

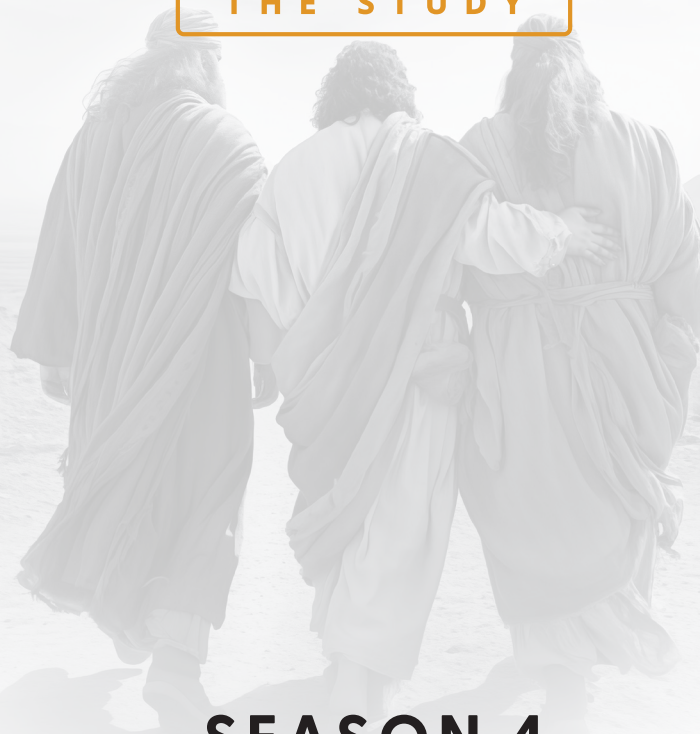
FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

PRESENTS

# RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE STUDY



**SEASON 4**

**A GROUP STUDY GUIDE**

TEXT BY BRITTANY GROOTERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BROOKE PENNINGTON

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

*RVL Discipleship: The Study, Season 4*

*Participant Guide*

© 2024 Ray Vander Laan

Focus on the Family and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

RVL Discipleship is a trademark of Ray Vander Laan.

Copies may be made for personal and small group use. Any other use requires prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Quotations identified as ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Quotations identified as HCSB are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible,® copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible,® Holman CSB,® and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. The quote of 1 John 2:6 identified as RVL is Ray Vander Laan's own translation combining the texts of the NIV and the ESV.

ISBN 978-1-64607-200-2

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
HOW TO USE THIS PARTICIPANT GUIDE	8
THE WORDS OF THE <i>SHEMA</i>	9

## EPISODE GUIDES

---

The School	11
The Dust	21
The Friends	30
The Call	39
The Gennesaret	53
The Commandment	63
The Neighbor	73
The Samaritan	83
The Kingdom	96

---

GLOSSARY OF KEY WORDS	107
ABOUT RVL	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY	110
ABOUT THE PUBLISHER	111



# INTRODUCTION

*Just then someone came up and asked Him,  
“Teacher, **what good must I do** to have eternal life?”  
“Why do you ask Me about what is good?”  
He said to him. “There is only One who is good. If you want to **enter into  
life, keep the commandments.**”  
“**Which ones?**” he asked Him. Jesus answered:  
“Do not murder; do not commit adultery;  
do not steal; do not bear false witness;  
honor your father and your mother;  
and love your neighbor as yourself.”  
“I have kept all these,” the young man told Him.  
“**What do I still lack?**”  
“If you want to be **perfect [or complete],**” Jesus said to him, “**go, sell  
your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in  
heaven. Then come, follow Me.**”  
When the young man heard that command, he went away  
grieving, **because he had many possessions.**  
Matthew 19:16-22 (HCSB, emphasis added)*



## WELCOME TO SEASON 4 OF RVL DISCIPLESHIP: THE STUDY!

When contemplating what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, the interaction above is fascinating to consider. Many Christians tend to assume that “eternal life” here means this man is asking how to be “saved.” *What an odd question*, we might think. As a Jewish person, the young man was likely familiar with the *Torah* and the sacrifice system which provided assurance of forgiveness for the sins of God’s people. (We might also note that Jesus hadn’t died or resurrected yet at this point!) But it’s interesting to consider that this would have also been a misguided question in the Jewish mind.

After all, biblically literate Jews recognized that the Ten Commandments—the backbone of the laws they were to live by—were preceded by God’s declaration: “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2). Apparently, the Jewish people understood that God’s commandments demanded a prior commitment to the Lord as God—similar to the traditional Christian teaching that believing in Jesus is the faith basis of being “saved.” As a nation, Israel was redeemed through God’s mercy, based on their belief that He alone is God. God saw this commitment as the essential faith basis for the sacrificial system and for God’s covenant with His people. With that understanding, obedience to the law was not the way to *earn* salvation. Rather, faithfulness was meant to be their *response* to such a prior commitment. In the

Jewish mind, God's people obeyed His commandments to be His *tselem* on earth, not to earn some kind of reward.

In fact, we have records of Jewish teachers denouncing this very idea! In his book *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus*, author David Bivin points out two very telling rabbinical sayings:

*“Blessed is the man that delights in His commandments’—  
in His commandments, not the reward of His  
commandments” (a reference to Psalm 112).*

and

*“Do not be like slaves who serve their master to receive a  
reward; rather, be like slaves who do not serve their master  
to receive a reward” (a reference to Ephesians 6).*



The rich young man in Matthew 19 knew that God wanted His people to make a faith commitment to Him as their God alone, and then to seek to live faithful lives in order to live out the mission. This man's problem was that he had not fully devoted himself to a faithful response to his commitment. In *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*, authors Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg say Jesus' teaching emphasized that for His disciples, it was important to go beyond the minimum in carrying out God's mission if they wanted to experience the life God intended them to have.

It's easy to consider these ideas 2,000-plus years later and look down on the young man for trying to earn a reward for his faithfulness. But if we are honest with ourselves, how many times have we approached discipleship this way?

***What is the minimum amount of effort necessary to get credit for following Jesus? How much do I have to give up, and what can I keep for myself?***

Jesus' answer to this man shatters that mindset into a million pieces: ***If you want to be perfect (or complete), go sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow Me*** (see Matthew 19:21). In other words, ***Give up every single aspect of your life—everything you are, everything you do, and everything you own—in service to the marginalized around you.*** Jesus wanted this rich young man to shift his focus from trying to earn God's favor to joining God's mission! That was the only way the man would find what he was looking for.

Discipleship is not a part-time effort. It is not just one block of a neatly compartmentalized life. If we want to follow Jesus, we cannot give Him a few moments and keep back the rest. To be a disciple of Jesus means to surrender everything we have in service to others. We don't do this to earn our salvation; we do it out of devotion to Him.

Is this an intimidating thought? Certainly. But as Jesus makes clear, losing our lives in this way is the only way to truly find them:

*“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

*Matthew 16:24-25 (ESV)*



We spent the first three seasons of this study building a solid foundation for understanding the meaning of discipleship in the context of the first century. We began in season 1 by learning helpful tools for studying Scripture in context, identifying how the original audience likely experienced it, and looking at the central thread that ties all of Scripture together. In season 2 we explored the roots of discipleship in the Old Testament and considered Israel’s journey as God called, trained, and established them to be His redeemed partner—His “first disciple.” And in season 3, we considered Jesus’ human life in the context of the culture, especially focusing on His ministry as a first century Jewish rabbi.

In season 4 we will look back at everything we have learned so far to answer several key questions: What was a disciple in Jesus’ day? How did one become a disciple? What were disciples supposed to do, and how did their role fit into the larger culture? How did Jesus approach discipleship in culturally typical ways, and what did He do counterculturally? Most importantly, what might it look like for us to be disciples of Jesus today?

If we, like the young man in Matthew 19, want the *shalom* of eternity in our lives, then the only way forward is to follow Jesus—on His terms, not ours.

In this series, we are exploring this idea of discipleship through the lens of its original definition in Scripture. What did it mean to be a disciple of Jesus back then, and what does that mean for us today? This study is organized into four seasons, each building on the last as we explore how to walk the path that God has set before us.

The seasons are organized like this:

**SEASON 1** | Jesus’ disciples really knew their Bible. As modern-day followers of Jesus, it is vitally important for us to value Scripture in the same way. Season 1 of *The Study* outlines how we are meant to interact with the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament text: 1) approaching it from the context in which it was written; 2) exploring how Jesus used the Scriptures in His teaching; 3) understanding how His followers were meant to be changed by what they learned; and 4) identifying the major paradigm that ties the whole Bible together.

**SEASON 2** | Discipleship was formalized with the rise of rabbis in Jewish culture, but the concept really started much earlier than that. This idea of knowing God’s path and faithfully walking in it began when He called Israel out of Egypt, setting them apart as a kingdom of priests to show the rest of the world what He was like. Building on the tools and central themes from the first season, season 2 of *The Study* explores the roots of discipleship, examining how God trained and established the nation of Israel in preparation for Jesus’ ministry to come.

**SEASON 3** | What was daily life like for the Jews of Jesus' day? How did they practice their faith under Roman occupation? And most importantly, what did it mean to be a rabbi? Season 3 of *The Study* focuses on Jesus as a man, our God made flesh, who chose to reveal Himself as a first-century rabbi to a first-century Jewish audience.

**SEASON 4** | What did it mean to be the disciple of a rabbi in Jesus' day? How did someone become a disciple, and what were disciples meant to do? The fourth and final season of *The Study* focuses on the practical role of a rabbi's followers in the first century, unpacking cultural and scriptural implications and applying them to our lives as modern-day followers of Jesus.

Let's begin our fourth and final season of this study together!

### SHOULD I START THE STUDY IN SEASON 4?

Each individual season presents valuable material about discipleship, so if you're just joining the series here in season 4, there is plenty to benefit from. However, each of the four seasons is also designed to build upon the previous material. You will find that you get the most out of *The Study* by working through the episodes in order from the beginning.

That said, if you're part of a group that is ready to begin season 4, don't quit! You can certainly start here. Consider watching through the earlier season videos on your own, just to make sure you don't miss out.



# HOW TO USE THIS PARTICIPANT GUIDE

This participant guide for season 4 of *The Study* is organized into nine episode guides, each of which corresponds to a video. Each episode guide is broken up into the following movements:

**THE SHEMA** | (optional) Groups may choose to begin each meeting by reciting the *Shema* together, as a reminder of what we are committing to. Read “The Words of the *Shema*” section in the next few pages to refresh your memory on what we learned about the *Shema* in season 1.

**INTRODUCTION** | Groups are encouraged to read this aloud together, either choosing one reader or taking it in turns.

**TALK ABOUT IT** | To prepare for the video lesson, groups will discuss one simple conversation starter in response to the introduction.

**WATCH** | The video episode will be viewed as a group, using the provided outline to take individual notes.

**VIDEO DISCUSSION** | After the video episode, groups will use discussion questions to dig deeper into the content.

**TO WRAP IT UP** | Just like the introduction, this conclusion should be read aloud together.

**END IN PRAYER** | End each meeting by praying for one another, making use of the prayer prompts if your group finds them helpful.

**P.S.** | (optional) Each episode guide includes a P.S. section, which is full of additional material to read and respond to on your own between meetings.

## CAN I GO THROUGH SEASON 4 ON MY OWN?

Of course! This study is designed to be accessible not only for small groups, but also for individual users. If you’re going through this season without a group, simply follow the order of each episode guide on your own. You may wish to record your answers to the discussion questions in a journal.



# THE WORDS OF THE *SHEMA*

## WHAT IS IT?

The words of this ancient Jewish prayer first show up in Deuteronomy 6 as Moses encourages the Israelites to keep God's commands when they enter the Promised Land:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and  
with all your soul and with all your strength.*

*Deuteronomy 6:4-5*



We see throughout the Text (the Old Testament) that sometimes Israel did a great job keeping God's commands—and sometimes they did the exact opposite. By the time of Jesus, religious Jews were determined to get it right, to be as faithful as humanly possible to every word that came from the Lord's mouth. With the ever increasing pressure to worship the gods of Greece and Rome, the *Shema* became a sort of pledge of allegiance, an expression of Israel's mission. It was recited first thing in the morning, last thing at night, and many times in between as a reminder to be "all in."

This practice continues among religious Jews to this day—and they don't like saying it alone. Recognizing the power of accountability, the *Shema* is often recited in groups as a reminder that people need each other.

## WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH DISCIPLESHIP?

When Jesus was asked which was the most important of all of God's commandments, He had an answer instantly—and it's a direct quote from the *Shema*:

*"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: **'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'** The second is this: **'Love your neighbor as yourself.'** There is no commandment greater than these."*

*Mark 12:29-31 (emphasis added)*



In season 1, we learned that the Hebrew word *shema* means “to hear and obey accordingly.” For this study, we use the *Shema* prayer in the same way as the Jews of Jesus’ day: a loyalty oath that reminds us to be “all in” to the mission of God as His disciples. Groups have the option to recite it together at the beginning of each meeting, reminding ourselves that we aren’t meant to do this alone. We recite it in Hebrew to remember that it was relevant for God’s people thousands of years ago. Then, we recite it in English to acknowledge that it is just as relevant for us today.

