

Discipleship

SERVICE & SPIRITUALITY

Our Lord's final commandment to His Church was not 'make members,' and it was not 'make attenders.' It was make disciples. That single word has shaped the entire Christian centuries since, and it should shape every servant's understanding of what he has been sent to do. A disciple is not a religious consumer; a disciple is a person being conformed, over a lifetime, to the image of Christ — and who is, in turn, helping to form others into that same image. This is the work the Lord has placed into our hands. It is not reserved for a few specialists; it is the ordinary calling of every baptized Christian, and especially of every servant. In this lesson we will sit with the Great Commission, trace the contours of what discipleship actually looks like in the Gospels, and learn from Scripture and the Fathers how the servant who has become a disciple makes disciples of others. We will find, tenderly, that the road has been walked before us by our Lord Himself, and that He is still the one doing the real forming — through our small, faithful, ordinary hands.

A Commandment, Not a Suggestion

There is a way of reading the Great Commission that turns it into a slogan for overseas missions and then quietly sets it on a shelf. Our Lord did not leave it on a shelf, and we must not either. The words He spoke to His apostles on the mountain in Galilee were His very last instructions to His Church before He ascended, and there is no accident in their form:

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18–20, NKJV)

Every clause bears weight. All authority has been given to Me. The Lord does not send us in our own authority; He sends us in His. Go therefore. The imperative follows from the authority; we do not go because we feel brave but because He has commissioned us. Make disciples. Not converts only, not hearers only — disciples. Of all the nations. No group is exempt; the commission reaches to our neighborhood and our own extended family as fully as to the ends of the earth. Baptizing them. The initiation into discipleship is sacramental, not merely intellectual. Teaching them to observe all things. The forming of a disciple is a long apprenticeship, not a short information transfer. And lo, I am with you always — the sentence we carry into every class we teach and every conversation we hold.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on this commissioning, drew out what our Lord had actually promised:

“He does not send them into the world bare of His help. He sends them with Himself. ‘I am with you,’ He says — as though He were saying, ‘Wherever you open your mouth to teach, there I also am; wherever you kneel to baptize, there also are My hands; wherever you instruct a soul in the way of life, there also is My heart.’” — St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew, on 28:20

This is the blessing the servant needs most. Our labor in discipleship is not a lonely one. The Lord Himself is with us in every conversation, every lesson, every prayer, every long car ride with a struggling disciple. He has not handed us this work and walked away; He has handed us this work so that He might walk with us through it.

What the Gospels Mean by 'Disciple'

Before we can make a disciple, we must know what one is. The word itself, in Greek, is *mathētēs* — a learner, an apprentice, one who walks behind a master and picks up the master's life by association. Our Lord did not invent the concept; there were many teachers in Israel with their own disciples. But He transformed the concept, because He was not asking for apprentices in a craft but for souls in the whole of their living.

The Gospels sketch, in a dozen different scenes, what a disciple actually does. A disciple leaves what he was doing and follows:

“As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him.” (Matthew 9:9, NKJV)

A disciple sits at the Master's feet and listens before he speaks:

“And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word... ‘One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’” (Luke 10:39, 42, NKJV)

A disciple loves his brethren with the love he has received from the Master:

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35, NKJV)

A disciple carries a cross:

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24, NKJV)

A disciple remains in the Word over time:

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31–32, NKJV)

And at the end, a disciple bears fruit — the fruit of his own disciples, made in his master's likeness, not in his own:

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”
(John 15:8, NKJV)

Six small sketches, and together they form a living portrait. The disciple has followed, has listened, has loved, has carried a cross, has abided in the Word, and is now bearing fruit. No one moment along that trajectory is the whole of discipleship. Discipleship is the whole trajectory, walked together with the Master and with those He sends us to.

St. Isaac the Syrian, writing out of a tradition that took these words as seriously as a handbook, summed it up in one gentle line:

“The disciple is not the one who has learned much from the master, but the one who has become like the master. Knowledge is the doorway; likeness is the whole house.”
— St. Isaac the Syrian, Ascetical Homilies, XXIII

Knowledge is the doorway; likeness is the whole house. The servant who measures the success of his discipleship only by the number of Bible verses his disciples have memorized is a servant still living in the doorway. The whole house is down the hall.

