

# THE WAY

DISCOVERING CHRIST'S  
PATH OF DISCIPLESHIP

# DISCIPLES PATH

*Disciples Path* is a series of studies founded on Jesus' model of discipleship. Created by experienced disciple makers across the nation, it offers an intentional pathway for transformational discipleship and a way to help followers of Christ move from new disciples to mature disciple makers. Each study in the series is built on the principles of modeling, practicing, and multiplying:

- Leaders model the life of a biblical disciple.
- Disciples follow and practice from the leader.
- Disciples become disciple makers and multiply through the *Disciples Path*.

Each study in the series has been written and approved by disciple-makers for small groups and one-on-one settings.

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For helps on how to use *Disciples Path*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading this study, visit: [www.ministrygrid.com/web/disciplespath](http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/disciplespath)

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## A NOTE FOR DISCIPLE MAKERS

Several years ago I was part of a massive research study that sought to discover how the Lord often brings about transformation in the hearts of His people. The study became a book called *Transformational Discipleship*. Basically, we wanted to learn how disciples are made. Based on the study of Scripture and lots of interactions with people, we concluded that transformation is likely to occur when a godly **leader** applies **truth** to the heart of a person while that person is in a teachable **posture**.

- **LEADER:** You are the leader. As you invest in the people you're discipling, they will learn much about the Christian faith by watching you, by sensing your heart for the Lord, and by seeing you pursue Him. I encourage you to seek to be the type of leader who can say, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."
- **TRUTH:** All six studies in the *Disciples Path* series were developed in deep collaboration with ministry leaders who regularly and effectively disciple people. The studies are designed to take the people you disciple into the Word of God—because we're confident that Jesus and His Word sanctify us and transform us. Our community of disciple-makers mapped out a path of the truths we believe are essential for each believer to know and understand.
- **POSTURE:** Hopefully the people you will be investing in adopt a teachable posture—one that is open and hungry for the Lord. Encourage them to take the study seriously and to view your invitation to study together as a sacred opportunity to experience the grace of God and the truth of God.

We hope and pray the Lord will use this study in your life and the lives of those you disciple. As you apply the truth of God to teachable hearts, transformation will occur. Thank you for being a disciple-maker!



In Christ,

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink.

Eric Geiger

Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources

Co-author of *Transformational Discipleship*

# WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Congratulations! If you've chosen to live as a disciple of Jesus, you've made the most important decision imaginable. But you may be wondering, *What does it mean to be a disciple?*

To put it simply, a disciple of Jesus is someone who has chosen to follow Jesus. That's the command Jesus gave to those He recruited as His first disciples: "Follow Me." In Jesus' culture, religious leaders called rabbis would gather a group of followers called disciples to follow in their footsteps and learn their teachings. In the same way, you will become more and more like Jesus as you purposefully follow Him in the weeks to come. Jesus once said, "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

On a deeper level, disciples of Jesus are those learning to base their identities on Jesus Himself. All of us use different labels to describe who we are at the core levels of our hearts. Some think of themselves as athletes or intellectuals. Others think of themselves as professionals, parents, leaders, class clowns, and so on.

Disciples of Jesus set aside those labels and base their identities on Him. For example:

- **A disciple of Jesus is a child of God.** In the Bible we find these words: "Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are!" (1 John 3:1). We are God's children. He loves us as our perfect Father.
- **A disciple of Jesus is an alien in this world.** Disciples of Jesus are aliens, or outsiders, in their own cultures. Because of this identity, Jesus' disciples abstain from actions and activities that are contrary to Him. Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, wrote these words: "Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you" (1 Pet. 2:11).
- **A disciple of Jesus is an ambassador for Christ.** Another of Jesus' disciples recorded these words in the Bible: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. ... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5:17,20). Ambassadors represent their king and country in a different culture for a specified period of time. Because we have been transformed by Jesus and are now His disciples and ambassadors, we represent Him to the world through our actions and by telling others about Him.

The journey you are about to take is one that will transform you more and more to be like Jesus. Enjoy! No one ever loved and cared for people more passionately than Jesus. No one was ever more sincere in His concern for others than Jesus. And no one ever gave more so that we could experience His love than Jesus did on the cross.

As you grow to be more like Jesus, you'll find that your relationships are stronger, you have more inner peace than ever before, and you look forward to the future as never before.

That's the blessing of living as a disciple of Jesus.