The full text of the *Shema* includes two passages from Deuteronomy and one from Numbers. For this study, we will focus on the first part only, along with the part that Jesus adds in the Gospels:

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu—Adonai echad  
Ve’ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b’khol levavkah,  
uve’khol naphshekah,  
uve’khol me’odekah.  
Ve’ahavta l’re’acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*





## EPISODE 1

# THE SCHOOL

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.  
Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home  
and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get  
up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.  
Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

*Deuteronomy 6:6-9*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to season 4! If you've journeyed with us for the first three seasons, you will have likely built an incredible foundation for understanding discipleship. But you probably have at least one unresolved question: When are we actually going to talk about first-century disciples?

Great news, friends—the moment to answer that question is now. It's finally time to wade into those waters of this study, beginning with today's episode.

In seasons 1-3, we prepared for this very moment by exploring three broader foundational topics:

- how to approach the Bible in its context, as disciples
- how God laid the foundations of discipleship as the means to carry out His mission through His partnership with Israel
- how Jesus lived an ordinary life—fully God, fully human, and as a little “r” Jewish rabbi—to show us how to live out that mission

(If you have not yet worked your way through the earlier seasons, here's an enthusiastic nudge to do so! While season 4 has incredible insights to offer, you will get the most out of this study by building a complete foundation.)

With all this in mind, let's begin to explore what it meant to be a disciple of a rabbi in the time of Jesus. Just as we approach this subject with an existing foundation of knowledge from the previous seasons, disciples in the first century didn't start from ground zero. Those who sat at the feet of a rabbi were first prepared through a well-honed educational system—one that Jesus Himself likely participated in.

What did Scripture education look like in Jesus' day, and how did this ready a select few to become disciples under a rabbi? Let's get into today's episode and find out.

## TALK ABOUT IT

For those of you who have already completed one or more of the previous seasons, what has been most impactful for you? What has been most challenging? For any group members who are joining this study for the first time, what are you hoping to take away from the experience? Take a few minutes to discuss as a group in preparation to watch the first episode.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

*Talmid* is:

*Beth sefer* is:

*Beth midrash* is:

Other notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. What were *beth sefer* and *beth midrash*? Who would attend each class, and how were they different?

## QUESTION 2

---

What forms of Scripture education do you see in our culture today, and how are they similar/different to the Jewish system of Jesus' day? How do you see these modern forms working well? In what ways might today's methods be improved by gleaning from a system like *beth sefer* or *beth midrash*?

## QUESTION 3

---

In this episode, Ray Vander Laan (RVL) explains that in the Jewish mind, Scripture study is a form of worship. Take a moment to consider where you stand on the value of studying God's Word. Why is knowing the Bible such an essential part of being a disciple? At your stage of life, what do you find most challenging about studying and memorizing Scripture consistently?

# TO WRAP IT UP

It's easy for today's Bible readers to assume that people like Peter, James, and John began following Jesus with little to no idea what they were getting into—and in many ways, that was probably true. But in terms of Scripture knowledge, growing up in a place like Galilee (where Jesus spent most of His time) gave just about everyone the opportunity to be highly literate in the Text. These communities saw biblical literacy as essential preparation for life, and the Galilee region was especially passionate about making such knowledge accessible through their community schools.

As we wrap up this episode, let us ask two questions of ourselves. First, do we tend to think of Bible study as an “extracurricular activity”—an occasional “add-on” to our personal lives? Or, like the Jews of Jesus' day, do we consider time spent in the Word as a form of worship?

Second, how do we in modern Western culture value our own access to the Bible? Perhaps you grew up going to church and many Bible passages are familiar to you. Don't take that familiarity lightly! You might not have great swaths of Scripture memorized like the students of *beth sefer* and *beth midrash*, but having a foundational knowledge puts you closer to the level of the Jews in Jesus' day than you might think. In fact, the Bible knowledge you already possess is a privilege which many believers worldwide do not enjoy—at least not without risking danger and overcoming difficulties.

And if following Jesus is newer to you, the simple fact that you have relatively easy access to a Bible—to walk into a local church and receive a free copy, or even to join a study like this one in the first place—gives you a level of freedom that many first-century Jews didn't have.

If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we must, *must*, MUST take our study of the Word of God seriously. The apostle John opens his Gospel with the declaration that Jesus *was* the very Word, “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). He continues, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, ESV). Our Rabbi Jesus is the Word made into flesh—the very essence of what it looks like to interpret the Text and live it out faithfully. If we want to be His disciples—His *tselem* to a broken world—we must be continually becoming the Word in flesh. And we cannot become what we do not know.



# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Spend time praying for one another, that this study would be a bonding experience for your group and that the Holy Spirit would teach you in new ways.
- Ask the Lord to show you real, practical ways to walk as He walked, both individually and in community.
- Pray that each one of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take on Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A FEW P.S.'S

## *“At five years of age, the study of Scripture . . .”*

There is a rabbinical saying that sums up the stages of life and education for a typical Jewish male, beginning with his time spent in *beth sefer*. While this saying was written down after Jesus' day, it likely describes an earlier time. According to custom, boys would begin learning *Torah* at age five. (One could guess that in places like Galilee, where education was highly valued for all members of the community, this is also the age when girls would begin their formal study.) The saying continues that at age ten, a boy would begin to study the *Mishnah*—the rabbinic commentary on the *Torah*. At thirteen, he would have the opportunity for *bar mitzvah*, a coming-of-age ceremony dependent on knowledge of the Text. He would study *Talmud*, or rabbinic legal decisions, by age fifteen, and he would be ready for marriage and a trade sometime after turning eighteen.

While the Bible does not tell us much about Jesus' early life after His family's flight to Egypt during His infancy, we do know that He grew up in Nazareth, a village in Galilee. As discussed, education would have been highly encouraged in this region, and it's likely that Jesus Himself attended *beth sefer* and *beth midrash* along with the rest of His community.

In the modern West, we think of education as a means to prepare for a job or career—one of many stepping stones on the journey to achieving a goal. In Jesus' culture, however, education was meant to prepare one for every aspect of life—and indeed, Scripture study was thought of as a lifelong act of worship. Formal education in *beth sefer* generally ended around age twelve or thirteen, when most children began to help with their family business, but as we have discussed in detail, their study of the Text never ended.

It's easy to assume that in this culture, Scripture schools would be thought of as secondary to the synagogue (which evolved to become the Jewish place of worship), but it appears to be the other way around. To this day, we note that *beth midrash*, in particular, seems to be more prominent than the synagogue. This is not because education is esteemed more important than worship—but rather that these two things are not separated in the Jewish mind. As we touched on in today's episode, study of the Text was—and still is—considered one of the highest forms of worship for religious Jews. (For more on this subject, see *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus* by David Bivin, listed in the bibliography.)

## *“I have hidden your word in my heart . . .”*

Aside from being community centers, the Scripture schools of Jesus' day were usually tied to the local synagogue because this is where the scrolls of the Text were stored. The practice of writing was highly developed by the time Jesus was born, but as we discussed in season 3, writing materials were expensive! The approximately twenty scrolls of Jewish Scripture could cost upward of a year's wages to acquire. That's why communities often pooled their resources—or even teamed up with neighboring

towns—to purchase shared copies, which would be kept in the synagogue. Ordinary Jewish homes might own a “personal copy” of perhaps one of these scrolls, but very few people had individual access to more than a fraction of the library of Scripture. The community typically went to synagogue to study the Text, and it made sense for schools to do so as well.

The shared use of biblical scrolls also meant that learning required memorization. Rabbis encouraged their students to memorize passages through ongoing repetition. We find in the *Talmud* that this practice often began when children were young, using mnemonic devices and other methods to commit their lessons to memory. By the time of a young man's *bar mitzvah*, he was expected to have large portions of *Torah* memorized.

The scarcity of Scripture scrolls wasn't the only reason memorization was so highly emphasized. Recall that in the time of the Exodus, when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He commanded them to keep His words in their minds and hearts:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. **These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them** when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. **Write them** on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

*Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (emphasis added)*



Later, the psalmist would write:

*"I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you."*

*Psalm 119:11*



Memorization and repetition were the Jewish way to let God's Word sink deep into their bones, guarding them from the trap of sin that leads to *tohu*. It seems that most religious Jews of Jesus' day were committed to living out the Text to the best of their ability; they wanted every part of their lives to be saturated in God's Word. In the Jewish mind, you could never read or recite it enough—there was always something more to gain, because in their shared experience of the Text, God's very presence dwelt. As the rabbinical saying went, "If [a student] learns *Torah* and does not go over it again and again, he is like a man who sows without reaping."

Followers of Jesus today would benefit tremendously from adopting this attitude toward the Bible, hiding it deep in our hearts until it informs everything we say and do. As we discussed in today's episode, a disciple is meant to become like Jesus—the Word in flesh who put God on display to a broken world. And how can we *model* the Word of God to others unless we know it well?

### ***Now It's Your Turn***

In the time before your next meeting, choose a portion of Scripture to memorize. Even after you've committed it to memory, make a point to continue reciting it daily. You might consider adding an additional verse each day until you have a longer passage memorized. Pay attention to how this passage remains in the forefront of your mind the more you recite it.



RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 2

THE DUST

*Whoever claims to be in him must walk as Jesus walked.*

*1 John 2:6 (RVL)*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

A major theme for this study has been the apostle John’s encouragement to “walk as Jesus walked” (1 John 2:6). We understand this in a metaphorical sense, of course, since we weren’t in Galilee 2,000-plus years ago to take it literally. We aren’t able to imitate Jesus’ pace and gait, to mirror His arm swings, to follow in His exact footsteps like children walking a path in the snow. We’ve spent enough time considering the Hebrew ways of thinking to value truth communicated through metaphor, and many translations even phrase this verse as simply, “live as Jesus lived.”

But what if this instruction is less abstract or metaphorical than we assume?

In season 3 we discussed how the role of a rabbi was to not only teach the interpretation of the Text, but also to model how God’s people should put that interpretation into practice. A disciple who followed such an honored teacher would “take the yoke” that his rabbi taught, learning to teach and obey the Text by example. The disciple’s role, therefore, was to copy his rabbi’s every move. His job was to—quite literally—walk as the rabbi walked.

As we ponder a fuller definition of “disciple” in today’s episode, let’s begin to imagine what such “walking” looks like when Jesus is our rabbi. What does Jesus teach and do—both in Scripture and in our lives today? What does it look like to copy Him? And how can we stay close enough to Him to even answer these questions in the first place?

Let’s discuss as we prepare to start today’s episode.

# TALK ABOUT IT

As a group, make a short list of things you recall Jesus doing in Scripture—everything from major events such as “feeding the 5,000” to seemingly insignificant ones such as “eating dinner” or “sleeping in a boat.” (This can be quick—just list things you remember off the top of your head.) How do you see the disciples joining or copying Jesus in some of these actions, and what might we take from this?

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*Whoever claims to be in him must walk as Jesus walked.*

*1 John 2:6 (RVL)*



A *disciple* is:

RVL's "Jewish motto":

Other notes:



# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. What was RVL's definition of a *disciple* in this episode? What does this definition require of a disciple, and how might this be different from or more challenging than the way Western cultures often think about being a Christian?

## QUESTION 2

---

While leading study trips abroad, much of RVL's teaching happens while walking to and from historical sites. Those closest in proximity to him can more easily hear these teachings, while those farther behind might not. In this episode, RVL emphasized the importance of staying close enough to the rabbi to catch his words; he also stressed that it's the responsibility of those in front to pass what they hear down the line. It's not only in your best interest for you to hear and understand the information, but to make sure that everyone does as well.

What can we learn from these concepts in our "walk" with Jesus? How can we approach discipleship together as a spiritual community?

## QUESTION 3

---

What was the "Jewish motto" RVL quotes in this episode? What does it mean to "stay dusty," and what might this look like in the context of following Jesus?

# TO WRAP IT UP

So far in this study, we have examined many attributes of a disciple. A disciple is someone who joins God's story, who "throws his/her stone" as part of the mission to bring *shalom* to chaos. A disciple is someone who takes seriously the idea of being God's *tselem*, His image to a broken world. A disciple is someone with *pratz*—intense, 110 percent passion to share the gospel of the Kingdom. And, of course, a disciple is someone who follows the teaching and example of a rabbi.

Now let's tie all these attributes together into one coherent definition:

*A disciple is someone with intense, intentional commitment to becoming more and more like Jesus every day.*

Can you see how this fits into the foundation we've established thus far—how God prepared His people over history to follow Him in this way? A disciple's commitment is one that lasts a lifetime. We don't attain a certain level and simply stop. We are committing to a process that will never end, at least on this side of eternity.

As we discussed in season 3, Jesus lived an ordinary human life so that He could show us what it looks like. He is the Word in flesh, the living embodiment of all the attributes we have studied throughout our time together. It is only if we are willing to follow His example—to "walk as He walked"—that we can truly call ourselves His disciples. We must take this idea literally, following Jesus not only in our hearts, but also in every aspect of our lives.