The Master's Method

If we want to know how to make a disciple, we would do well to watch, closely, how the Master made His own. Our Lord did not publish a curriculum and hand it to the Twelve; He lived with them for three years, and their formation happened largely through the ordinary friction and grace of that shared life. The Gospels are, in a sense, case studies in discipleship method.

First, He called them by name. He did not put out a general invitation and hope the right souls showed up. He walked up to Simon and Andrew and said, 'Follow Me.' He walked up to James and John as they mended their nets. He called Matthew from his tax booth in the middle of a work day. Each disciple was called personally, by a Master who had already taken the trouble to know him. Every servant who makes disciples today does the same work: he knows the people entrusted to him not as a crowd but as a set of faces, names, stories, and seasons.

Second, He spent time with them. Not an hour a week, but the whole of the hours. They walked with Him on the road. They ate with Him. They went fishing with Him. They saw Him tired, hungry, misunderstood, praised, attacked. They saw Him pray. This is what formed them. The Lord did not cut any corners on the duration of the relationship, and neither can a servant. Discipleship cannot be microwaved. It happens on the long road, over many cups of tea, across the small and large seasons of life.

Third, He taught them as they were ready. He did not dump every truth into them at once. He spoke in parables to the crowd and then, privately, explained the parables to the Twelve. He withheld certain teachings until they could bear them (John 16:12). He let their own questions shape what He revealed

next. This is the holy patience that every discipler must learn. A disciple is not a bucket to be filled; he is a flower being grown, and he opens at the speed the Spirit sets for him, not at the speed of our schedule.

Fourth, He sent them out. After a season of watching Him, He began to send them out in pairs to do what He had been doing. He let them fail. He received them back. He corrected them tenderly. He sent them out again. This rhythm of send-and-receive is crucial. A disciple who is never given responsibility to do the work never becomes a disciple; he remains a spectator.

Fifth, He promised to remain with them after He was gone. The whole discipleship project was never about creating dependence on Him in His earthly form; it was about creating a confidence in Him that would survive His ascension and grow into the great sending of the Church.

St. Gregory the Great, whose Pastoral Rule is among the great discipleship handbooks of the ancient Church, named the Lord's method in a single sentence:

“Christ did not teach first and live afterward. He lived first and taught out of His living. The servant who would make disciples must take the same order seriously: let life precede lesson, let example precede exhortation, and the Holy Spirit will do in a year more than a decade of mere words could do.” — St. Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rule, II.3

Life before lesson. Example before exhortation. This is the order our Lord kept, and it is the order every disciple-making servant must keep if his work is to bear the kind of fruit that lasts.

The Chain Across the Generations

Discipleship is not an island. Every disciple is a link in a chain that reaches back to the apostles and forward into a future none of us will see. The beauty of this chain is that each link is ordinary; no one has to be extraordinary for the chain to hold. It holds because the Lord holds it.

St. Paul draws the chain with unforgettable precision in his last letter to Timothy:

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2, NKJV)

Count the generations in that single verse. Paul — Timothy — the faithful men — the others also. Four generations, in one sentence. This is not the Apostle doing long-range strategic planning; this is the Apostle simply describing how the Gospel spreads. It spreads through relationships, across generations, by the deliberate choice of each disciple to invest in someone who will in turn invest in someone else.

The servant who thinks of himself merely as a teacher of his current class has missed the deeper calling. His current class is not the end product; it is a set of future disciplers. The young man in the youth group who is quietly watching how the servant prays is, in some real sense, already a

fourth-generation disciple of St. Paul — and will, if God wills, pass the chain to a fifth generation the servant himself will not live to meet.

This is why our Lord cared so intensely about the Twelve. He was not merely training twelve good men; He was planting the seed of the entire future Church. Everything we enjoy in the Orthodox Christian life today — every Father we read, every hymn we sing, every priest who hears our confession — reaches us through that original apostolic planting and the many, many humble disciple-makers who have kept the chain unbroken since.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in the second century to defend the apostolic succession against heretics, wrote one of the gentlest and most confident sentences in all of patristic literature:

“The Church, though scattered throughout the whole world, guards the one faith she has received from the apostles, as if she occupied but one house. She believes these points just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart. For the languages of the world are various, but the power of the tradition is one and the same.” — St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, I.10.2

One house, one soul, one heart, across all the centuries and all the continents. That is what the chain of discipleship has produced. And every servant today, by the faithful forming of even one disciple, is contributing to that one house.