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Welcome to *The Way*. By exploring the journey of Jesus' earliest disciples, both new and established Christians will gain a better understanding of what it means to follow Christ. As you get started, consider the following guides and suggestions for making the most of this experience.

### GROUP DISCUSSION

Because the process of discipleship always involves at least two people—the leader and the disciple—each session of *The Way* includes a practical plan for group engagement and discussion.

This plan includes the following steps:

- **GET STARTED.** The first section of the group material helps you ease into the discussion by starting on common ground. You'll begin by reflecting on the previous session and your recent experiences as a disciple. After spending time in prayer, you'll find a practical illustration to help you launch into the main topic of the current session.
- **THE STORY.** While using *Disciples Path*, you'll find opportunities to engage the Bible through both story and teaching. That's why the group time for each session features two main sections: **Know the Story** and **Unpack the Story**. **Know the Story** introduces a biblical text and includes follow-up questions for brief discussion. It's recommended that your group encounter the biblical text by reading it out loud. **Unpack the Story** includes practical teaching material and discussion questions—both designed to help you engage the truths contained in the biblical text. To make the most of your experience, use the provided material as a launching point for deeper conversation. As you read through the teaching material and engage the questions as a group, be thinking of how the truths you're exploring will impact your everyday life.
- **ENGAGE.** The group portion of each session ends with an activity designed to help you practice the biblical principles introduced in **Know the Story** and more fully explored in **Unpack the Story**. This part of the group time often appeals to different learning styles and will push you to engage the text at a personal level.

## INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each session of *The Way* also includes content for individual use during the time between group gatherings. This content is divided into three categories:

- ↑ **Worship:** features content for worship and devotion. These activities provide opportunities for you to connect with God in meaningful ways and deepen your relationship with Him.
- ⇒ ◀ **Personal study:** features content for personal study. These pages help you gain a deeper understanding of the truths and principles explored during the group discussion.
- ◀ ⇒ **Application:** features content for practical application. These suggestions help you take action based on the information you've learned and your encounters with God.

*Note:* Aside from the **Reading Plan**, the content provided in the Individual Discovery portion of each session should be considered optional. You'll get the most out of your personal study by working with your group leader to create a personalized discipleship plan using the **Weekly Activities** checklist included in each session.

## ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- You'll be best prepared for each group discussion or mentoring conversation if you read the session material beforehand. A serious read will serve you most effectively, but skimming the **Get Started** and **The Story** sections will also be helpful if time is limited.
- The deeper you're willing to engage in the group discussions and individual discovery each session, the more you'll benefit from those experiences. Don't hold back, and don't be afraid to ask questions whenever necessary.
- As you explore the **Engage** portion of each session, you'll have the chance to practice different activities and spiritual disciplines. Take advantage of the chance to observe others during the group time—and to ask questions—so that you'll be prepared to incorporate these activities into your private spiritual life as well.
- Visit [lifeway.com/disciplespath](http://lifeway.com/disciplespath) for a free PDF download that includes leader helps for *The Way* and additional resources for disciple-makers.



## SESSION 1

# DEFINING A DISCIPLE

To be a disciple of Jesus is to participate in  
God's redemptive mission for the world.



## REFLECT

Welcome to *The Way*. The goal of this resource is to help you explore the process of growing and maturing as a disciple of Jesus. Throughout the following sessions, we'll examine the journey of Jesus' own disciples through different passages from the Gospels. In this session, we'll begin by gaining a better understanding of what a disciple is and what it means to live each day as a disciple of Christ.

Use the following questions to begin the session with discussion.

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*What are some words our culture uses to describe those who choose to live as disciples of Jesus?*

*What are some words that describe your own experiences while living as a disciple of Jesus?*

*In what ways would you most like to grow and mature in your efforts to follow Jesus?*

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## PRAY

Take a break from your discussion to approach God in prayer. Use the following guidelines as you connect with Him:

- Thank God for the opportunity to join with other disciples of Christ in order to gain a better understanding of what it means to live as a disciple.
- Praise God for the ways He has worked in your life.
- Ask for wisdom for all present as you engage God's Word.

## INTRODUCTION

The English language has a lot of quirks. There are bunches of rules and principles that are supposed to keep things separated and in order. Yet many times those rules and principles overlap in strange ways—even sometimes contradicting one another.

For example, did you know many English words can be used as both nouns and verbs? Think of a farmer milking a cow. The word *milk* acts as a verb in such situations; to “milk” a cow is an action that involves specific steps. But what do you get after the cow has been milked? You get milk, of course—*milk* as a noun. The same word goes in two separate directions.