As we continue our study of how discipleship worked in Jesus' day, let's keep this definition at the forefront of our minds. Pay attention to how it played out in the lives of the twelve disciples, and consider how it ought to change the way we approach our faith today.

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

If you'd like some ideas, here are some points you might pray about:

- Pray through some practical ideas for how to “stay dusty” together.
- Ask the Lord to show you real, practical ways to walk as He walked, both individually and in community.
- Pray that each one of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, and equipped with the wisdom and courage to take on Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A FEW P.S.'S

## ***“Disciple”—some Hebrew language context***

Earlier we learned that the Hebrew word for “disciple” is *talmid*, which literally means “student” or “learner.” The term takes on a broader meaning in modern Hebrew; students are simply referred to as *talmidim* (the plural form). In Jesus’ day, however, this word referred to a certain type of student—specifically, a disciple who participated in an apprentice-like learning system under a Jewish rabbi.

If we dig a little deeper into the Hebrew language, we find that *talmid* actually comes from the root word *lamad*. *Lamad* is one of the more intense words in the Hebrew language, but it translates into English as “to practice intentionally.”

Does the relationship between *lamad* and *talmid* now begin to make more sense?

Think of a famous athlete—someone like basketball player Caitlin Clark. Not only is she a fantastic team player, but she is also particularly talented at making three-point baskets. How do you suppose she acquired that ability? She practiced intentionally! Clark certainly has natural talent, but she has also put enormous time and energy into honing specific aspects of her game, and it shows. In the heat of a game, Clark has drilled her techniques so thoroughly that she knows how to react to any number of scenarios—and making three-pointers has become her specialty.

***Lamad, lamad, lamad.***

Yet we rarely approach following Jesus in this way. It’s far too easy to treat imitating Christ as a theoretical concept. We know that Jesus taught and modeled “love your enemy,” but we don’t look for opportunities to actively demonstrate such love. We know that Jesus said, “Give to the one who asks,” but more often we speculate about motives and intentions and whether we’re being “scammed” by people who are in need. The principles from Scripture are in our brains somewhere, but rarely do we treat everyday life with the intentionality of an athlete practicing how to react during the pressure of competition.

This is not the Jewish understanding of how one should imitate the rabbi. A *talmid* is someone who knows what it is to *lamad*—to engage in intentional, repeated practice. A disciple wakes up every morning and intentionally treats every situation as a chance to practice being like the rabbi. ***How would my rabbi react when someone cuts him off on the freeway? How would my rabbi react when someone asks for money in the grocery store parking lot? How would my rabbi react when someone wants to debate an issue?*** Every single moment of every single day is a chance to imitate the rabbi’s example—a chance to put the yoke into practice.

***Lamad, lamad, lamad.***

## ***Be covered with the dust of His feet***

RVL once attended an event at which a renowned Jewish scholar was invited to speak. His topic was discipleship, and this man had an interesting take on the idea of following Jesus as a rabbi. He said (to paraphrase), “Christians talk a lot about being disciples. I question it.”

A bit taken aback, RVL thought, ***Well, that doesn't seem right. What right does this man have to question it?***

The scholar continued: “If you claim to be a disciple of Jesus, and you don't read the four Gospels once a week, on a regular basis, then you are a liar. There is no way you could possibly know Jesus well enough to be like Him.”

Strong words! And yet, considering all we have learned about the rabbi/disciple relationship, is this statement without foundation?

It's true that as believers we have the Holy Spirit living in our hearts to guide and empower and counsel us. And it's true that God is present with and often works through the lives of other believers. But Jesus is called the Word made flesh—the living example of what it looks like to join the mission. Every teaching, every prophetic word, and every decision we make ought to be measured against Jesus' interpretation of Scripture. We only cripple ourselves (and others) if we do not know His words. We “stay dusty” by immersing ourselves in Jesus' teaching. If we want to be His disciples, we should be doing everything we can to learn from His example.

In the spirit of “staying dusty,” RVL challenges his students to read one Gospel per month, every month. That averages out to less than one chapter a day; the longest Gospel is Matthew, and it has only twenty-eight chapters.

“Do this every month for three years,” RVL encourages, “and see what it does to you. You cannot spend that much time with Jesus without being changed.”

## ***Now It's Your Turn***

Take the challenge to read the four Gospels on a monthly rotation seriously! At less than a chapter a day, even if you miss one here or there, you can still easily achieve the goal. (You might consider listening to an audio version through your Bible app if that is your preference.) Immerse yourself in Jesus' words and actions. Even on days when nothing feels profound, the simple act of hearing or reading the Gospels over and over will help you hide the words deep in your heart and enable you to recall them when life calls for it.



RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 3

THE FRIENDS

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that  
God's Spirit dwells in your midst? . . . You together are that temple.*

*1 Corinthians 3:16, 17*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

It should come as no surprise that as we explore what it means to be a disciple, the emphasis will be on doing so in *community*. We learned in season 3 that—especially in Galilee, where Jesus conducted much of His ministry—much of Jewish life was communal in nature. Families lived in close proximity; the work of daily trades often took place in the courtyards of private homes; and the synagogue system encouraged study of the Text in groups. Community, community, community . . .

Did we mention that nearly everything was done in community?

In modern Western culture, we tend to think (and live) more individually. This isn't necessarily a negative thing—in many ways, such a mindset can foster fairness and organization. But it does tend to rob our culture of opportunities for teamwork, shifting our focus toward what we can accomplish on our own. More often than not, our natural inclination is to understand discipleship in terms of our own progress. We like to grade ourselves based on personal knowledge and accomplishment, instead of viewing life as a community endeavor.

Yet it seems that the rabbis of the first century—including Jesus—recognized that disciples needed teammates just as much as they needed a teacher. Rarely, if ever, would a rabbi intentionally take on only a single disciple. The typical practice was to form a carefully selected group, usually members of varying ages, who could encourage one another, learn from one another, and model for each other what it meant to walk as their rabbi walked. Like everything else in Jewish life, discipleship took place in community.

What does this mean for us today? What can it look like to walk as Jesus walked, even in an individualistic culture? Let's discuss as we prepare to jump into today's episode.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Think back on your own experiences with believing communities. What about modern culture makes it easy to find and bond with other believers? What makes it difficult? Discuss as a group.



# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*Don't you know that **you yourselves are God's temple** and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? . . . **You together** are that temple.*

*1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 (emphasis added)*

*I am a friend to all who fear you,  
to all who follow your precepts.*

*Psalm 119:63*

*"You are my friends if you do what I command."*

*John 15:14*



*Haverim/havurah* mean:

Other notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. What are *haverim* in the Jewish context? How is this idea different from modern definitions of "friends" in Western culture?

## QUESTION 2

---

As a group, recall moments when God called you to take on something difficult; a time when you had to step out of your comfort zone or when you struggled through a challenging season of your faith. How were you challenged and encouraged to persevere by believing friends—or how would you have *wanted* to be supported in this way?

## QUESTION 3

---

What might it look like to be *haverim* to one another—intentional, committed friends united by your walk with Jesus—in a modern context? What practical steps can we take to form or grow this kind of community today?

# TO WRAP IT UP

It has been said—reverently at times, yet free of any theological basis—that Jesus’ greatest miracle was having twelve close friends in His thirties.

It’s funny . . . because *it’s sort of true*.

It’s no secret that adult friendships can be challenging to develop. Without the proximity and abundance of affinity-based activities that one finds in typically younger settings such as school or college, adult relationships can take far more time and effort to nurture. Maintaining even one or two close adult friendships can feel downright impossible! The way that modern Western cultures approach adult life can leave many of us feeling alone, and this feeling often carries over to relationships in the church. We are used to looking for that spark of instant connection when it comes to close friends, and it can be discouraging to find ourselves surrounded by believers we don’t necessarily click with—or even have the time to get to know.

The thing about Jesus’ *havurah*, though, is that it wasn’t made up of people who just naturally got along. In previous episodes, we’ve touched on the obvious clash between Matthew, a tax collector, and Simon the Zealot, natural political enemies whose animosity might have led to violence under any other circumstance. But heated political hatred aside, have you ever taken on a group project with, well, other human beings? We don’t always get along!

Jesus’ disciples were (likely) a rowdy group of (likely) twelve- to twenty-something-year-olds who left behind homes, beds, existing friendships, reliable sources of food, and basically everything they were accustomed to. They now spent their time trying not to drown in the Sea of Galilee, entering stressful places such as Samaria or the Decapolis, or going hungry in someone’s wheat field on the Sabbath day. You just *know* a group that size would have irritated each other even under the most favorable circumstances—and we can say with certainty that the disciples did not always have it easy. Even Peter complained to Jesus about his own brother, Andrew: “How many times do I have to forgive him?” (see Matthew 18).

*Haverim* are friends who are united by their intense, intentional commitment to follow their rabbi. Not by their shared hobbies. Not because their personalities mesh well. Not because they particularly like each other. Their shared commitment is the secret ingredient to growing a lasting friendship—the kind of friendship that is more fulfilling than you can imagine.

Look around you (the group participating in this study is a great place to start). Who are the believers that are nearby in your life? Start being *haverim* to one another, regardless of whether there is an immediate spark of friendship. Study together. Pray with one another. Show up for each other. Challenge one another to *shema* and look for ways to cultivate *shalom* together. You will be astounded by the ways the Kingdom of God can grow—and how close you will become—when two or more people decide to do this discipleship thing as a team.

Go get some *haverim*!

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Pray that God would provide and grow deep and lasting *haverim*-style friendships among your group and in each of your lives.
- Pray that each one of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, and equipped with the wisdom and courage to take on Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A FEW P.S.'S

## *We can do hard things—together*

The Gospel of Mark records an interesting snapshot into the life of Jesus' disciples. In chapter 5, Jesus takes the Twelve across the Sea of Galilee to the Decapolis, a Gentile region. When they land, a demon-possessed man comes running out of some tombs and yells at Jesus. Jesus gets out of the boat, sets the man free, and sends the demons into a herd of pigs nearby, which promptly careen off a cliff into the lake. (If you've ever wondered whether Jesus cares more about thriving commerce or suffering individuals, well, here you go.)

Those tending the pigs run to the nearby city to tell everyone. A crowd of terrified people show up and beg Jesus to leave. The no-longer-possessed man begs Jesus for permission to join Him, but Jesus sends the man home to tell his story. Jesus returns to the boat, and all thirteen men head back to the Jewish side of the water.

If you read this story closely, you'll notice an interesting omission. There's plenty of action happening on the shore—lots of running and yelling and rescuing and counseling and begging things of Jesus. But what's missing? What characters are suspiciously absent here?

In both Mark's and Matthew's account, it quickly becomes clear: The disciples don't seem to ever get out of the boat.

We've alluded to this story in earlier seasons, focusing on the fact that the disciples were supposed to follow Jesus. By now we know that a disciple was meant to imitate his rabbi in every situation, so it would have been a big deal if the Twelve failed to join Jesus on the shore. But for today, the point is this: Being a disciple of Jesus will always, at one point or another, mean following Him somewhere that makes you uncomfortable.

***Maybe that's one reason Jesus set up His disciples to do this thing as a team.***

There will certainly be moments in life when we must respond to situations by ourselves. There are plenty of believers, especially in places that are unwelcoming or even hostile toward the Christian faith, who find themselves largely alone for periods of time. But that is not how God intended us to live.

When God made Adam, one of the first things He said was, "It's not good for this man to be alone," thus He also created Eve (see Genesis 2:18).

When God began the process of redeeming His fallen human partners, He turned to a family (Genesis 12).

When Israel was in the desert, God put His Spirit on a group of seventy elders to help share the burden of leadership with Moses (Numbers 11).

David had thirty-seven mighty men with him in war and in peace (2 Samuel 23).

Daniel had three close friends committed to serving the Lord with him in Babylon (Daniel 3).

Zerubbabel, the descendant of the last king of Judah, had Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the prophet (plus nine other named leaders) with him when the first wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 2).

The angel of the Lord didn't only explain the plan for Jesus' birth to Mary; he told Joseph as well (Matthew 1).

And Jesus did not call just one man to follow Him: There were twelve men and also a group of women mentioned in Scripture who became the first messengers of the Good News. And even when Jesus sent them on ahead, they were always in groups of two (Mark 6).

***Community, community, community.***

We do not need—and should not try—to do this discipleship thing alone!

### ***Now It's Your Turn***

In the time before your next meeting, make an effort to reach out to at least one other believer. If you are going through this study as a group, consider taking on last episode's challenge to read the four Gospels regularly. Get together to pray, discuss what you are reading, or take some other steps toward forming committed friendships. It may feel awkward at first—in fact, it probably will—but it is worth it to find some *haverim*!



RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 4

THE CALL

*"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I  
will send you out to fish for people."*

*Matthew 4:19*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*





# INTRODUCTION

Let's recap what we know so far about becoming a first-century disciple to a rabbi.

