

FIVE-SESSION
GROUP BIBLE STUDY

*THE FIVE PRINCIPLES
OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP*



MATTHEW BALL

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Matthew Ball is a fourth-generation Apostolic minister who has been preaching since he was a young teenager. He was born into a missions family. His grandparents, James and Grace Ball, were missionaries to Colombia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, as well as a founding bishop of the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew's father, David E. Ball, was born on the mission field in Colombia.

Matthew's early years of ministry were spent in a home missions church founded by his parents, David and Kathy Ball, in 1979 in Carmel, Indiana. As a teenager, he traveled across the United States as an evangelist while attending Indiana University. He met Jamie Fielden at a camp meeting in 1988. She was from Bishop Billy McCool's church in Knoxville, Tennessee. Matthew and Jamie were married in 1989 and traveled the country for several years as evangelists for the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ Evangelist Department.

Upon his father's death in 1997, Matthew and Jamie returned to Carmel to assume the pastorate of Faith Apostolic Church in Carmel, Indiana. He is currently the senior pastor and resides with Jamie and their children.

He has served in many capacities in the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ, including Indiana District Presbyter, Indiana District Secretary, National Home Bible Study Director, National Home Missions Director, Asia-Pacific Regional Field Supervisor, and currently, World Missions Director.

Matthew's passion for God's Word is contagious. He is the author of *God's Plan for Man Home Bible Study* and other Bible study books and resources. He and Jamie are frequent speakers at camp meetings, conferences, training seminars, and retreats in the United States and overseas.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Follow Me. Jesus spoke those two simple words to a few ordinary fishermen in Galilee. They dropped their nets, left everything behind, and followed Him. Since that day over 2000 years ago, Jesus has spoken the same words to countless millions - Follow Me. And just like James and John or Peter and Andrew, men and women of all walks of life have responded to His call.

But what does it mean to be His disciple? What does a true disciple of Jesus Christ look like? Surely it involves more than just calling oneself a disciple. Talk is cheap. A majority of Americans - even in our post-modern culture - call themselves Christians. But calling oneself a Christian and living life as a true disciple of Christ are not one in the same.

In John 8:31, Jesus used the words “*disciples indeed*,” which means “true disciples.” If there are disciples indeed, then there must also be those who claim to be a disciples, but are not, in fact, true disciples.

This Bible study explores the principles of true discipleship. It answers the question, “What does a true disciple of Jesus Christ look like?” Disciples indeed are more than Christians in title only. Disciples indeed have experienced radical spiritual transformation. Disciples indeed have a deep, personal relationship with Christ, who is truly their Lord. Disciples indeed are fulfilling their divine purpose and impacting the world around them through the love of Christ.

The Disciples Indeed workbook is laid out so you will study one discipleship principle each week. You will have five days of personal study with questions to answer each week and will meet once a week with your small group to discuss the previous week’s content. Completing each day’s homework - including looking up scripture references mentioned and answering each question in the workbook is the key to getting the most out of this study. The five principles of true discipleship are:

- The Principle of Transformation
- The Principle of Relationship
- The Principle of the Lordship of Christ
- The Principle of Purpose
- The Principle of Love

Prepare to have your preconceived ideas about being His disciple turned upside down! As we study His Word together over the next five weeks, we will be challenged to full surrender, called to His divine purpose, and inspired to share His love with the world around us.

INTRODUCTION

James and John (*Matthew 4:21-22, Mark 1:19-20, Luke 5:10-11*)

They locked eyes. Fishing was an honorable trade, but James and John had often wrestled with the notion that true life held more. They glanced back at their father, Zebedee. It only took a moment to survey their lives.

Their mending tools slipped from their hands and fell to a familiar wooden plank. They eased over the edge of the small fishing boat and waded through gentle waves to the shore, leaving their bewildered father in the boat. With clothes dripping and the smell of fish still on their hands, they walked off into the distance with a stranger who had only spoken two words to them: Follow Me.