Other words follow the same pattern. You might smell (verb) something wonderful in your kitchen and recognize it as the smell (noun) of baking bread. You can use a hammer (noun) to hammer (verb) nails into a board. Strange as it may sound, it’s entirely possible to chant a chant, broadcast a broadcast, and drink a drink.

*Disciple* is another word that can go in two directions at once. Those who have experienced salvation live and breathe each day as disciples of Jesus Christ. In this way, the word *disciple* defines who we are as Christians. At the same time, the term also defines much of what we do as Christians. As followers of Jesus, we’re called to disciple less-mature Christians by helping them grow in their relationships with Christ—even as we are disciplined by others.

This process is called “discipleship,” and it’s one of the primary goals of this resource. As you engage the pages to come, you’ll learn what it means to find your identity as a disciple of Jesus. You’ll also learn (and experience) the benefits of discipleship in the context of deeper relationships with other Christians.

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***How would you summarize in your own words what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?***

***What questions do you have about the meaning and process of discipleship?***

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## KNOW THE STORY

John the Baptist was a man with a mission. He had been charged by God to prepare the way for the Messiah—for Jesus. The following story highlights Jesus' mission for the world. It also helps us gain a sense of our place in that mission as disciples of Christ.

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"  
<sup>30</sup> This is the One I told you about: 'After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me.' <sup>31</sup> I didn't know Him, but I came baptizing with water so He might be revealed to Israel."

<sup>32</sup> And John testified, "I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him. <sup>33</sup> I didn't know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup> I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God!"

<sup>35</sup> Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and noticed them following Him, He asked them, "What are you looking for?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are You staying?"  
<sup>39</sup> "Come and you'll see," He replied. So they went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him. <sup>41</sup> He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" (which means "Anointed One"), <sup>42</sup> and he brought Simon to Jesus.

**JOHN 1:29-42**



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***What do these verses teach us about Jesus?***

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## UNPACK THE STORY

### JESUS HAS A MISSION FOR THE WORLD

We're exploring the question: *What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?* Interestingly, the best way to answer that question is to focus not on the concept of a "disciple," but on the identity of Jesus. In order to understand what it means to live as followers of Jesus, we must first have a proper view of Jesus Himself.



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*What are some different ways people define Jesus today?*

*How would you express or explain who Jesus is?*

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John the Baptist offered several identifying factors for Jesus. For example, John claimed that Jesus existed before him, even though John was older than Jesus by several months (see Luke 1). More importantly, John identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God," "the Son of God," and "the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

All of these factors point to a vital truth: Jesus is more than a regular person. In fact, Jesus is God in human flesh. One of the foundational concepts of Christianity is the doctrine of the incarnation, which states that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. Jesus' time on earth involved the fullness of God interacting with humanity and all of creation both physically and historically.

Jesus didn't come to earth for a vacation, however. He had a purpose. He had a mission. And it was this mission John the Baptist referenced when he saw Jesus for the first time: "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29).

The world has been broken and corrupted by sin. We as individuals are broken and corrupted by sin. But Jesus came to fix the problem of sin. His death and resurrection opened the door for redemption—they allow us to experience forgiveness for our sins and live in a restored (or redeemed) relationship with God. This is the gospel.

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*Where have you seen evidence of Jesus' mission?*

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Jesus came to fix the problem of sin. His death and resurrection opened the door for redemption—they allow us to experience forgiveness for our sins and live in a restored (or redeemed) relationship with God. This is the gospel.

## DISCIPLES PARTICIPATE IN JESUS' MISSION FOR THE WORLD

To live as disciples of Jesus, we must first understand His redemptive mission for the world. As with most things, however, it's not enough for us to simply *understand* Jesus' redemptive mission for the world. We must go further. We must take action. Indeed, to be a disciple of Jesus is to *participate* in His mission and purpose for the world.

Notice from our Scripture focus that John the Baptist wasn't content with recognizing Jesus as "the Lamb of God." John took pains to publicly proclaim the truth about Jesus on multiple occasions. He took action in order to participate in Jesus' mission and purpose. And his participation produced fruit—men who had been following John were rightly convinced to follow Jesus, instead (see vv. 37-39).

In a similar way, verse 40 shows how Andrew—one of the two men who had been following John—participated in Jesus' mission by sharing the good news with his brother, Simon. Andrew's efforts went beyond words. He brought Simon to Jesus so that his brother could experience the truth for himself.