We learned that the cultural practice was to encourage Scripture education from a young age. Elementary-school-aged boys (and girls, apparently, at least among the religious Jews of Galilee) would attend *beth sefer*, a class put on by the community that educated children in the *Torah*. After coming of age, teenagers would join their family trade and prepare for marriage, continuing their education through the *beth midrash* class. We noted that *beth midrash* was attended by everyone in the community as they had time, and it was more like going to church than a structured educational experience with grades and graduations. *Beth midrash* never ended; it served as an ongoing way for the community to immerse itself in the Text together.

This education did not replace one's trade. Rather, the idea was that knowing the Text helped prepare people for life. It was taken for granted (at least among religious Jews) that to be God's people was to be immersed in and obedient to His words, so it would have been a no-brainer that everyone should know the Text on some level. In this way the entire religious community was at least informally engaged in discipleship.

But where do the actual disciples come in? How did one go from working a trade and attending *beth midrash* to following a great rabbi? And how did Jesus' twelve followers end up in His *havurah*?

Let's discuss as we prepare to begin today's episode.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Imagine being at work (or school, or home, or wherever you spend most of your time) when, suddenly, a rabbi from Nazareth shows up. He asks you to drop everything and follow Him. Putting aside everything you already know about Jesus and simply imagining this interaction in today's culture, what would your reaction be, and why? Discuss as a group.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.** Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. **Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.***

*Matthew 4:18-22 (emphasis added)*

***“You did not choose me, but I chose you** and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”*

*John 15:16 (emphasis added)*



The cultural process of becoming a disciple to a rabbi:

Other notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. How did someone become a disciple to a rabbi in the culture of Jesus' day? How was Jesus countercultural in this process? How do you think this would have changed the disciples' perspective of their ability to follow, or their perceived value in the Kingdom of God?

## QUESTION 2

---

How does Jesus gain new disciples today? How would you articulate the requirements to be a disciple of Jesus, based on what we've learned so far?

## QUESTION 3

---

How do these ideas change your perspective of following Jesus today? Where does our value come from, and what makes us capable of being disciples in the first place?

# TO WRAP IT UP

In season 3 we talked about how Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah, the anointed King who would usher in the Kingdom of God. We compared the way that Jesus announced His kingship and exercised His power to the way that Caesar and the other rulers of the time grappled for domination and control. It was fascinating to see how Jesus turned the existing system of authority on its head. Instead of using His divine identity to force the nations into submission, He brought the Kingdom near through sacrificial love.

In the same way, Jesus also turned the whole system of discipleship upside down! Instead of looking for individuals who *deserved* to be there and waiting for them to feel qualified enough to apply, He invited people who had never been accepted by other rabbis to follow Him. They didn't have to earn anything. Their value was not in who they made themselves to be, but in who Jesus called them to become. Jesus' disciples had the right to be at His table simply because He said so.

How might this affect the way we carry ourselves today? We will never deserve to be Jesus' disciples based on merit. We will never be good enough on our own—as Jesus says in the Text, the only One who is good is God Himself (Matthew 19:17). It is Jesus' invitation to follow Him—a call that He extends to every human being through the redeeming power of His death on the cross—that makes us worthy to respond. As Paul would later write:

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. . . . While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Romans 5:6, 8*



Your value is infinite, because the One who appraised you is worth infinitely more! What freedom we can have in remembering not only that Jesus thinks us worthy to be His disciples, but also in knowing that He will give us everything we need to be such.

As RVL said in today's episode, you might decide to say no to Jesus' invitation to be His disciple. You are free to do that; He gives each of us the choice. But you can never say you *can't* do it—because Jesus says you *can*.

Let's move into a time of prayer as we consider all that we learned today.

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- In smaller groups of two or three, as people feel comfortable, talk about any spiritual insecurities you struggle with. Pray through these concerns with each other, declaring the truth that Jesus' invitation to all of humanity makes us worthy to follow Him—no matter how many mistakes we make along the way. Pray according to John 15:16 specifically:

*"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."*

- Pray that each of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A FEW P.S.'S

## *How old were the disciples?*

In classic Western religious artwork, the disciples are often portrayed as solemn, gray-bearded old men. It is possible that these depictions are accurate (there are a couple of historical examples of elderly men following a rabbi—the great rabbi Akiba, for example, was fairly old before he ever became a disciple, well before he was ready to take on *talmidim* of his own), but based on the cultural context and the few hints we see in Scripture, many scholars make the case that Jesus' disciples could have been quite young. Some even propose that John might have been twelve years old or younger when Jesus called him.

From what we know about the Jewish education system in Jesus' day, which appears to have been already evolving into what it would become some 100 years later, Jewish boys were encouraged to attend *beth sefer* beginning at roughly an elementary school age. This was especially emphasized in Galilee, and at least five of Jesus' disciples seem to have come from that region. After *bar mitzvah*, young men would typically join the family trade while continuing to study in the *beth midrash*. As RVL pointed out in earlier episodes, it was primarily those young men who showed promise in *beth sefer* who were most often encouraged to spend extra time in *beth midrash* and later find themselves a rabbi. This age group generally had more energy, more willingness to learn and adapt to new things, and less established responsibility. For these reasons, when rabbis considered new disciples, they often chose from this pool of young men between ages twelve and twenty, thus Jesus might very well have done the same. It is possible and even likely that His twelve disciples were roughly what we would consider junior high to college age today.

The Bible gives us a few clues to support this theory. First, the fact that Matthew was already established as a tax collector and that Peter, Andrew, James, and John were working as fishermen has often been taken to mean that they were adults engaged in full-fledged careers. This is certainly possible, but remember, children typically learned and participated in their family trades from a young age. The accepted practice was to start working full time after "graduating" *beth sefer*, which usually took place at age twelve or thirteen. So the fact that these disciples were working when Jesus called them is not sufficient proof of older age. From what we know of the culture, it is just as likely that at least some of them were teenagers working in the family business.

Second, Matthew 10 records Jesus sending the Twelve out ahead of Him to various towns, empowering them to heal and to drive out demons. He gave them a series of instructions for this journey, everything from what to preach to how to behave. He concluded with encouragements in the event that people mistreated the disciples, and then He added:

*“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to **one of these little ones who is my disciple**, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”*

*Matthew 10:42 (emphasis added)*



Some have taken this wording (“little ones”) to mean that the disciples were still immature believers who were new to their roles. But in an honor/shame culture like that of the Jews, calling adult or middle-aged men “little ones” would have been quite the insult. Jesus doesn’t mince words when He rebukes hypocritical religious leaders, but this is not one of those cases. More likely, scholars suggest, this is a clue that the group was at least younger than Jesus—whom Luke tells us was in His thirties (see Luke 3).

Finally, Matthew also records another story that offers some interesting cultural clues:

*After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of **the two-drachma Temple tax** came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the Temple tax?”*

*“Yes, he does,” he replied.*

*When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”*

*“From others,” Peter answered.*

*“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a **four-drachma** coin. Take it and give it to them for **my tax and yours**.”*

*Matthew 17:24-27 (emphasis added)*



The tax referred to in this passage comes from God's instructions to Moses in Exodus 30—a tax that at that time was tied to census-taking:

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, **those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord.**"*

*Exodus 30:11-14 (emphasis added)*



By Jesus' day, the tax was used to keep the Temple up and running. Recall that at this point, Israel was under the control of Rome and no longer minted their own money; instead, they used *drachma* and *denarii*. (See the P.S. sections in season 2 for more interesting info about the drama surrounding Roman money in the Temple.) All Jewish men twenty years of age and older were expected to pay a two-drachma tax to satisfy this command from Exodus 30.

In Matthew 17, who does Jesus provide tax money for? Only for Himself and Peter! Out of the fish's mouth came a four-drachma coin, which was enough to pay for two men aged twenty or older. Perhaps the other disciples paid their own tax, or perhaps they were elsewhere at the time, but many take this passage to mean that Peter was the only disciple over the age of twenty.

Scripture also tells us that Peter had a mother-in-law, whom Jesus heals in Matthew 8. The typical marrying age for Jewish males (not taking second marriages into account) was between eighteen and twenty, so this further confirms that Peter was likely in his early twenties.

Throughout the Gospels, Peter also behaves like the oldest disciple. Remember, rabbis often chose disciples of varying ages, which allowed the older ones to practice setting an example and provided the younger ones with role models. RVL observes that even to this day, custom dictates that younger disciples will not speak or give their opinion until after the older ones have done so. This is both a sign of respect and a way for younger *talmidim* to learn from the example of their older *haverim*. In the Gospels, Peter is constantly the one who speaks and acts before the others, which would be in keeping with this custom.

In the end, it truly doesn't matter how old the disciples were when Jesus called them. But considering the possibility that some could have been as young as twelve, it's clear that discipleship is something everyone can participate in, no matter how ready you think you are.



## *How did a disciple become a rabbi?*

We need to keep a few things in mind when considering this question. First, remember that as we learned in season 3, “rabbi” was not an official, ordain-able occupation until after Jesus’ time. The little “r” rabbis of Jesus’ day were known as sages—honored teachers who had demonstrated great knowledge of the Text and spent time teaching it to others. The title “rab” or “rabbi” in that time period was more of an honorific term, not a job title such as “pastor” or “reverend.” When people call Jesus “rabbi” in Scripture, they are essentially calling Him “master”—to acknowledge His knowledge of the Text and His ability to teach and interpret it.

Thus to be a rabbi was not an occupation in the same way that the job of pastor or priest is today. Recall how we learned that rabbis appear to have been generally itinerant, traveling around to teach and dependent on the hospitality of others instead of taking a wage. It seems that many sages also relied on “day jobs” in addition to their teaching activities. For example, Shammai—a well-known rabbi we’ve mentioned already and will spend more time discussing later this season—was a construction business owner, sort of like an architect. Hillel, another teacher we’ve introduced briefly, was a woodcutter by trade. We see in the New Testament that a group of women supported Jesus financially out of their own means, but He was also skilled as a *tecton*, or builder (Luke 8:3).

In other words, nobody in Jesus’ day became a rabbi in the same way that someone is hired for a job as an ordained religious leader today. A disciple’s goal back then was to become as much like his rabbi as possible, and at some point, he would—presumably with the blessing of his rabbi—venture out on his own to teach others as he himself had been taught.

In the P.S. section of episode 1, we mentioned there is a rabbinic saying in the *Talmud* that sums up the expected stages of life for Jewish males. According to this tradition, the age of thirty was “the peak of strength,” and this appears to have been the age at which a disciple was expected to take on the role of teacher. Depending on what age a disciple began to follow his rabbi, he may have spent ten or fifteen years studying under his teacher by that point. In the Hebrew Bible, Joseph was thirty years old when he began working for Pharaoh (Genesis 41). Saul was thirty when he became king (1 Samuel 13), as was David (2 Samuel 5). It seems that when a man reached “the peak of strength,” he was expected to come into his own. This expectation might have continued with disciples and rabbis too.

Interestingly, Luke tells us that Jesus was “about thirty years old” when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23). The word *about* tells us that He might have been slightly younger or older, but Luke is showing the reader that Jesus was following the typical cultural process of beginning to teach at around that age.

## Did Jesus have female disciples?

If you thought Jesus was countercultural in the way He called the Twelve to follow Him, you must understand that having female *talmida* would have truly upset the apple cart. At least in Galilee, girls attended *beth sefer* and women were certainly welcome in *beth midrash*, but it was not culturally typical for rabbis to accept women as disciples. Yet, as we've seen, Jesus was not always culturally typical.

So, did Jesus invite women to follow as disciples? The short answer, it seems, is not *officially*. But that doesn't necessarily mean no.

The Bible tells us that there were women who certainly acted *disciple-ish*. Let's take a look at a few examples. First, Luke records:

*After this, **Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another**, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. **The Twelve were with him, and also some women** who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: **Mary (called Magdalene)** from whom seven demons had come out; **Joanna** the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; **Susanna; and many others**. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

Luke 8:1-3 (emphasis added)



Notice, what are the women doing in this passage? They are traveling around with Jesus—exactly what disciples are supposed to do. They weren't only supporting Him, or hosting Him and His disciples when they came to town. They were doing exactly what the Twelve did. The Gospels never call them "disciples," but it is clear that these women were acting disciple-like.

Mark writes in his chapter 3:

*Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*

...

*Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."*

*"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.*

*Then he looked at **those seated in a circle around him** and said, **"Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."***

Mark 3:20, 31-35 (emphasis added)

Notice that Jesus is redefining His *beth ab*. He certainly would have still thought of His immediate family as His *beth ab*, but He is extending the boundaries to include those who follow Him—those who are intensely committed to becoming like Him in their walk with God. In other words, Jesus’ *beth ab* includes all who act as His disciples.

In that honor/shame culture, it would have been an insult of the gravest kind to refer to an all-male group as “my brother and sister and mother.” If there were only men present, committing to act disciple-like, He would have just shamed them all with those words. Jesus’ response here implies that there must have been both men and women present—both men and women counted among His followers. Nothing in this passage blatantly tells us, “Jesus called female disciples,” but it does indicate Jesus’ approval of women making a disciple-like commitment to follow Him.

One last example comes from one of the most familiar passages in the Gospels: the story of Mary and Martha. Jesus and His disciples traveled to the village of Bethany and stayed in the home of His friend Lazarus, who lived with his sisters, Martha and Mary. You know the story: Martha got stuck doing all the preparations while Mary sat listening to Jesus. But what phrase is actually used here?