Levi (*Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-32*)

They muttered while reluctantly dropping five shekels into the bag. Being forced to pay tribute to Caesar for the use of the road didn't sit well, even if Rome did build it. It was extortion. Why should Jews, living in their own land, have to pay taxes to travel from Capernaum to Jerusalem?

The only thing a Jew hated more than paying taxes was the corrupt tax collector! It was traitorous for a Jew to be an agent for Rome. But Matthew didn't care. He had already grown calloused to the scorn of fellow Jews and the heartbreak of his godly parents. He reminded himself often that he earned far more as a publican than he ever could have made in the priesthood.

"Levi."

He turned to see who might know him by his Hebrew birth name. It had been a long time since anyone called him that. As he looked into the eyes of a familiar stranger, all the ill-gotten gain and patronizing Roman accolades lost their appeal. He had an epiphany. Material wealth and its diminishing satisfaction no longer mattered.

He set the bag – still heavy with coins – on the small table next to the record book. He rose from his chair, leaving the roadside booth and puzzled taxpayers unattended. Without looking back, he walked into the distance with a man who'd simply said, "Follow Me."

Simon Peter and Andrew (*Matthew 4:18-20, Mark 1:16-18, Luke 5:1-11*)

He was known to be impulsive. Peter's nature frequently got him into trouble. His father and older brother Andrew had often told him to slow down and think things through before making important decisions. But this was different. He wasn't being impetuous. He had never been more certain in all his life. And Andrew was the first to move.

They slowly relaxed their grip. Their salty nets, still dripping, fell to the

wet sand. Without looking back to see if their fishing boat was sufficiently moored, Andrew and Simon walked into the distance with a man they had never met.

Phillip (*John 1:43-46*)

He finally sold the last of the day's catch. His usual customers hurried home to prepare their evening meal. He cleaned the small wooden table at his fish market in Bethsaida, throwing scraps to birds eagerly awaiting an easy buffet.

But Phillip's mind was not on fishing. He was anxious to get home and finish reading. He had hardly slept the night before. The excitement of realizing Moses and Isaiah spoke of the same Man kept him up well into the night.

And this evening, he would search the writings of Zechariah. If they proved as revealing as Isaiah, he would have to share his discovery right away with Nathaniel.

The long walk to the water's edge the next morning seemed short to a man pondering messianic prophecies. He was about to shove off for another day on the sea when he heard two words he didn't even know he'd been waiting his whole life to hear, "Follow Me."

He turned to see Him. Could He be the one? The bucket of chum slowly slipped from his hand, hitting the ground with a thud. He never picked it up.

It's impossible to know precisely and fully what was going on in the minds of these men when Jesus called them. I've used my imagination to fill in unwritten details. But we are certain of this - these men forsook all to follow Jesus. Why? What caused these men to abandon life as they knew it to follow a man they had never met? Was it His charisma and charm? Was it His peaceful demeanor or the gentle sound of His voice?

I believe it was much deeper than that. Their human spirit within recognized the voice of their Creator. His eyes pierced into their unsatisfied souls. Deep called unto deep. His invitation resonated with their inner yearning for a greater purpose and meaning in life. Through a spiritual means too great for human logic or reason to explain, these men recognized that following this Man was their destiny. They were created to be His disciples.

Follow Me. Jesus is still calling. He has been ever since that day in Galilee. And ordinary men and women not too unlike the sons of Zebedee or Phillip the fisherman or Matthew the tax collector have answered the call to be His disciple.

We all remember our day. We all remember hearing His call for the first time and deciding to follow Him. For many of us, it was during a church service as the congregation worshipped or during the sermon as we wondered, almost angrily, how the preacher could possibly know about our situation. For others it may have been as we eagerly searched the scriptures in our homes. For some, it may have been after much inward conflict - wrestling between the truth of God's Word and our selfish, preconceived ideology. Some were

raised in God-fearing homes and answered the call before experiencing the agonies of worldly vices. What about you? Do you remember the day you became his disciple?