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***How would you describe your experiences of talking with others about Jesus?***

***In addition to evangelism, what are some other ways we can participate in Jesus' mission for the world?***

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As you read through Scripture—and as you work through the pages of this resource—you'll notice that Jesus' disciples rarely engage His mission as individuals. Instead, followers of Christ typically work together in relationship with one another as they seek to advance His redemptive mission in the world. That was certainly Jesus' preference during His public ministry. He didn't recruit converts and then send them out to do His work in isolation. Instead, He gathered disciples to Himself so they could follow Him as a community—even as a family.

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***What are some advantages of working as a team to engage Jesus' mission for the world?***

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Jesus' disciples rarely engage His mission as individuals. Instead, followers of Christ typically work together in relationship with one another as they seek to advance His redemptive mission in the world.

Following Jesus is not an individual activity, nor is it something that can be accomplished in isolation—not for long. Instead, living as a disciple of Christ means living within a community of Christians. That community extends around the world and throughout time to include the church in all ages and all locations. On a more practical level, however, your local community includes the fellow disciples you connect with, worship with, and serve with each week.

Take a few minutes to practice living as a community of disciples in the following two ways:

- 1. **Pray with one another.** Spend several minutes praying together as a group. Talk openly about the major events in your life, including both difficulties and triumphs. Then take turns praying for one another specifically and intentionally.
- 2. **Connect with one another.** Plan a time to meet socially as a group and do something fun, preferably before the next group meeting. Meet at a park, have dinner, watch a movie—anything that moves you forward together in community.

PRAYER REQUESTS

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In addition to studying God's Word, work with your group leader to create a plan for personal study, worship, and application between now and the next session. Select from the following optional activities to match your personal preferences and available time.

## ↑ **Worship**

- ☒ Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 16.
- ☐ Spend time with God by engaging the devotional experience on page 17.
- ☐ Connect with God each day through prayer.

## ➡ ⬅ **Personal Study**

- ☐ Read and interact with "Jesus Has a Mission for the World" on page 18.
- ☐ Read and interact with "Disciples Participate in Jesus' Mission" on page 20.

## ⬅ ➡ **Application**

- ☐ Be intentional about making the most of your experiences at church this weekend. Take advantage of opportunities to engage other disciples of Jesus in a more meaningful way.
- ☐ Memorize John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"
- ☐ When you have an opportunity to participate in Jesus' mission this week, invite another disciple to join you.
- ☐ Start a journal to record the different ways you engage Jesus' mission for the world each day. This is a great way to remind yourself of that mission and evaluate your participation in it.
- ☐ Other:



# WORSHIP

## READING PLAN

Read through the following Scripture passages this week. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses.

### **Day 1**

Luke 14:25-35

### **Day 2**

John 15:1-17

### **Day 3**

John 17:6-19

### **Day 4**

John 21:15-23

### **Day 5**

Ephesians 4:17-32

### **Day 6**

2 Timothy 2:1-13

### **Day 7**

2 Timothy 2:14-26



## TO SERVE AND TO GIVE

As you'd expect, Jesus' earliest disciples had a lot of learning to do about what it meant to follow Him. For example, they spent much of their time in a strange kind of sibling rivalry—they pushed and jockeyed with one another in order to see who would become the greatest in Jesus' kingdom. The disciples knew Jesus was something special and they understood Him to be both majestic and powerful. Therefore, each wanted to position himself to receive the largest portion of reflected majesty and power once Jesus declared Himself to the world as King.

Of course, none of that was in Jesus' plans. And He let them know it:

<sup>42</sup> Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and their men of high positions exercise power over them. <sup>43</sup> But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many."

**MARK 10:42-45**

We must also be careful of pride and ambition as we seek to follow Jesus—mainly because such attitudes will damage our relationship with Him. Use the following questions to assess your heart.

***What factors cause you to feel jealous of or competitive with other disciples?***

***In what situations do you feel superior to other people? Why?***

***How do you feel when you intentionally work for the benefit of others?***

Following Jesus isn't about notoriety and big rewards—not in this life, anyway. Instead, those who choose to live as disciples of Christ must constantly give of themselves in order to serve others, as He did.

## JESUS HAS A MISSION FOR THE WORLD

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? At the core, it means to join with other disciples in order to participate in His broader mission for the world. To that end, we've already seen that Jesus' mission centers on His role as the One "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But let's dig a little deeper into that mission—and into the identity of Jesus Himself—in order to better understand what's expected of us as disciples.