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who **sat at the Lord’s feet** listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”*  
*“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. **Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.**”*

*Luke 10:38-42 (emphasis added)*



To “sit at his feet” was a phrase that referred to studying under a rabbi as only a disciple would. Paul would later say in Acts (also written by Luke, by the way), “I am a Jew, brought up in this city [Jerusalem] . . . I sat at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). The idea is that the rabbi teaches while his disciples sit around his feet listening. Luke used the same technical term to describe Mary’s relationship to Jesus as he would later record Paul employing to describe his study under the famous rabbi Gamaliel. This implies that the Gospel writer likely recognized disciple-like behavior in Mary.

So, how do we answer that question, *Did Jesus have female disciples?* The answer is no, not officially, and we should not try to twist Scripture to fit modern cultural norms. It is clear that Jesus took great pains to pave the way for His culture to shift in this direction. He gladly accepted and approved of women who wanted to follow His example in disciple-like ways, making room for them in a culture that persisted in keeping them on the outside.

### ***Now It's Your Turn***

In the time before your next meeting, ask God to reveal any spiritual insecurities that you carry. Spend time in prayer about these, either on your own or with some *haverim*, allowing Jesus' appraisal of your worth to change the way you see yourself.



# RVL

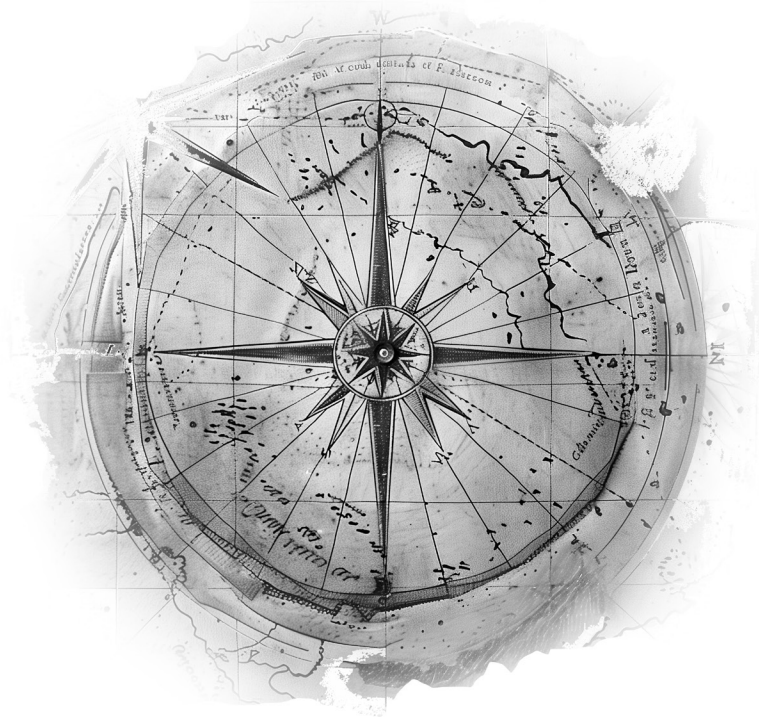
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

## EPISODE 5

# THE GENNESARET

*Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

*Mark 6:45-46*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

Earlier in this season, RVL talked about the rabbinical practice of leading by example. Rabbis in Jesus' time generally expected their disciples to do what they did, not only by following their teachings but also their actions. RVL recalled encouraging this mindset on his study trips by doing unexpected things, such as walking directly into rivers with his shoes on, taking unnecessary "shortcuts" through thorny bushes, or running at a surprising pace just to see who would imitate him. The lesson, of course, is that this is how we are meant to follow Jesus—imitating His example and following His instructions, simply because He said so.

But what if Jesus requires more from us than getting our shoes wet? What happens when imitating Him means stepping into something risky? What if obedience to our Rabbi lands us somewhere we never expected to end up?

In today's episode, we will examine how the disciples responded to a situation where their obedience not only led them into danger, but also ended unexpectedly. How did they react while going through such challenges, and how did Jesus handle the outcome?

Let's discuss as we prepare for today's video.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Recall a time in your faith journey when circumstances took an unexpected turn. Where was God in the process, and how did you come through it? Discuss as a group.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and **go on ahead of him to Bethsaida**, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

*Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.*

*Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.*

*When they had crossed over, **they landed at Gennesaret** and anchored there.*

*Mark 6:45-53 (emphasis added)*

*When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to **a solitary place**. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

...

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

*"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."*



*"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"*  
*Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.*  
*"You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"*  
*And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.*  
*Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying,*  
*"Truly you are the Son of God."*  
*When they had crossed over, **they landed at Gennesaret.***  
*And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. **People brought all their sick to him** and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and **all who touched it were healed.***

*Matthew 14:13-14, 22-36 (emphasis added)*



Notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Why do you think Peter got out of the boat? Why might the other disciples have chosen not to? What would you have done in this situation, and why?

## QUESTION 2

---

When the disciples first began to struggle against the storm, where was Jesus? What was He doing? How might this story change the way we think about the metaphorical “storms of life”—the difficulties we face today?

## QUESTION 3

---

Where did Jesus tell the disciples to go in Matthew 14? Where did they end up? Have you ever seen God lead a person to someplace unexpected, only for it to become a place of fruitful ministry?

# TO WRAP IT UP

Matthew 14 and Mark 6 both record fascinating accounts of this story. In both texts, Jesus sends the disciples in one direction; they encounter dangerous conditions from which only Jesus can save them; and they end up landing miles away in the opposite direction. Matthew's account also includes the compelling interlude of Peter walking on water with Jesus, doing his best to be like his Rabbi until the storm becomes too overwhelming. The experiences of the Twelve in these chapters have profound implications for disciples today!

Possibly the most fascinating thing about these accounts is that the whole time, the disciples were trying to be obedient. They didn't run into a storm because they refused to listen to Jesus; they got into a boat and did as He asked. They didn't land in Gennesaret rather than their intended destination because they decided to "pull a Jonah" and run away; they were faithfully following Jesus' instructions. Peter even went so far as to walk on water simply because he was doing his devoted best to imitate his Rabbi. The disciples weren't perfect, but their obedience level in these chapters is high.

We talked in season 2 about how deep water and storms are often symbols of *tohu v'vohu* in Scripture. What an intriguing metaphor that when the disciples were obedient to Jesus, chaos tried to interfere. And at face value, it might look like the interruptions were successful. The disciples did not end up at their planned destination, and eleven of the twelve never even tried to follow Jesus on the water. Even Peter, who did get out of the boat, became distracted by the wind and the waves and began to sink.

Nothing went according to plan, but how did the story end? Jesus rescued Peter. He turned failure into a learning experience for all twelve of them; not yelling or becoming angry, but simply letting them observe. And when they landed at Gennesaret, *shalom* broke out for the people who needed it. The Kingdom of God was expanded *in spite of* the opposition:

*When they had crossed over, **they landed at Gennesaret.**  
And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent  
word to all the surrounding country. **People brought all  
their sick to him** and begged him to let the sick just touch the  
edge of his cloak, and **all who touched it were healed.***

*Matthew 14:34-36 (emphasis added)*



Sometimes following our Rabbi's lead takes us into danger, and sometimes it leads us to unexpected places. Yet no matter what, Jesus can handle it. Chaos is going to come; we are going to make mistakes; but Jesus will bring the Kingdom anyway—even if we don't fully understand His plans this side of heaven. As cliché as it may sound, the journey of obedience is every bit as important as the destination—wherever God decides to take us.

Our job is to row our hardest toward “Bethsaida” in obedience to His leading. Let Jesus worry about “Gennesaret”—whatever that ends up looking like.

## END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other’s needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Ask God for specific ways to be obedient this week, for a “Bethsaida” to row toward. Commit to trusting His leading, even if it lands you in a “Gennesaret” instead.
- Pray that each of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take Jesus’ yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A P.S.

## ***Building a tower or going to war***

It was not easy to be a disciple in the first century. To follow a rabbi meant to leave everything you had ever known. The *Mishnah* describes the life of a disciple as “a painful existence,” saying:

*This is the way [to acquire knowledge] of the Torah: eat bread with salt, drink water by measure, sleep on the ground, live a painful existence (or a life of sorrow), and labor [in studying] the Torah.*

Rabbis make discipleship sound like a real party. Jesus wanted His followers to deeply consider what they were committing to before they joined Him. To one man who asked to follow, He said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58, ESV). In other words, ***Hey guy, are you ready to be homeless with Me? Are you dedicated enough to becoming like Me that you will follow, even if it involves sacrifice?*** To another, He said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

Jesus compared weighing our commitment to His yoke to the thoughts of a man building a tower, or of a king deciding whether to go to war (Luke 14). Neither would dare such an undertaking without thoroughly thinking it through (or at least getting a solid budget approved!). In the same way, Jesus wanted His disciples to understand what they were getting themselves into.

If it was difficult—that is, costly—to be a disciple of Jesus in the first century, we should expect no less today. Like the Twelve experienced in today’s episode, following Jesus can take us to dangerous places. It can land us in places we never expected to be, sacrificing home, comfort, safety, resources, or opportunities. Sometimes following Jesus can even lead to losing the respect and love of friends and family.

When faced with this reality, Peter cried out to Jesus: “We have left all we had to follow you!” (Luke 18:28). What was Jesus’ response?

*“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”*

*Luke 18:29-30*



To be a disciple of Jesus is to take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). But we should not lose heart! After all, why did Jesus go to the cross in the first place?

***For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.***

*Hebrews 12:2-3 (emphasis added)*

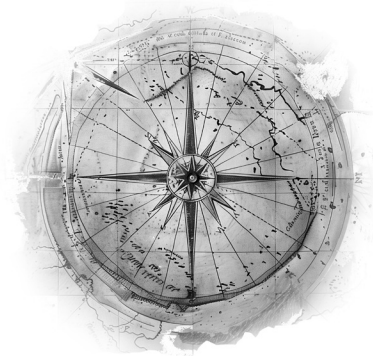


Are we committing to “build a tower” of faithful service to God’s mission, or to go to war against the reign of *tohu*, simply because we . . . want to be miserable? Of course not! Just as Jesus set His face toward the cross for the joy of redeeming us into His *beth ab*, we “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward” (Philippians 3:14).

The abundant life that Jesus promises to those who give up their lives for Him is so much better than anything we could create for ourselves. Yes, discipleship done right is costly. But Jesus promises that it is so, so worth it.

### ***Now It’s Your Turn***

In the time before your next meeting, make a point to reevaluate your commitment to being a disciple. Maybe you counted the cost of following Jesus a long time ago, and you haven’t looked back since. Maybe you feel like the disciples rowing toward Bethsaida, wondering what on earth you got yourself into. Or maybe, like many of us, you’ve never actually sat down with your royal advisors and considered the true costs of going to war. Wherever you are in your walk with Jesus, take some time to really think it through and be honest—perhaps enlisting the listening ear of one or two *haverim*.



RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 6

# THE COMMANDMENT

*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

*Matthew 22:37-39*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*





# INTRODUCTION

We are already more than halfway through the last season of our study! Can you believe it? So far in season 4, as we focus on disciples in the first century, we have:

- explored the Scripture education system of Jesus' day, noting how it prepared people for a life of faithfulness;
- refined our definition of "disciple," building on the entire foundation of this study;
- emphasized the need for *haverim*, or intentionally committed community;
- noted Jesus' invitation to all of humanity to follow Him in this way; and
- considered how a disciple ought to respond when obedience leads us to difficult or unexpected places.

Keeping all of these lessons in mind, our season will now take a turn as we consider how to put these lessons into practice. Recall that an essential part of becoming a rabbi's disciple is to "take the yoke"—that is, to take on the interpretation of Scripture that the rabbi would teach and model. A disciple was not only supposed to know how his rabbi would respond to any given situation, but also how to put that interpretation into practice and thus become a living image of God to a broken world.

If we are going to be modern-day disciples of Jesus—people who are intensely committed to His mission and to becoming more like Him every day—we must become thoroughly acquainted with His yoke.

So let's begin today's episode, the first of a three-part discussion on how Jesus taught and modeled His interpretation of the Text—and how we must learn to live it out today.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Based on previous seasons, what do we already know about Jesus' yoke—His interpretation of how to put Scripture into practice? Discuss as a group.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:*

*“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

*Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

*Matthew 22:35-40*

*“Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*

*Matthew 5:19*



Meaning of “heavier” and “lighter” commandments:

Recall the meaning of *tselem*:

Other notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. How does Jesus rank the importance of "love the Lord your God" against the importance of "love your neighbor?" In other words, does He say that one is greater than the other? Why or why not? What does this tell us about Jesus' yoke?

## QUESTION 2

---

Why does RVL suggest that loving your neighbor is, in fact, also a way to show love for God? How might thinking of every individual human being as *tselem* change the way we approach others?

## QUESTION 3

---

Based on today's episode, how would you explain Jesus' yoke? What might it look like to put this aspect of His yoke into practice in our lives today—to love your spouse, your kids, your coworkers, or the driver who cuts you off in traffic?

