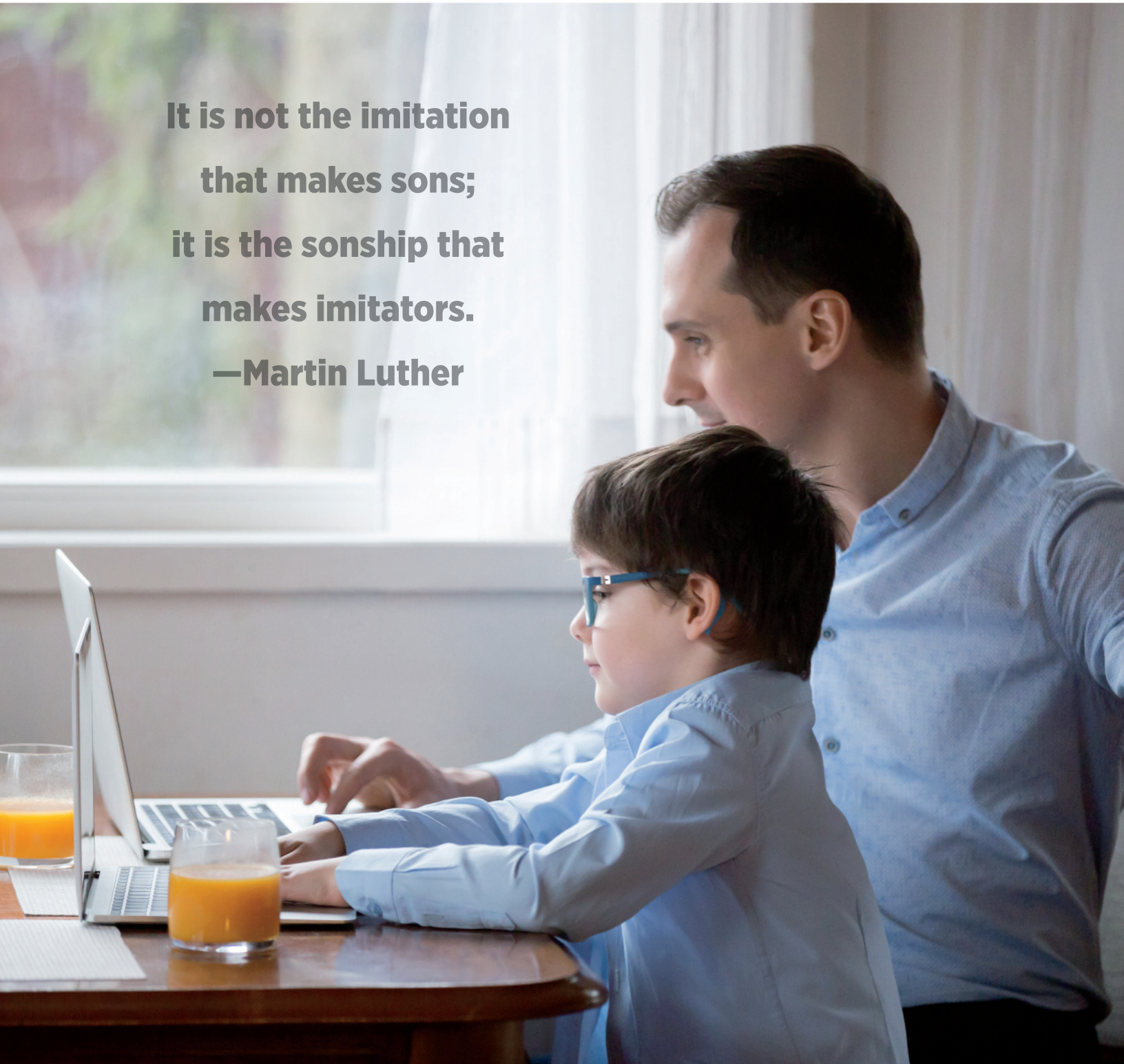


GOD'S REVIVALIST

March 2023

and Bible Advocate

**It is not the imitation
that makes sons;
it is the sonship that
makes imitators.
—Martin Luther**





thinking out loud

IMITATORS

I have a daily ritual of reading “Morning Briefing” in the *New York Times*. Why? Primarily because I don’t want to expose myself to information that comes from only one perspective, rendering me culturally myopic. I also enjoy doing the daily Wordle, Mini Crossword, Pangram, as well as the weekly Quiz on Friday. But my reason for writing this is not just to justify my being a NYT reader. Something grabbed my attention during a recent perusal of the newspaper.

Noma—the renowned Copenhagen restaurant, often called the best in the world—was shutting down its regular service. Who is going to set the trends now that Noma will no longer be introducing such delicacies as “one-bite appetizers of reindeer lichen and puffed fish skin?” Pete Wells, the *Times* restaurant critic, made the case that Noma’s influence “will live on through its imitators” (my emphasis).

You may think it is quite a leap to go from the thought of chefs around the world copying Noma menus, cooking methods, and even restaurant ambiance, to the idea of striving to lead a vibrant, authentically Christian life; but that is where my thoughts took me. How important it is to live one’s life in a way that makes others consider it to be worthy of imitating! I reminisced about how blessed I was to have had parents who were excellent models—not just in the spiritual realm, but also through winsome elements of their personalities. Both lived exemplary Christian lives, and both had a fun-loving sense of humor. Those who know me well will see certain aspects of my personality that are imitations of those of my parents. For example, Daddy had a strong sense of ethics and a strict adherence to the truth. Mother had a high level of self-confidence in her ability to “get things done” and an enthusiasm for being “the life of the party.” By taking a sample of those elements mixed together, you get a basic picture of my personality.