The call of Jesus usually coincides with an epiphany. Our present lives suddenly feel incomplete upon realizing God has a grander purpose. The timing of that awakening usually matches a growing dissatisfaction with material possessions and worldly pursuits. Sometimes, the wake-up call is realizing that life is clearly going in the wrong direction with little hope of change. Others surrender when desperation finally wins over pride or stubbornness.

However and whenever we chose to follow Him, that decision was the most important one of our lives. It was a turning point. It was a beginning. It was a rendezvous with destiny. He put our broken lives back together and gave us a bright future in His Kingdom.

It's an incredible notion – Jesus has called *us* to be His disciples. There is no greater joy and honor than hearing the call to be His disciple. He's called us to follow Him and be a part of His divine plan and purpose. He chose us so that He could use us.

What does it take to be His disciple? Must we abandon everything to follow after Him? Is it necessary to forsake our occupation – to drop our nets as Peter did? Is it mandatory that we leave father, mother, sister, and brother? These are questions man has pondered since Jesus called His first disciples.

What we become when we follow Him is more important than what we lay down to follow Him. He is more interested in our future than our past. I'm not denying there is always a personal cost to be his disciple. If I must forsake houses and lands to be His disciple, then so be it. If I must leave every semblance of my previous life to follow Him, then I will gladly drop my nets and follow Him without even looking back. But a more important question than what I'm leaving is: what am I becoming?

If I lay down my fishing nets but don't truly become the disciple He intended me to be, what difference does my sacrifice make? If I forsake houses and lands to follow Him, but never reach my fullest potential as His follower, then the sacrifice was for naught. If I surrender to His call, but my broken life is never healed, what does it matter that I said yes? If my life as a supposed Christian is no different than my past life, something has gone awry.

Jesus made a statement to Jewish believers in John 8:31 that contains a subtle yet vitally important truth. It is the foundation of this entire study. Because it is such a key to our study, we'll be referencing this verse many times:

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;" (John 8:31).

Jesus said if you continue in My Word, then are ye my disciples indeed. Notice the phrase **"disciples indeed."** His very use of that phrase makes a huge implication. Indeed means truly or really. In fact, most versions other than the King James substitute the word truly or really for indeed.

The New Living Translation says:

“You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings.”

The New International Version says:

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”

Jesus said if you continue in My Word, you will *truly* be My disciple, or you will *really* be My disciple. The version or word you use doesn't change the subtle, underlying message. Just the use of the phrase implies there are some who may *claim* to be a disciple, but they are not *truly* a disciple or not a disciple *indeed*. In other words, Jesus was implying that there are those who are “disciples,” and then there are those who are *really* disciples!

Disciple is a popular term very freely used and easily affixed. Anyone can *call* himself or herself a disciple – that's easy. But just calling yourself a disciple doesn't mean you truly are. I'm sure if I asked anyone claiming to be a Christian, “Are you a disciple?” the response would immediately be, “Yes, of course!” That's easy to say or claim.

The real question is, “Am I a disciple indeed?” Am I truly a disciple? Am I what Jesus considered a disciple?

Jesus made this statement to believers. He wasn't talking to unbelievers. He was speaking to people who had made a profession of belief in Jesus Christ. So, we can conclude that being a disciple indeed means more than believing in Him. The simple definition of a disciple is a follower, student, or pupil. But to many people who followed Him, believed in Him, and learned from Him, He still clearly implied a distinction between being a disciple and being a disciple indeed.

The real question is not what I must forsake, but what I must become? I want to become a true disciple – a real disciple. For some it may very well mean forsaking the fishing boat, the tax collector's booth or preconceived religious ideas. But the focus is on what lies ahead not behind. Am I becoming a disciple indeed – the kind of follower that *Jesus* considers a true disciple?

