the harvest with ongoing discipleship training.



The *Discipleship Handbook** especially aids churches in the **PRESERVE** phase of disciple-making—a phase in which members are nurtured, trained, and equipped to engage in all five phases of making disciples.

To learn about the five GROW goals for every local church, and for training videos, customized logos, and additional resources, go to:

WWW grow.adventist.org



General Conference Sabbath School
and Personal Ministries Department