# TO WRAP IT UP

The yoke that a rabbi taught was based, at least in part, on this idea of heavier and lighter commandments. As RVL emphasizes, no one in the religious Jewish community debated that the *Shema* outlined the greatest of all the commandments. But depending on what your rabbi taught was next in importance, the way to practically live out the Text could vary widely. By equating “love your neighbor” with “love the Lord your God,” Jesus lays a clear framework for how the rest of the commandments should fall into line.

This idea should not be a surprise to us in this study. We discussed the *Shema* in the very first episode of season 1, and we have emphasized it ever since. Understanding how Jesus’ stance fits into the larger discussion among the religious Jews of the first century gives us helpful context for further examining how He interprets Scripture. As the Messiah, the Anointed King, Jesus takes His rightful place as the final word on how to live out the Text. If we want to be His disciples, we must take His yoke seriously.

This idea of the greatest commandment begs the question: *What does it mean to love my neighbor in a practical sense?* In our next meeting, we will continue to explore Jesus’ yoke by looking at His ideas on the subject, examining how this was lived out in the biblical context, and considering what it means for us today.

Let’s move into a time of prayer as we wrap up our time together.

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about and some actions you might take:

- Consider spending some time together in musical worship.
- Break off into smaller groups and show love to your neighbor by praying for individual needs.
- Pray that each of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A P.S.

## *Flipping the script*

The rabbis of Jesus' day recognized that they were not the authors of *Torah*. They could only do their best to help people apply God's commandments to an ever-evolving world. To that end, it appears that many rabbis, especially the Shammai school, tended to focus on defining the *minimum requirements* of the law. *What should I do or not do in order to avoid sin/punishment?* The idea was to create plenty of buffer in between faithfulness and sin, ever shoring up the boundaries in the hope of keeping people far from *tohu*.

Yet it's fascinating to note that when Jesus enters this conversation, He takes an opposite approach.

There is a famous story in the *Talmud* in which a prominent Gentile challenged both Shammai and Hillel (separately) to convert him by explaining the entire *Torah* while standing on one foot. (This is quite a challenge, and it would be interesting to meet this Gentile in heaven someday.) As the story goes, Shammai scornfully swatted the man away with a measuring stick. Hillel, on the other hand, simply responded: "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole *Torah* and the rest is commentary. Go and learn it."

We might look at this interaction and think Shammai got it wrong, and that Hillel's answer was closer to the truth. The similarity between Hillel's response and Jesus' teaching of the Golden Rule in Matthew 7 is so striking, we assume that both are essentially saying the same thing. *Good for you, Hillel.*

But notice how Jesus phrased this idea:

*"So in everything, **do to others what you would have them do to you**, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*

*Matthew 7:12 (emphasis added)*



If you look closely, Jesus actually takes this idea much further. Where Hillel's answer is focused on *avoiding hateful behavior*, Jesus instructs His hearers to *pursue loving behavior*. Do you see the distinction? In this way, Jesus' interpretation of the Text—His yoke—does what the teachings of other rabbis could not. It defines for us God's entire motive in giving the law in the first place—to bring *shalom* to a broken world.

In *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* by Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, the authors illustrate this key difference between Jesus' teaching and that of teachers like Hillel with some practical examples:

*When there's a snowstorm . . .*

Hillel says: Shovel your sidewalk so no one will slip and hurt themselves.

Jesus says: Shovel your sidewalk and then shovel your neighbor's too.

***When your little sister borrows your clothes . . .***

Hillel says: Don't ransack her closet.

Jesus says: Open your closet door and see what else she might like to wear.

***When you are pinched financially . . .***

Hillel says: Don't steal.

Jesus says: Look around to see who you could bless with resources you enjoy.

***When someone annoys you . . .***

Hillel says: Don't bad-mouth that person.

Jesus says: Find something kind to say to such a person.

***If someone forces you to go one mile . . .***

Hillel says: Go with him.

Jesus says: Go with him two miles.

What Hillel and other rabbis taught as cautious reactions to protect against a negative outcome, Jesus turned into intentional, proactive actions directed toward a specific goal: the bringing of *shalom*! It's as if Jesus is saying, ***Don't focus your energy on avoiding unfaithfulness because you are afraid of punishment. Focus on actively engaging tohu with shalom because you know who you are in this story!***

This is such an important distinction to recognize as we explore Jesus' yoke. Don't live your life in avoidance, terrified to mess up in front of God and be punished. Instead, have a little *pratz* and enthusiastically practice living in obedience to His commands, knowing that we do so to partner with Jesus in bringing *shalom*.

### ***Now It's Your Turn***

In the time before your next meeting, make it a point to spend some time in the Gospels. (You might already be doing so if members of your group decided to take on the challenge of reading one Gospel every month.) Pay attention to how all of Jesus' teachings connect back to or fall in place behind the greatest commandments—to love God and love your neighbor. You might find it helpful to record your thoughts in a journal.





RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 7

# THE NEIGHBOR

*"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."*

*Leviticus 19:18*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

*“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

*Leviticus 19:18*



A common Western interpretation of this passage is that to “love your neighbor” means to care for another with the same measure that you love yourself. According to that interpretation, if you can’t love yourself, you won’t be able to truly love your neighbor.

There may very well be some truth to that—it’s all too easy to measure others harshly when that’s the way we view ourselves. But this interpretation can also be problematic, for at least two reasons. First, it can make you self-centered. If you hold any amount of self-hatred (as nearly every person does), the temptation will be to put loving your neighbor on the back burner while you focus on learning to love yourself. Your neighbor will simply have to wait until you can attain some immeasurable level of self-love, something you probably will never achieve to your internal satisfaction. This kind of thinking can paralyze you from putting any real effort toward loving others.

Second, we must understand that the original Hebrew readers and writers recognized an additional, significant nuance to this idea in the Text.

In our last episode, we began examining Jesus’ yoke by identifying how He interpreted which commandments were greatest. When we understand Jesus’ priorities, it becomes easier to see how the rest of the commandments fall into place, giving us a framework for how to live. We discussed how this topic led to heated debates among the religious Jews of that day, but it’s also important to note that these discussions led to two important follow-up questions: *How do I love my neighbor?* and *Who is my neighbor?*

In today’s episode, we will continue our exploration of Jesus’ yoke by focusing on the first question, examining it through the lens of the original Hebrew understanding. How did Jesus approach this subject in His interpretation of Scripture, and what does that mean for us today?

Let’s discuss as we prepare to watch today’s episode.

## TALK ABOUT IT

How have you seen the idea of loving your neighbor as yourself modeled or put into practice? Where have you found the most fulfillment in trying to be faithful to this command, and what has been most challenging? Discuss as a group.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but **love your neighbor as yourself (who is like yourself)**. I am the Lord.”*

*Leviticus 19:18 (emphasis added)*

*“Do not go about spreading slander among your people.  
“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord.”*

*Leviticus 19:16*

*“Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will **live (experience life fully)** by them. I am the Lord.”*

*Leviticus 18:5 (emphasis added)*

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. **His disciples were hungry** and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”*

*He answered, “**Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?** He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. **Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?** I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”*

*Matthew 12:1-8 (emphasis added)*



A Hebrew understanding of “love your neighbor”:

*Pikuach nefesh* means:

Other notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. How did Jesus use Scripture to demonstrate that "love your neighbor" is greater than the commandments about Sabbath or temple law? Why do you think He used the Text instead of simply coming out and making this claim?

## QUESTION 2

---

What is the meaning of *pikuach nefesh*? How might our understanding of this concept teach us what it looks like to love our neighbors in a practical sense?

## QUESTION 3

---

What is the Hebrew understanding of the verb *ahavta*, which means "to love?" Recall a time, past or present, when you struggled with showing love to someone in your life. How might the Hebrew understanding of *ahavta* help us set healthy boundaries while faithfully living out the command to love our neighbor?

# TO WRAP IT UP

It might be easy for modern audiences to look at the debates of those first-century Jews and wonder, *How is this even an argument? Of course protecting and respecting other human beings is more important than something like not working on the Sabbath. This shouldn't be that hard to understand!*

We have emphasized in this study that, for the most part, the religious Jews of Jesus' day appear to have been intensely devoted to living faithful lives. They didn't want a repeat of the Exile, and they longed for the day when the Messiah would appear. It makes sense that the devout among them would become a bit obsessed with trying to get it all right. And isn't intense, intentional commitment a key requirement for being a disciple? Some might not have always lived out their role correctly, but you can begin to see why this debate was so hotly engaged.

Instead of going through a study like this one, and in hindsight rolling our eyes at such debates, it's far more helpful to give the idea of "love God and love your neighbor" a preeminent place in our modern context. Are you willing to be late to church—or miss it altogether—in order to buy a meal for a homeless person? Would you invite someone in need to live in an extra bedroom in your home, even if he or she couldn't pay rent? Is protecting and enhancing the life of your neighbor really at the top of your priority list? The temptation is to think of *pikuach nefesh* as just another cultural idea to journal about—but not actually do.

It's not so easy to scoff at the debates of those first-century Jews when we consider these ideas in our own context, is it? Driving past a homeless person on the side of the road in order to make it to a comfortable church pew on time sounds a whole lot easier—and, dare we say, a lot more religious—than stepping off the bank into the *tohu* with Jesus. And if we're being honest, there is not a human alive who wouldn't struggle with putting this into action, at least on some level. Loving God and loving our neighbor is not a small ask.

In this episode we focused on the question, *How do I love my neighbor?* in the context of Jesus' yoke. And the reality is, it can cost us a lot. Yet the Jews also asked a second question, which will unpack Jesus' interpretation of Scripture even further: *Who is my neighbor?* In our penultimate episode, we will tackle that question through the lens of Jesus' teaching, identifying exactly to whom we are meant to show extravagant hospitality.

If you're feeling intimidated at this point, you're surely not alone! Remember, we are meant to do this together; and we are only able to be faithful through the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's move into a time of prayer as we consider all that we've learned today.

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Ask God to give you practical, doable ways to love the neighbors in your life.
- Pray that each of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*



# A P.S.

## *Why was it okay for David to eat the showbread?*

Let's look at the story about David and his men eating the consecrated bread, which Jesus references in His explanation about the priority of loving one's neighbor. At this point in the story, Jonathan had just helped David escape from a jealous King Saul. David fled to Nob and, concealing his predicament, asked Ahimelek the priest for supplies:

*"Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."*

*But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women."*

*David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the Lord and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.*

1 Samuel 21:3-6



What a fascinating example of two faithful Israelites working out how to interpret the Text. The bread in question was supposed to be presented as an offering to the Lord in the tabernacle (and later the Temple) on a regular basis. Every Sabbath, this bread would be replaced by fresh loaves. Beginning with Aaron and his sons, the priests would be allowed to eat the previous week's offering in the sanctuary area (see Leviticus 24).

In this passage, neither Ahimelek nor David denies that the bread was meant only to be eaten by priests. Both are aware of God's instructions and are taking them seriously. But they also appear to recognize that these are unusual circumstances. Even Ahimelek, who doesn't know for certain that David is running from Saul, seems to intuit that the young man is dealing with some kind of danger. The priest greets the future king with trembling, asking nervously, "Why are you alone?" (1 Samuel 21:1).

This specific situation wasn't explicitly spelled out in the *Torah*: **Which is more important, keeping the old showbread exclusively for priests, or feeding the hungry in crisis?** In this passage, Ahimelek weighs the commandments about the bread against *pikuach nefesh*, and decides to feed David. David himself recognizes the need to approach this moment with holiness, weighing his own need against the

commandments. He agrees that “love your neighbor” takes greater precedence in this case, and he accepts the loaves from the priest.

Just like the rabbis of Jesus’ day, the two men did their best to interpret the Text and apply it to the situation in which they found themselves. Centuries later, Jesus—our ultimate interpreter of Scripture—approved of their decision.

### ***Now It’s Your Turn***

In the time before your next meeting, consider how you might not only protect but also actively enhance the life of a neighbor. Discuss some ideas within your study group to see if there is something you might do together.



RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 8

THE SAMARITAN

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor  
to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*Luke 10:36*



# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

Jesus' yoke, His interpretation of Scripture that teaches us how to put God's Word into action, can be summed up as: "Love God and love your neighbor." In our last episode, we noted that to "love your neighbor" comes from the Hebrew term *pikuach nefesh*, which literally means "protect life." The Jewish idea was that we show love to our neighbors by not only protecting, but also by actively *enhancing* their lives. Jesus equates this action with loving God. Because humans are created in God's image, loving one's neighbor is in fact an act of loving God Himself.

Regardless of where the religious Jews of Jesus' day believed "love your neighbor" fell in the list of greater or lesser commandments, this is how they understood this concept. Yet it begged a second question, one that was also widely debated: *Who is my neighbor?*

In today's episode we will conclude our discussion of Jesus' yoke by examining His answer to this second question, exploring what it meant to His original audience and how we are to put it into practice today.

Let's begin!