My parents taught me that the first order of imitation was to “be like Jesus,” and they helped me understand how to do that by example, through family discipling, and by providing the correction that was often needed in my case.

Elmer and Betty Farmer, like the original Noma restaurant, are no longer open for service here on earth. However, their influence lives on through their children Harry, Kenny, Sam, and Kitty Lou, as well as many others who, inspired by their lives, have become imitators of them and of Christ.

Ask God to help you live a life worthy of imitation!—KF

CONTENTS

MARCH 2023
Volume 135 No.2

FEATURES

- I Follow Jesus** **5**
by Nathan Brown
- I Followed John To Jesus** **11**
by Richard Miles
- Intimacy With The Almighty** **18**
by Glenn Black
- Ten Questions To Consider When Choosing An Accountability Partner** **24**
by Sonja Vernon

DEPARTMENTS

- The President’s Page** **3**
- Letters To The Editor** **10**
- News From The Hilltop** **13**
- Revivalist Family** **13**
- Dear Phil: A Biblical Response** **20**
- Revivalist Pulpit** **21**
- World Pulse** **23**
- Student Focus** **23**
- Alumni News** **26**
- Thoughts For The Quiet Hour** **27**

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I Follow Jesus

by Nathan Brown



In part one of this series, we looked at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and we did this in terms of five verbs. Being a disciple of Jesus means:

- Committing to Him alone.
- Following Him.
- Imitating Him and those who follow His example.
- Coaching others in how to follow Him.
- Persuading others to follow Him.

We also defined discipleship as a lifetime journey made in community with other disciples in which we endeavor to become more like Jesus, we imitate and coach each other, and we persuade the lost to follow Christ. Now at this point you might be thinking, “That’s a nice definition, but how do I actually do all those things?” That brings us to part two where we’re going to answer this question: How do I personally follow Jesus?

To answer this question, we’ll go through each of the five verbs of discipleship and talk about how to put them into practice in daily life. Let’s start with the first—*commit*.