What does a true disciple look like? What is the litmus test of being a disciple indeed? Clearly, one must continue growing in His Word. Jesus specifically mentioned that in John 8:31 as a quality of a true disciple. But there are more characteristics of a disciple indeed.

Most discipleship lessons, classes, or Bible studies are designed to equip people with information. Most of these materials teach Bible doctrines or theology. They cover things like faith, salvation, the New Birth, and the Godhead. Of course, these are all extremely important things to know, and any serious disciple will study these timeless truths.

Most discipleship studies then proceed into topics involving spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, and systematic Bible study. Again, these are important tools every true disciple must learn.

A typical discipleship course wouldn't conclude without covering the practical aspects of spiritual life, such as how to resolve conflicts, how to share your faith, how to find your spiritual gifts, and how to handle difficulties.

While all these subjects are important and mustn't be neglected, most discipleship material fails to establish some underlying principles that are the foundation upon which all these other subjects are built.

Bible Doctrines are important – but they are *best* explained in the context of deeper underlying principles. Christian disciplines like prayer, fasting and Bible study are important – but they are best practiced when underlying principles answer the question, “Why do I do what I do?”

A holy lifestyle is a must. But unless guidelines for Christian living are the fruit of deeper underlying principles, the pursuit of true holiness reverts to just following a list of dos and don'ts.

Practical tools for the spiritual life are important to know, but the real power of those tools lies in their connection to deeper principles.

Being a disciple indeed is about more than learning information – it's about transformation. It involves more than knowing *about* Jesus – it involves *knowing* Jesus. People who try to embrace a holy lifestyle but have not truly surrendered to the authority of Christ are setting themselves up for failure. Unless Christian service is driven by a deep love for people and a sense of calling, ministry will turn into drudgery and, ultimately, resentment and burnout.

There are deeper principles of discipleship that must not be overlooked. Without an understanding and embracing of these deeper principles, all the typical discipleship topics and lessons have less impact and may never lead to one being a disciple indeed.

This Bible study establishes five underlying principles of true discipleship. These five fundamental concepts are the foundation for a true disciple's life.

The Five Principles of True Discipleship Are:

- The Principle of Transformation
- The Principle of Relationship
- The Principle of the Lordship of Christ
- The Principle of Purpose
- The Principle of Love

I want to be more than a disciple in label only – don't you? I pray over the next 5 weeks God's Word will challenge and inspire us to become disciples indeed!

WEEK ONE.

TRANSFORMATION

DAY ONE

Information or Transformation

John 8:31 is our key verse for this entire Bible study. We'll begin this week by writing out that verse.

Write John 8:31 in the King James Version below:

Write the verse in a version other than the King James Version:

If Jesus spoke of true disciples, then there must also be those who claim to be but are not, in fact, true disciples. Over the next few weeks, we'll study five underlying principles of true discipleship. Our first is the **Principle of Transformation**. Measurable, discernible transformation is one of the characteristics that separates disciples indeed from those who simply profess to be Christians.

When you first became a disciple you probably enrolled in a new believer's course or discipleship small group at a local church. If you grew up in the church, Sunday School may have been where you first learned about the Bible and being a Christian.

Where did you learn your first concepts about the Bible and Christianity?



Important Note

All Scripture references are King James Version unless otherwise noted

What were some of the “fundamentals” that you learned?**Key Concept**

Learning information is not the same as transformation.

I'm thankful that I was raised in the church. My parents were very active in our local church, and from the time I was born, I was present anytime the church doors were open. Other than what I learned from my parents at home, my first exposure to God and His Word took place in my Sunday School Class. I still remember my Kindergarten Sunday School teacher, Bessie Anderson. In that small classroom in the basement of Full Gospel Tabernacle in Kokomo, Indiana, I learned the stories of the Bible and the basic plot of God's plan, His love for mankind, and His great sacrifice at Calvary.