# TALK ABOUT IT

In our modern context, how would you answer the question, *Who is my neighbor?* Discuss as a group.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

*He answered, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind**"; and, "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**"*

*"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "**And who is my neighbor?**"*

*In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.*

*The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

*Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

*Luke 10:25-37 (emphasis added)*



Notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. Why does RVL suggest the priest and the Levite passed by the dying man? What does this indicate about the yoke of *Torah* that they followed? How does it differ from Jesus' yoke?

## QUESTION 2

---

As RVL mentions, the Jews and Samaritans hated and killed each other for both historical and religious reasons. Who might be the Samaritans of our time, and how might Jesus' teaching change the way we think about others?

## QUESTION 3

---

Taking the parable of the Good Samaritan into account, how would you summarize Jesus' yoke? What might it look like to put His interpretation of Scripture into practice today—both individually and as a believing community? Why is it important for disciples of Jesus to take this seriously?



# TO WRAP IT UP

Let's summarize Jesus' yoke—His interpretation of Scripture that provides the framework for how we live as His disciples. Remember, a disciple is someone with intense, intentional commitment to continually become more like Jesus, joining Him in the mission to bring *shalom* to chaos.

We can sum up Jesus' yoke in this way: The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Loving God and neighbor are inseparable ideas—you cannot claim to do one while neglecting the other. Loving your neighbor means to actively work to enhance and protect life as you join the mission to bring *shalom* to chaos. And your “neighbor” includes every human being. On these principles rests the entirety of the Law and the Prophets—every single commandment falls into place after these.

It sounds so simple, yet can be very difficult to put into practice! That's why it's so important that we stay close to Jesus, observing His example in Scripture and allowing the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher and Counselor.

Our next episode will be the very last in this study. Let's prepare to review everything we have learned in this course as we complete our examination of what it means to be a disciple.

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Who among you is struggling with “Samaritans” in your life? Consider breaking into smaller groups of two or three to pray about these relationships and circumstances with each other.
- Pray that each of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own before the next meeting.*

# A FEW P.S.'S

## *A priest, a Levite, and a pharisee walk into a . . .*

To twenty-first-century Christians, Jesus is probably the only parable teller most of us know. We in the West have read fables and allegories and our fair share of cautionary tales, but parables are a distinctly Eastern invention. For those without experience in the Jewish world, Jesus is the only window into the power of parables.

Recall how some rabbis referred to parables as “basket handles”—narrative tools that help us “carry” or put into practice the teachings of Scripture. It’s easy to assume that Jesus, in the spirit of helping people understand His teachings, likely made up plots and characters and settings to suit His purposes. Those of us without a Jewish perspective completely miss that while Jesus’ content was certainly original—and absolutely brilliant—He often used familiar, existing Jewish parable structures to make His point.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a great example of this. It was a familiar parable structure in which a scenario involving how to interpret the law was laid out. In this structure, there were three primary characters who would respond to the scenario: a priest, a Levite, and a pharisee.

Keep in mind that parables were most commonly used within the teaching approach practiced by the pharisees. Which character do you suppose would always do the right thing in this parable structure? You got it—the pharisee . . . or at least a character who followed the interpretative approach of the pharisees. The priests and the Levites, who controlled the Temple, were believed by many to be largely corrupt in that they courted favor with Rome. One would not expect to hear a parable in which either of those guys got anything right.

Therefore, when Jesus began to tell the parable recounted in Luke 10, the audience would have instantly known what to expect. *The priest is going to get it wrong. The Levite is going to get it wrong. And then a pharisee will come along and he will show us how to answer, “Who is my neighbor?”*

But incredibly, Jesus pulls the rug out from under the audience with *His* version of this narrative structure. The third character is *not* a pharisee. He does not affirm the tradition of either Hillel *or* Shammai. The third character is everyone’s worst nightmare: *a Samaritan*.

## *Who were the Samaritans, and why did the Jews hate them?*

Think about what you know of the clash between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland; the animosity between Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia; or the ongoing violence between Israelis and Palestinians today. Each conflict represents historic feuds based on religious and territorial struggles—horrifying clashes of culture with atrocities on all sides. Sadly, that’s also an accurate way to describe the mood between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus’ day.

Let’s begin by looking back to the book of 1 Kings. King David had died; his son Solomon had died;

and political strife had splintered the twelve tribes into two separate countries. In the south was the kingdom of Judah, which included Jerusalem and the Temple. In the north was the kingdom of Israel, which now lacked Jerusalem as a capital. King Omri of Israel (a few kings down the line after Solomon's death), buys "the hill of Samaria" and builds a city there by the same name (1 Kings 16). This city becomes the new capital of the northern kingdom.

Fast forward a bit in the history of the two kingdoms. Israel didn't do a great job of being God's *tselem* to a broken world. In fact, they spent a lot of their time worshipping idols, oppressing the marginalized, and generally being exactly like the *tohu* nations around them. God warned His people over and over through the prophets, but they refused to listen. Finally, God allowed the northern kingdom of Israel—with its capital, Samaria—to fall to the crushing might of the Assyrian Empire.

The Assyrians killed about half the population of the northern kingdom. Most of the half that survived were exiled as slave labor to various places in the empire, but the armies left behind those who were poor and weak. Assyria then assimilated the region into its empire, appointed a governor who ruled from Samaria, and brought in other peoples to repopulate the land. The Jews who remained intermarried with these new settlers, eventually forming a new people group who came to be known as Samaritans.

Eventually the southern kingdom of Judah also fell, this time to the Babylonians, and those Jews were either slaughtered or dragged off to exile. By seventy years later, the Persians had taken over Babylon. Their emperor, Cyrus, permitted a wave of Jews to return to Jerusalem, led by David's descendant Zerubbabel, Ezra the priest, and Nehemiah the prophet.

When their exiled relatives returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the Temple, it appears that some of the Samaritans were eager to join their long-lost kinfolk. But this didn't work out so well for them:

*When **the enemies of Judah and Benjamin** heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "**Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.**" But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "**You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.**"*

*Ezra 4:1-3 (emphasis added)*



Presumably, “the enemies of Judah and Benjamin” refers to the Samaritans. The returning exiles wanted nothing to do with their mixed-race cousins and flatly refused their help. From that point on, the Samaritans began to harass and violently oppose the rebuilding of the Temple, even sending legal complaints about the Israelites to the Persian rulers (see Ezra 4). They persuaded one Persian king to object to the rebuilding project, and construction was put on hold for a long time before the Jews could get their building permits reinstated.

Later, the prophet Nehemiah would exile Eliashib, the high priest’s grandson, for marrying a Gentile woman. And not just any Gentile woman, but the daughter of Sanballat, the governor over the province of Samaria (Nehemiah 13). Sanballat, a Gentile but also a worshipper of the God of Israel, was furious. He fumed that if his son-in-law was not welcome in Jerusalem, then he would build God a new temple in which the young man could function as a priest—and that’s exactly what he did. The Samaritan temple to God was built on Mount Gerizim in the north, and the rift between Jew and Samaritan was permanently solidified. (This is what the woman at the well refers to when Jesus stops in Samaritan country to speak with her in John 4.)

As time went on, it seems that the Samaritans continued to ally themselves with the enemies of the Israelites. At one point the Jews retaliated by destroying the Samaritan temple. Later, a group of Samaritans profaned the Temple in Jerusalem by scattering bones in the sanctuary. Like all conflicts over faith and territory, horrible things were done by both sides, and by Jesus’ day the hatred ran so deep that it was dangerous for either group to enter the territory of the other.

So when Jesus was asked, *And who is my neighbor?*, making the third character in His parable a Samaritan must have been the shock of the century for His Jewish audience. They probably hated Samaritans even more than they despised Rome, and that’s saying something! To think that their greatest enemy would be the one to rise above centuries of violent conflict and care for someone he considered *his* enemy . . . well, that would have absolutely blown their minds.

### ***A Samaritan going to Jericho***

In this episode, RVL points out some helpful geographical context, explaining how narrow the road to Jericho is. Everyone who was familiar with that road would have understood that passing the injured man “on the other side” really meant stepping over or around him—there was no avoiding an interaction! But scholarship also recognizes a more subtle Old Testament allusion in this parable. This callback also involves a Samaritan and the road to Jericho—a reference that many in Jesus’ biblically literate audience would likely have picked up on as well.

In 2 Chronicles 28, we find the Israelites before the Exile, yet already split into the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. At this time Ahaz was king of Judah, and Scripture tells us that he roused God’s anger by worshipping idols and practicing child sacrifice. The Lord allowed Ahaz to be defeated and many people captured by the king of Aram—but also by Pekah, the reigning king of Israel:

In one day **Pekah son of Remaliah** killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah—because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their ancestors. Zikri, an Ephraimite warrior, killed Maaseiah the king's son, Azrikam the officer in charge of the palace, and Elkanah, second to the king. The men of Israel took captive from their fellow Israelites who were from Judah two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria.

**But a prophet of the Lord named Oded was there, and he went out to meet the army when it returned to Samaria. He said to them, "Because the Lord, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven. And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the Lord your God? Now listen to me! Send back your fellow Israelites you have taken as prisoners, for the Lord's fierce anger rests on you."**

Then some of the leaders in Ephraim—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berekiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai—confronted those who were arriving from the war. "You must not bring those prisoners here," they said, "or we will be guilty before the Lord. Do you intend to add to our sin and guilt? For our guilt is already great, and his fierce anger rests on Israel."

So the soldiers gave up the prisoners and plunder in the presence of the officials and all the assembly. The men designated by name took the prisoners, and from the plunder they clothed all who were naked. **They provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm. All those who were weak they put on donkeys. So they took them back to their fellow Israelites at Jericho, the City of Palms, and returned to Samaria.**

2 Chronicles 28:6-15 (emphasis added)



Recall that Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and the Samaritans were descended from these people. In the Chronicles story, a Samaritan ancestor must put aside his hatred for the southern kingdom to bandage his enemies' wounds, put them on donkeys, and take them to Jericho. Sound familiar?

*“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the [Jewish] man was; and when he saw him, **he took pity on him**. He went to him and **bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine**. Then he put the man on **his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.**”*

*Luke 10:33-34 (emphasis added)*



A biblically literate member of Jesus’ audience would have expected the third character in Jesus’ parable to get “love your neighbor” right, simply because of the familiar story structure. But when Jesus described a Samaritan dealing with an injured enemy on the road to Jericho, the story of Pekah and the people of Judah in Chronicles would almost certainly have come to mind. Jesus’ audience likely knew exactly what the Samaritan was going to do—the same thing his ancestors did!

Not only does Jesus’ allusion provide some startling foreshadowing for the Samaritan’s behavior, but it hearkens back to a time in Israel’s history when the relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was far closer. The bloodshed between the twelve tribes in the days of the kings was a tragedy; should not the violence between these groups in later days be equally mourned?

Oded’s words to Pekah reminded the king that he was also not without fault before God. Perhaps Jesus was interested in making the same point when it came to the animosity between Jews and Samaritans in His day. By alluding to this story in His parable about who counts as one’s neighbor, Jesus seems to gently remind His audience that there is not one who is blameless—and that, in His parable, your worst enemy is sometimes your neighbor.

### **Now It’s Your Turn**

In the time before your next meeting, spend some time considering who the “Samaritans” might be in your own life. There might be an individual whom you know personally, or a group of people that you have a hard time forgiving or showing love. In the time before your group meets again, make a point of praying for these people daily, asking God to bring *shalom* both in your own heart and in theirs.



RVL  
DISCIPLESHIP  
THE STUDY

EPISODE 9

# THE KINGDOM

*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for  
the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

*Matthew 4:17*





# THE *SHEMA*

## ON YOUR OWN

Take a moment to reflect before beginning the meeting. Consider the emotions, experiences, and thoughts that are most on your mind right now. Lay them before the Lord, and prepare your heart for the prayer you are about to speak, the commitment you make with the words of the *Shema*.

## TOGETHER

Stand together and recite the *Shema* in Hebrew and in English.

### HEBREW

*Shema Israel,  
Adonai elohenu-Adonai echad  
Ve'ahavta et Adonai eloeikah,  
b'khol levavkah,  
uve'khol naphshekah,  
uve'khol m'odekah.  
Ve'ahavta l're'acha comocha. Amen.*

### ENGLISH

*Hear O Israel!  
The Lord is our God—the Lord alone.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your might,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.*



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the final episode of our study in discipleship! Today is the day we tie it all together, completing our definition of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

- In season 1 we started our journey by learning how to approach the Bible in its context. We built a tool kit for studying the Bible, recognizing some of the ways the original audience would have experienced it. We concluded by identifying the central thread that ties all of Scripture together: God's mission to bring *shalom* to chaos.
- In season 2 we built on our foundation by exploring the roots of discipleship in the Hebrew Bible. We looked at how God prepared, established, and trained the nation of Israel as His "first disciple."
- In season 3 we examined Jesus' life as our sinless human example—the Jewish Messiah who conducted His ministry as a little "r" Jewish rabbi.
- In season 4 we've explored the world of disciples in the first century, identifying a disciple's role, unpacking how Jesus called and trained His disciples, and identifying Jesus' yoke—the framework His followers relied on in learning how to follow Him.