COMMIT: Resolve Each Day to Be a Disciple

When you made the decision to become a disciple of Jesus, you made an initial commitment to follow Him. However, it’s important to renew that commitment on a daily basis. This can be done in the following ways:

Cultivate your identity. If someone asked you about your faith, what would you say? Most of us would probably respond with, “I’m a Christian,” and, of course, the disciples of Jesus were indeed called Christians (Acts 11:26). Yet the word “Christian” has become a loaded word in our culture. It can mean different things to different people. Because of this, I encourage you to think of yourself and describe yourself to others like this: “I’m a disciple, a fol-

lower of Jesus.” When we tell people we’re Christians, they often put us in a box in their minds. Using the word “disciple” can shake things up and lead to fascinating and productive conversations with others. The more we think of ourselves as disciples, the more our hearts and minds will resonate with this truth, and the more often we’ll ask, “How can I become more like Jesus?”

Commit daily. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). This shows how important self-denial is to discipleship. We must die to ourselves daily (give up the right to have our own way), and we must obey the Spirit, no matter what He tells us to do. That’s the example Jesus left us, and we must follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). I suggest you add this prayer to your daily conversation with God: “Father, thank You for Your grace, which gives me the desire and power to do Your will. Today, I consecrate myself to You. Help me resist temptation and say ‘Yes’ to the Holy Spirit. Help me live each moment under His influence.” This short prayer will be a daily reminder of your identity as a disciple of Jesus.

Be accountable. One of the best ways to maintain a commitment is to be accountable to someone for that commitment. We aren’t meant to live the Christian life apart from the help and encouragement of the Church. That’s why accountability to other believers is so important (cf. Heb. 3:12-14; 10:23-25; 1 Thess. 5:11; Gal. 6:1-2). I encourage you to find a fellow believer you can trust and give him/her permission to check up on you on a regular basis. We need fellow believers to whom we can be accountable. We need to humble ourselves and confess our faults to them (Prov. 28:13; James 5:16). This is one of the best ways we can maintain our commitment to follow Jesus.

FOLLOW: Foster a Relationship with God

The second verb is *follow*, and it’s all about fostering a relationship with God. When we’re saved, we enter into a master-disciple relationship with Jesus. We commit to follow Him, learn from Him, and obey Him. Here are some practical ways to cultivate a relationship with God.

Take time. God wants to have a personal relationship with each of us (John 17:3), and as we all know, relationships take time. If we don’t take time for personal discipleship, it won’t happen. Jesus left us an example—He regularly left His disciples, went off by Himself, and spent time alone with God (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). We need to do the same. We need to find a place each day where we can be alone with the Father. We should eliminate as many distractions as possible and focus our minds on God.

Listen to God. I deliberately use the phrase “listen to God” because it emphasizes that *when we read the Bible, God is speaking directly to us*. Several years ago, I was teaching on discipleship at a church, and after I was done, a young lady came up to me and said, “When you said that God is speaking directly to us when we read the Bible, my brain just stopped right there, because the Bible doesn’t feel like that to me at

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). This shows how important self-denial is to discipleship.

all! Tell me more about that.” So I spent some time trying to explain, and she seemed to have a better understanding; but then, as so often happens, about an hour later, I realized what I should have told her.

I should have shown her Hebrews 12:5-6, which says, “Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’” In this passage, the author of He-

brews quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 and tells his readers that what Solomon wrote so many years ago was directly addressed to them! Solomon was speaking to his own children at the time, yet God was also speaking through him to us. This means that the Scriptures are God's Word to us, right now, today, not just a record of what He said to others so many years ago (cf. Deut. 5:2-3).

Now you might be thinking, "Well, that might work with Proverbs, but how could it work with everything in the Bible?" Let's look at Deuteronomy 25:4 which says,



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"You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain." This is a command from the Mosaic Law, and it seems completely irrelevant to us in America today. Who uses an ox to tread grain anymore? Yet Paul quotes this verse 1,460 years later and says, "Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does He not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop"

(1 Cor. 9:9-10). This teaches us that even the most obscure and seemingly irrelevant parts of the Bible contain principles for daily living and are God's words for us today (see also 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 4:23-24; Rom. 15:4; John 5:39)!