I have such fond memories of Sunday school. When we got a little older, we played a game called “sword drills.” The teacher would give a scripture text, and all the young people would see who could find the passage in their Bible (sword) the quickest. Whoever found it first would stand and read the verse aloud. I was the undisputed champion in the church Sunday school and youth group. The sword drill competition was fun and had the intended side-effect of teaching us the books of the Bible and where they were located in relation to one another.

On Wednesday evenings, my father taught the mid-week Bible class. From the time I was a young teenager, I would sit in the front row with a notepad and take notes during the Bible study. All the young folks did the same - it was our church culture.

The years in Sunday school, youth class, and mid-week Bible study served me well. I learned a lot of information about the Bible. I became very familiar with its characters, themes, and doctrines.

While those things are all important - they don't necessarily ensure that a person will be a Disciple Indeed. Learning about the Bible is a great foundation, but being a true disciple is about more than learning information - it's about personal transformation.

A person can attend church every Sunday and hear good sermons that teach important doctrines of the scripture. One can memorize all the books of the Bible and become familiar with all the prominent biblical characters. Learning these things is good, but information is

not the same as transformation. Acquiring information about God and His Word doesn't necessarily translate into meaningful, spiritual transformation. Information without transformation produces disciples in name only, not disciples indeed.

We have all met people who know a lot about the Bible, but that knowledge never translated into a changed life. What about us?

Can you think of an area of your life where your Bible knowledge about a subject has translated into a change in your own behavior?



Share

“Being a true disciple is about more than learning information - it’s about personal transformation”

#DisciplesIndeed

As a pastor for over thirty years, I have observed countless people make the decision to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Some continue on, reach their full potential as a disciple, and flourish in the Kingdom of God. Sadly, others struggle in their new profession of faith. Their spiritual growth never seems to gain any traction, and little, if any, forward spiritual progress is ever made. Despite my best attempts to encourage and uplift them, they either eventually fall away from the Kingdom or, if they do continue, they do so only in a marginal way, living an anemic and inconsistent spiritual life.

Why do some excel as Christians, and others seem never to get their faith off the launch pad? I've concluded that the difference lies in whether the person has experienced a true, deep, personal spiritual **transformation**.

As a pastor, it's so rewarding to see people become true disciples – to see those who continue growing in their faith and reach a place of victory and fruitfulness. When I look at the lives of such Christians, I can usually point back to a spiritual experience that produced a radical change within them. Their spiritual journey began with a revolutionary transformation of their whole person.

In contrast, those who struggle spiritually usually lack any significant, measurable transformation of their lives. They may have professed a belief in Jesus Christ and even had a genuine experience with God, but it never produced any real transformation of their person. They may have put on the Christian label, but they are – for all practical purposes – the same person they've always been.

Read Romans 12:1-2. Write the phrase in that passage that describes what we are currently discussing.

Look up the word, transform, in the dictionary. What are some of the definitions?

I love the New Living Translation of that verse. It says:

"...let God transform you into a new person..."

Paul is speaking to the Roman church about a spiritual transformation. This involves much more than just learning information about the Bible. Disciples indeed have had a transformation of their very nature and person.

It is much easier to profess a faith in Christ than to truly become a new person in Christ. Learning some cursory information about the Bible requires drastically less commitment than undergoing a personal spiritual metamorphosis. Becoming a disciple indeed requires a significant investment of time and energy as well as an unwavering commitment to the long-term process of spiritual transformation.

Why not just be a disciple in label only? That would be much easier! Why would someone want to pay the price to be a disciple indeed?



Additional Reading

Ephesians 4:22-24

Colossians 3:9-10

Throughout this week, we will be digging deeper into the first of five principles of true discipleship – the Principle of Transformation.



Today's Prayer

*“Lord, Jesus, I hear
Your call. I will
follow You wherever
you lead. I want to
be a true disciple
- not just one in
label only. Help
me over the next
few weeks to learn
what it means to be
a Disciple Indeed.
In Jesus' Name -
Amen!”*