Today we will bring together everything we know about Jesus' yoke through the lens of His primary message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17). We will tie the whole study together, defining discipleship as we apply it to our lives in the twenty-first century.

## TALK ABOUT IT

As we conclude our study, what stands out most? What will you take away from this time together? Discuss as a group.

# WATCH THE VIDEO

As you watch the video for this episode, you may use the following outline to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

## THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

*Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. **Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."*

*Exodus 19:3-6 (emphasis added)*

*But you are **a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

*1 Peter 2:9-10 (emphasis added)*



The biblical definition of kingdom:

*Segula* means:

Other notes:

# VIDEO DISCUSSION

## QUESTION 1

---

Let's recap. What is God's mission—the one He's had from the beginning? How does He invite human beings to join Him as His partners/disciples?

## QUESTION 2

---

What is a kingdom in the biblical sense? How does the Kingdom of God come and grow in our lives?

## QUESTION 3

---

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus today—at your age, in your context? What is Jesus inviting you to? And how will you answer at this point in your life?

# TO WRAP IT UP

*“There is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all things, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”*

*Abraham Kuyper, theologian and statesman*



Let’s recall, from way back in season 1, the central thread that ties God’s great story together: Human beings were created to be God’s partners in cultivating His *shalom* on earth. Yet we disobeyed, instead choosing separation from God and inviting *tohu v’vohu* to creep back into Creation. But instead of rejecting humanity, God decided to redeem us, slowly carrying out an epic story involving a kingdom of priests from every corner of the earth who would join Him in the mission to restore *shalom* to all things.

We saw how God planted the seeds of this idea in Israel’s ancestors—people like Abraham and Sarah.

We saw how God redeemed Israel out of Egypt and called them to be His people—His *tselem* to a broken world.

We saw how *shalom* comes when God’s people engage *tohu*—reaching out to the marginalized.

We saw how even when Israel failed in their mission, God did not give up on them.

We saw how Jesus came to earth, fully God but also fully human, to show us what it looks like to live out this mission completely.

We saw how Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God, showing His disciples by example how to expand it.

And we saw how God’s Kingdom grows every time we obey the will of the King.

Every time we join God’s story; every time we engage chaos rightly; every time we do the King’s will by putting Jesus’ yoke into practice, we take territory back from the evil one. All of Creation belongs to the Lord. There is not one square inch, one single situation, or one single human being that cannot be redeemed, and God wants *all of it*.

Jesus’ invitation is clear, but the choice is yours. Only you can decide what to do with the time He’s given you. You’ve been given a stone to throw, a story to join, a Kingdom to expand. And you have a Rabbi who promised to be with you every step of the way.

As we conclude our time together, only one question remains: *Will you be a disciple?*

# END IN PRAYER TOGETHER

Close your time together in prayer, praying for each other's needs and encouraging one another to *shema* until you meet again.

Here are some things you might pray about:

- Spend time praying for one another individually.
- Discuss and pray about the next steps for your study group, considering how you might continue to be *haverim* to one another.
- Pray that each of you would be filled with the Holy Spirit daily, equipped with the wisdom and courage to take Jesus' yoke and put it into practice.

END GROUP MEETING

*To dig deeper into the content from this episode, check out the P.S. section on your own.*

# A P.S.

## *A word study of “The kingdom of heaven has come near . . .”*

Both John the Baptist, who prepared Israel for Jesus’ ministry, and Jesus Himself had the same central proclamation in their public ministry: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17).

In English, a “kingdom coming near” might sound like something out of a fairy tale. *Jesus came all the way from heaven to rescue you and take you back to heaven with Him.* But the meaning in the original Greek and Hebrew makes this idea even more intense—something we should pay attention to as we conclude our time together.

In Greek, the language in which the Gospel of Matthew was originally written, the phrase for “has come near” is *engiken*. The root word is *engizo*, which means “to come near,” or “to approach,” but also—“to join one thing to another.”

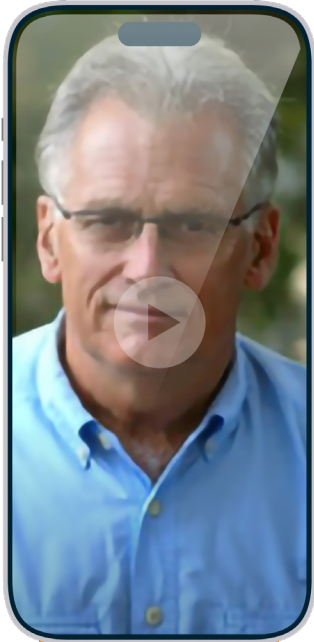
In one translation of the Hebrew New Testament, this phrase comes from the root word *qarav*, which means “intimately present.” We see forms of this Hebrew word throughout the Old Testament. In Isaiah, for example, it is used to describe sexual relations: “I [came near] to the prophetess and she conceived” (Isaiah 8:3).

The implication from the Greek and Hebrew is not only that the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived, but that it is present in the most intimate way you can imagine. That the conception of new life could be the result of such an action is also fascinating. It’s as if Jesus is saying, *Not only has the Kingdom arrived, but it has also sparked something that will only continue to grow.*

As RVL points out in our final episode, Jesus brought the Kingdom . . . but it’s our job to grow it! Every time we do His will—every time we choose to walk as Jesus walked—the Kingdom that was sparked so long ago takes back more ground from the kingdom of this world. The *shalom* of eternity is intimately present with us as we near the time when our King will return. And when He does, may He find us living out His yoke as His disciples!







**Watch this FREE  
7-part video series**

# MORE TOOLS FOR DEEPER STUDY

## **WALK DAILY AS A DISCIPLE WITH RAY VANDER LAAN**

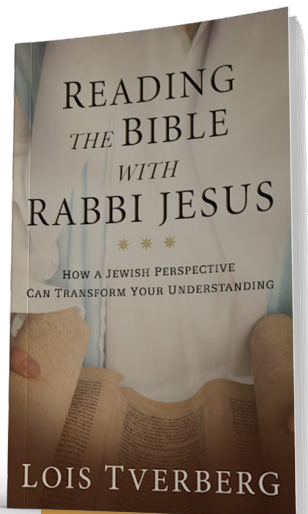
### ***Start your free 7-part video series devotional***

Being a disciple means that we have to walk in the footsteps of Jesus every day, and that takes consistent practice. To help, we want you to have this 7-part devotional video series inspired by Ray's popular *That the World May Know* teaching.

In each video, you'll get the best of Ray's Holy Land object lessons—on location in Israel. Each 3-minute session is like a modern-day parable that brings you a fresh understanding of Scripture and the historical context from which it was written.

Like RVL, if you have a thirst for living a life that honors Jesus, deepen your devotion time by learning from one of the world's foremost Bible teachers.

**TEXT RVL TO 32728 FOR UPDATES  
ON NEW SEASONS AND ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES FROM RAY.**



**FREE GIFT**  
*with Donation*

# MORE TOOLS FOR DEEPER STUDY

## CONTINUE LEARNING THE CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

An eye-opening book about understanding Scripture

Reading the Bible in context is a process and challenge, but *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus* brings the Jewish interpretation to light.

Recommended by Ray Vander Laan, this resource provides a deeper understanding of God's story, allowing us to approach these lessons with new eyes. Expose any misconceptions you may have and free yourself to read the Bible in a fresh, enriching new way.

Get a copy of this excellent book for free, with a donation of any amount!

TEXT RVL TO 32728 FOR UPDATES  
ON NEW SEASONS AND ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES FROM RAY.

# GLOSSARY OF KEY WORDS

**AHAVTA** | “to love,” which in the Hebrew mind means “love in action” (Hebrew)

**BETH AB** | literally, “the father’s house.” The dominant patriarchal social construct of biblical Jewish culture, spanning from the Old Testament to the New. A *beth ab* was an extended family unit who lived together, in tents or, later, in houses. This group would include the patriarch, his wife or wives, any young children, and their adult sons and their sons’ families. Daughters would join the *beth ab* of their husbands when they got married. (Hebrew)

**BETH SEFER** | “school of the Text”; primary level Scripture education for children, which focused on study of the *Torah* (Hebrew)

**BETH MIDRASH** | school of Scripture interpretation; secondary-level Jewish education (Hebrew)

**ENGIZO** | “to come near,” “to approach,” or “to join one thing to another” (Greek)

**HAVER** | (plural: *haverim*) intentionally committed friends who share a common goal (Hebrew)

**LAMAD** | to practice intentionally (Hebrew)

**PIKUACH NEFESH** | to protect or enhance life; the understood meaning of “love your neighbor as yourself” (Hebrew)

**PRATZ** | violent, explode, burst out; intense passionate, with all your might (Hebrew)

**QARAV** | “near” or “intimately present,” also used colloquially in Scripture for sexual intercourse (Hebrew)

**RABBI** | honored teacher (Hebrew)

**SEGULA** | “*treasured possession*.” Refers to a cultural practice in the ancient biblical world. When a king or ruler subdued another kingdom, the conquered peoples would offer him tribute. That tribute, in whatever form it took, was called the conquering king’s “treasured possession.” It would be set aside and treated with great sentimental value, used only for significant purposes. For example, Solomon put his *segula* toward construction of the first temple to God. (Hebrew)

**SHALOM** | perfect peace and harmony; ordered and flourishing function; deep meaning and completeness. Describes the character of God Himself (Hebrew)

**SHEMA** | to hear; to obey or respond to (Hebrew)

**SHEMAYIM** | literally “the sky”; used as a way to describe God without saying His name (Hebrew)

**SYNAGOGUE** | “meeting house”; a Greek word that was absorbed into the Hebrew language and referred to the public building in which the Jews of Jesus’ day would gather for social events, teaching, and education (Greek/Hebrew)

**TALMID** | (plural: *talmidim*) means “student” or “learner,” referred to the disciple of a rabbi (Hebrew)

**TOHU V’VOHU** | formless and empty; also conflict and disharmony; disorder and disfunction; deterioration or decay; confusion and brokenness. The opposite of the character of God. Symbolized in Scripture by churning water and desert. (Hebrew)

**TORAH** | the first five books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (Hebrew)

**TSELEM** | image or likeness; referred to a deity’s physical representation (Hebrew)

# ABOUT RVL

Since receiving his Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1976, Ray Vander Laan has been actively involved in studying and teaching Jewish culture using the methods of Jewish education. He has continued graduate studies in Jewish Studies in the United States, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt. He has been a teacher for more than 40 years and is an ordained minister with the Christian Reformed Church. He has also authored a book entitled *Echoes of His Presence*, published by Focus on the Family. Ray founded That the World May Know Ministries in 1998. He has taken thousands of people with him on his study tours of Israel, Turkey, and Egypt.

Ray's preaching and teaching ministry is focused on understanding the Bible in light of the historical and cultural context in which God placed it. This perspective on the Bible highlights God's call for His people to be a transforming influence on their culture. He uses research of the top scholars in the fields of archaeology, history, and biblical study as tools to explore the biblical text ever more deeply. His gifts, expertise, and calling are to link that cultural information and the Bible so that its message applies to our lives today in very practical ways.



# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BOOKS

---

- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jacob & the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story*. InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976.
- Bivin, David. *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus: Insights from His Jewish Context*. En Gedi Resource Center, 2005.
- Instone-Brewer, David. *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament, Vol 1: Prayer and Agriculture*. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Instone-Brewer, David. *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament, Vol 2A: Feasts and Sabbath – Passover and Atonement*. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Levine, Amy-Jill and Brettler, Mark Zvi. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- NIV First-Century Study Bible: Explore Scripture in Its Jewish and Early Christian Context*. Zondervan Publishing, 2014.
- Richter, Sandra L. *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Tverberg, Lois. *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus: How a Jewish Perspective Can Transform Your Understanding*. Baker Books, 2019.
- Tverberg, Lois. *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewish Words of Jesus Can Change Your Life*. Zondervan, 2011.
- Wilson, Marvin R. *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014.
- Wilson, Marvin R. *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*. 2nd ed., W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021.
- Wright, N.T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*. HarperOne, 2021.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES – WEBSITES

---

*Our Rabbi Jesus*: [www.ourrabbijesus.com](http://www.ourrabbijesus.com), “Can We Use Jewish Sources to Study Jesus?”  
[www.ourrabbijesus.com/articles/can-we-use-jewish-sources-to-study-jesus](http://www.ourrabbijesus.com/articles/can-we-use-jewish-sources-to-study-jesus)

*Bible Project*: [www.bibleproject.com](http://www.bibleproject.com)

*En-Gedi*: [www.engediresourcecenter.com](http://www.engediresourcecenter.com)



# ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. We provide help and resources for couples to build healthy marriages that reflect God's design, and for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles.

We're here to come alongside families with relevance and grace at each stage of their journey. We support families as they seek to teach their children about God and His beautiful design for the family, protect themselves from the harmful influences of culture, and equip themselves to make a greater difference in the lives of those around them.

No matter who you are, what you're going through, or what challenges your family may be facing, we're here to help. With practical resources—like our 1-800-AFAMILY help line, counseling, and websites—we're committed to providing trustworthy, biblical guidance and support.