How much of what God has said should we be interested in hearing? All of it, of course! We need to have our minds regularly exposed to all of God's Word. Listening to all that God has said ensures that we:

- **Get to know the Bible.** God's people ought to have a basic knowledge of His Word. If we aren't familiar with the entirety of Scripture, we will overlook something God wants us to know. Consider the story of Ezra, who discovered an entire festival while reading the Law to the people. They celebrated the feast of booths (tabernacles) in obedience to God's command, and Nehemiah tells us that it hadn't been done like that since the days of Joshua! (Neh. 8:13-18). You never know what you'll find when you listen to all of God's Word.
- **Give God the respect He deserves.** When we read the entire Bible, we show God that we honor everything He said, not just those parts we feel are particularly relevant or applicable to us. When Ezra read the law to the remnant in Jerusalem (Neh. 9:3), they stood up for "a fourth part of the day." Why? They were showing God how much they respected Him and His Word.
- **Gain a balanced understanding of the character of God.** If we don't regularly fill our minds with everything God has revealed about Himself, our understanding of Him will become unbalanced. For example, if we only spend time reading about God's love, we'll be horrified when God tells us how He killed Uzzah for touching the ark (2 Sam. 6:1-7). If we only spend time reading about God's wrath and judgment on sin, we'll be astounded when God tells us how He restored Manasseh to the throne after he repented (2 Chron. 33).
 - **Know where things are with respect to other things.** Think about geography. If we know where the seven continents are on the globe, we can quickly find the part of the world for which we are looking. When we read the Bible all the way through, we gain a bird's-eye view of Scripture that allows us quickly to locate various sections of interest. For example, we will know where to find: what happened after the exile, the history of the early church, the law, etc.
- **See the connections between various parts of Scripture.** Stephen's speech in Acts 7 is a good example of this. He started with Abraham and ended with the people who crucified Jesus, and he had it all connected. The Bible is like a tree. It's a growing revelation that starts with the roots in Genesis and ends with the fullness of the Son's revelation in the New Testament.

In what order should we read the books of the Bible? Most of us with a Christian background grew up reading the Bible in canonical order (the current order of the books in our Bibles). However, I believe reading the Bible in chronological order is an excellent way to maximize our learning experience. We can see this in two ways:

- It gives us a better sense of the overall flow of biblical history from beginning to end. When we read chronologically, we are carried along by the unfolding story of redemption, and we gain insight into how God was working through history to bring about the salvation of men and the establishment of the kingdom of His Son. It begins all the way back in Genesis 3:15 with the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, and we follow that through, watching as Satan tries his best to derail and destroy that seed, until it culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ Who destroyed the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).
- It helps us put each passage of Scripture in its proper historical and theological context. For example, the first sermon in the book of Haggai (1:1-13) should be read against the backdrop of the construction of the temple as recorded in Ezra 4-5 (construction started in 536 BC, but stopped after opposition by local enemies, and it did not begin again until the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah in the late summer and fall of 520 BC). Also, David's psalm of praise to God (Psa. 34) is connected to the story of his escape from the Philistines in Gath where he pretended to be insane (1 Sam. 21:10-15).

How can we read the Bible in chronological order? I've personally tried several different chronological reading plans, and I also created one of my own. I'll explain how to use my system in the next article of this series, so stay tuned.

Talk to God. Most of us think of reading the Bible as a solitary activity, but when we read God's Word, we *have just entered into a conversation with our heavenly Father!* This means Bible reading and prayer are not separate from one another. They are two sides of the same relational coin. Here's how it works: God talks to us through His Word, we think about and meditate on what He said, and then we respond to God in prayer, telling Him what we learned. I'm afraid that all too often our prayers are disconnected from the conversation. If we read God's Word and then set it aside and go through our prayer lists without talking to God about what He just said to us, then we're missing out on the relationship He wants to build with us through the conversation.