John the Baptist provides an interesting character study for these themes. While he spent his life preparing the way for the Messiah, he didn't encounter Jesus until the end of his ministry. Yet, we can learn much from John when it comes to living in light of Jesus' person and mission.

Look at the following passage, for example:

<sup>15</sup> Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were debating in their minds whether John might be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, "I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing shovel is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with a fire that never goes out."

**LUKE 3:15-17**

***What can we learn about John the Baptist from these verses?***

***What can we learn about Jesus from these verses?***

The people of John's day were looking for the Messiah, a specific term for the Savior of the world prophesied throughout the Old Testament. John knew the Messiah would be Someone greater than himself—Someone with the power to both save people for eternity ("gather the wheat into His barn") and pronounce judgment for sin ("the chaff He will burn up").

In addition, John understood that the Messiah would grant people access to God's Spirit. John baptized people with water as a symbol. The Messiah would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire."

All of this is important because it helps us understand that Jesus' mission for the world is directly connected to His divine authority and divine identity. The reason Jesus can fix the brokenness of the world is because He created the world. The reason Jesus can provide forgiveness for sin is because He is God; therefore, He is totally untouched by sin. For these reasons and more, we can feel confident as participants in Jesus' mission.

In order to live as disciples of Jesus, we must first fully embrace His identity as God. Thankfully, Jesus made His identity clear throughout the Scriptures, including here:

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one.

**JOHN 10:27-30**

***How did you come to the conclusion that Jesus is God?***

In a similar way, Jesus wasn't silent about the nature of His mission for the world. He spoke often of His purpose and His goals as Savior.

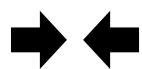
***Read the following passages of Scripture and record how they contribute to your understanding of Jesus' mission for the world:***

***Mark 10:42-45***

***Luke 4:16-21***

***John 17:1-5***

Living as a disciple of Jesus means embracing His identity and His mission for the world. Be sure you've taken that crucial step as you consider what it means to follow Him each day.



## DISCIPLES PARTICIPATE IN JESUS' MISSION

In order to live as disciples of Jesus, we must fully embrace His mission as the divine Savior of the world. But that's just the first step. In addition to understanding and embracing Jesus' mission for the world, we must also participate in that mission. We need to get involved.

But what does that mean on a practical level? How do we actually go about joining Jesus in His redemptive purpose for the world? We'll spend the remainder of this resource exploring answers to those questions. Specifically, we'll focus on four ways Jesus empowers those who follow Him:

1. Jesus calls His disciples.
2. Jesus teaches His disciples.
3. Jesus equips His disciples.
4. Jesus sends His disciples.

***Which item from this list are you most interested in exploring? Why?***

Before we move forward, however, let's look at two important truths that will help us gain a deeper understanding of what it means to participate in Jesus' mission for the world. First, our involvement in Jesus' mission goes beyond "participation" in the normal sense of that word. We don't participate with Jesus in the same way we participate in the Parent Teacher Association or a charitable cause—we don't "pitch in" with Jesus' mission whenever our schedule opens up.

No, to follow Jesus means to give up our lives in service to Him. Jesus Himself made that clear:

<sup>23</sup> Then He said to them all, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it."

**LUKE 9:23-24**

***What's your initial reaction to these verses?***

Jesus wasn't necessarily talking about physically dying for His mission—although many of His followers have done so over the centuries. Instead, Jesus wanted us to understand that joining His purpose for the world means giving over control of our lives to Him. Following Jesus means we not only recognize Him as Savior, but also submit to Him as Master, Lord, and King.

***In what ways have you already submitted yourself to Jesus?***

***What steps can you take in the coming weeks to continue releasing control of your life over to Him?***

Second, we need to understand that our involvement in Jesus' mission depends on His strength and resources rather than our own. It's easy for Christians to get the wrong idea on this subject—it's easy for us to feel like the world is on our shoulders and all of God's plans will collapse if we don't pray harder, worship longer, read the Bible more frequently, and evangelize until we drop.

Thankfully, Jesus again made things clear in His Word:

I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me.  
JOHN 15:5

***How have you benefited from Jesus' presence and power in your life?***

***What kinds of fruit do you hope will be produced in your life as a disciple of Jesus?***

As a disciple of Jesus, you will participate in His mission when you submit control of your life to Him and actively rely on His resources to work through you and produce fruit.