Think about what this means for prayer. First, it means we don't have to think up something to pray about each day. We can simply talk to God about what He just said. Second, it means we can have a *conversation* with our heavenly Father. He loves to talk to us and then hear what we've learned from His Word. Last, it means prayer can

become more than just bringing a list of names and concerns to God. Prayer can be the most uplifting and encouraging part of our daily walk with Jesus!

How do we pray about what we just read? How do we talk to God about what He just said to us? This can be difficult if you're not used to doing it, so I've included a sample prayer for each day of the Bible reading plan. The prayers are designed to help you praise God, learn lessons from His Word, reflect on how Scripture applies to your life, ask God for grace and strength to live for Him throughout the day, and thank God for all that He's done for you. You can pray these prayers as your own, or you can print out the "Daily Prayer Template" and pray your own prayers. The goal is for your Bible reading and prayer time to be a conversation with God that challenges you and enriches your life.

IMITATE: Follow the Example of Jesus and Others

How do we imitate someone we're unable to be around? Suppose, for example, that you admired Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, and you wanted to be like him. How would you do that? One way would be to find books about Lincoln's life and read everything you could about him. You would examine his writings and learn about his beliefs, his values, and his priorities. You would then take all you learned and set about imitating his life.

For example, Lincoln regularly checked out books from the Library of Congress, so you would make reading a priority. Lincoln kept his sense of humor, even under the most challenging circumstances, so you would strive to relax and laugh during times of stress. Lincoln was known for standing up for his beliefs, even when he was ridiculed, so you would determine to stay the course no matter what others were saying.

We can use this same approach with Jesus. We have four different accounts of His life (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and there is so much we can learn about His beliefs, His values, and His priorities. Here are just a few examples from Jesus' life that are worthy of imitation:

- He loved God with all His heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37).
- He loved His neighbor as Himself (Matt. 22:39).
- He pursued wisdom and a knowledge of God's Word (Luke 2:40).
- He was obedient to His parents (Luke 2:51).
- He sought God's will and then did it with all His heart (John 6:38).
- He served others and strove to build them up in the faith (John 13:12-16).

We can also use this approach with godly men and women of the past. After all, we are called to imitate "those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). Here are a few examples:

- Paul—he chose to praise God in difficult and painful circumstances (Acts 16:25).
- Peter—he was willing to accept public rebuke (Gal. 2:11–15; Acts 15:6–11).
- David—he humbled himself and repented with sincerity (2 Sam. 12:13; Psa. 51).
- Martin Luther—he stood firm for the truth, even when powerful people were against him.
- Hudson Taylor—he witnessed to the lost, no matter where they were.

Our examples to imitate are not limited to the past. That’s why it’s so important to invest and participate in a local church. *If we’re going to imitate the godly, we need to be with the godly!* Remember, Paul told the Philip-

prians, “Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil. 3:17). We need to be listening to the testimonies of our fellow disciples and learning from their examples. We need to be watching the way they live their lives and putting what we see into practice. We have so much to learn about being Jesus’ disciple from those who are in the race with us!

COACH: Show Others How to Be Disciples

When it comes to showing others how to be disciples, there are two main ways we do this: *informal coaching* and *intentional coaching*.

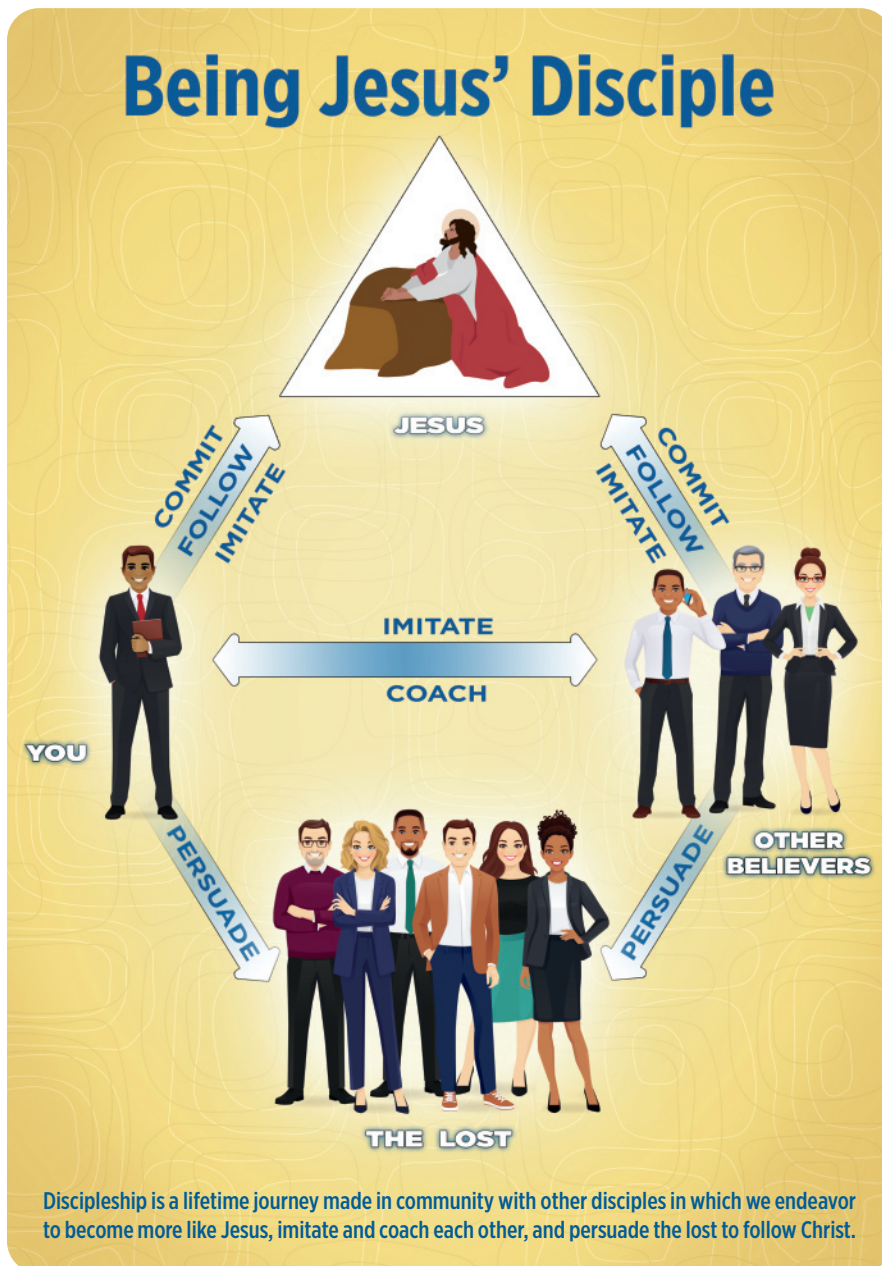
Informal coaching. All of us are coaching others all the time. How are we doing this? By living an example that others can follow. That is fundamental to coaching!

Every time you ask someone how they’re doing spiritually, you’re coaching. Every time you testify and joyfully worship God in church, you’re coaching. Every time you speak a kind word, you’re coaching. Every time you encourage another believer, you’re coaching. Every time someone sees you reading the Bible, praying, singing a hymn, or reading a spiritual book, you’re coaching. Every time someone sees you serving others, giving sacrificially, apologizing for a wrong, being teachable when rebuked, or being gracious when scorned, you’re coaching.

Intentional coaching. While the example we live in front of others is essential, all of us are commanded to do *intentional* coaching. This is not optional. God told Israel to teach their children His laws, explain His commands, tell them about His works, and instill His ways in their hearts (Deut. 4:9; 6:7; Exod. 12:24-27). Jesus echoed this command when he told us to “make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18-20). We must take time and diligently, intentionally coach others in how to be disciples of Christ. How do we do this? We invest, explain, show, and exhort. I’ll give you a template to follow and the tools to implement it later on in this series.

PERSUADE: Call Others to Repentance and Faith in Christ

We often think of evangelists and missionaries when we think of persuading others to be disciples, but all of us are commanded to make disciples. How do



we do this? There are two ways all of us can persuade others to be disciples:

Share your story. Like Paul, we should be looking for opportunities to tell others about Jesus (Acts 17:16-17). One of the best ways to do this is by sharing the story of how we became disciples ourselves. When I was discipling some new converts years ago, I made them practice sharing their story with each other and then leading each other in a prayer of repentance and faith. It was a little awkward at first, but they had fun with it and soon gained confidence in telling someone what God did for them. When was the last time you told someone how you became a disciple? If it's been a while, practice with a fellow believer until you're comfortable sharing your story with others.

Live the gospel. It's easy to say that we're disciples of Jesus, but it's actually hard to live a consistent, holy life. The greatest witness we have to the truth of God's transforming power is to live a transformed life in front of others. If we want to make disciples, we must be disciples. The world is watching us. They notice how we live. They're very aware of what we wear, where we go, what we read, what we listen to, how we do our jobs, and how we interact with our children. They see how we react when we're ridiculed and how we respond when we're disappointed, and they can be powerfully impacted when we're patient and kind in the midst of suffering and persecution. Let's commit to living a transformed life each and every day. When we do, we're calling others to follow Jesus!

We began this article with a question—*How do I personally follow Jesus?*—and we've seen how to do this in terms of our five verbs: *commit, follow, imitate, coach, and persuade*. We can personally be disciples by renewing our commitment to follow Jesus each day. We can personally follow Jesus by fostering a relationship with Him through the conversation: listening and talking to God (Bible reading and prayer). We can imitate Jesus and others, learning from them and putting their example into practice. We can coach others by how we live and by intentionally teaching them about God and His Word. We can persuade others by telling them how God transformed our lives. Every day, we can be disciples of Jesus! ■

Nathan Brown is a senior engineer for Southern Company Services, Director of Discipleship for the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, and founder of ComeAfterMe.com (a discipleship website). He, his wife Charity, and two children live in Trussville, AL. All Scripture quotations are ESV.

GOD'S REVIVALIST and BIBLE ADVOCATE

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Letters should be emailed to revivalist@gbs.edu or addressed to the Editorial Office, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202. Letters reprinted here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor of God's Revivalist nor those of the administration of God's Bible School. Names and locations of writers will be withheld at their specific request or at the discretion of the editor. We reserve the right to edit and condense.

[We read with interest] President Loper's article, "Dangers for the Local Church." For the past few years, we have been concerned about the direction the Holiness Movement has taken. What will it take to bring us back, I have asked myself? What, if any, are the goals set by our leaders?

JOHN TAYLOR
email

I thought the editor's vulnerable "Thinking Out Loud" segment about being "Captain Corrector" [December 2022] was brave and very valuable. All of us have areas needing refinement in order to enhance our relationships. We should all welcome those learning experiences as part of our discipleship journey. Thanks for sharing.

RICHARD MILES
email

You do a great job with the magazine! I was very interested in your explanation of the proofers! After I read that I thought, "You know, I don't ever remember seeing a mistake!" That is not to say that I catch everything!

LINDA PAULUS
email

I enjoy *God's Revivalist* immensely and have been getting it for many years. Please renew for three more years. I am 89, so I may not live three more years. I have had a daughter and two granddaughters graduate from GBS.

MARGARET HEILMAN
Circleville, OH

I was so happy to see the recognition given to Thelma Bloomfield [November 2022]. The Bloomfields stayed in my childhood home many times and held revivals in our church. They were faithful, loving Christians who influenced my life. Sis. Bloomfield continues to serve God with her whole heart.

FAITH (REED) TOFTE
email

(continued on page 25)