The Cost and the Promise

Our Lord never hid the cost of discipleship. He spoke of it plainly, with a tenderness that warns but does not frighten. He wanted every soul who followed Him to count the cost beforehand so that the yes, once given, could stand through whatever came:

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26–27, NKJV)

The word hate is a Semitic idiom, not a call to family resentment. The Lord is saying plainly: nothing, not even our dearest human loves, may be placed above Him in the ordering of our heart. A disciple is one for whom Christ is first, and everything else dearer to us is held more tenderly precisely because Christ is first. This is not a reduction of our loves; it is the purification of them.

But He balanced the cost with a promise, and the promise is extravagant:

“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:29–30, NKJV)

A hundredfold now in this time. Not in the age to come only, but now. Every disciple who has walked far enough along the road knows what this promise means. He has discovered that the family of Christ is wider than his blood family ever was. He has discovered homes open to him in every place his feet have taken him. He has discovered a joy the world does not know and cannot take. The cost was real. The return is a hundredfold. The Lord does not exaggerate His promises.

St. John Chrysostom, preaching on this passage to a congregation that included many who had suffered for their faith, spoke the truth with the force of pastoral experience:

“No one has ever truly given anything to Christ and walked away poorer. Count the gift; count the return; then count again. The arithmetic of the Kingdom does not resemble the arithmetic of this world. In His hands, every offering multiplies.” — St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, LXIV

Making Disciples This Week

How, practically, does a servant make disciples this week? The question sounds ambitious, but the answer is refreshingly ordinary. Disciple-making is a habit, not a campaign. It is built from small, repeated practices that compound over years into souls shaped for Christ.

First, it begins with our own discipleship. We cannot make in others what we have not allowed the Lord to make in us. The servant who has stopped reading the Scriptures for himself cannot make Bible-reading disciples. The servant who has grown cold in prayer cannot make praying disciples. The soul of discipleship is contagion; what we have becomes what our disciples catch. Let us tend our own fire first. The Lord is not going to shame us for doing so.

Second, it asks us to know our disciples by name. Most of us serve in contexts where the people entrusted to us are numerous: a youth group, a Sunday school class, a choir, a parish. We cannot disciple everyone equally. We can, however, know everyone a little and a few people deeply. The Lord gave Himself to the multitude but to the Twelve in a different way, and among the Twelve, to Peter and James and John in a different way still. This is not favoritism; it is capacity. A servant who invests deeply in a handful over years leaves a deeper legacy than a servant who invests shallowly in hundreds for a season.

Third, it asks us to be interruptible. So much of the Lord's own discipleship happened in unscheduled moments — a conversation by a well, a question from a blind man at the roadside, a child brought forward by a mother. A servant too busy for interruptions will make, over time, very few disciples. A servant who has learned to receive interruptions as assignments will find the Lord doing some of His richest work precisely through the moments our schedule had not anticipated.

Fourth, it asks us to pray by name. Long before anything else, a servant's disciples need to be carried to the Lord in prayer. The servant who prays for his disciples every morning — naming them, thanking God for them, asking the Holy Spirit to form each one — is doing more disciple-making at seven a.m. than anything he could possibly say from a podium at seven p.m.

Fifth, it asks us to be patient with the Spirit's timing. Some disciples grow quickly; others grow slowly; many grow in unexpected seasons, long after the servant had given up waiting. Our work is to remain faithful. The Spirit will decide when the fruit ripens, and some of the sweetest fruit of our service will ripen on trees we will not see bear.

May the Lord of the harvest, who Himself made the first disciples and who still calls each of us by name, give us grace to be faithful disciples ourselves and faithful makers of disciples. May He fill our small and ordinary investments with His own abundant life. And may He bring us all, at the end of our long service, into the company of those good and faithful servants who have invested what they were given and are welcomed, by a smiling Master, into the joy of their Lord.

Review Questions

1. Our Lord's command in the Great Commission is to 'make disciples,' not merely converts or hearers (Matthew 28:19–20, NKJV). What is the practical difference between making a convert and making a disciple, and how does that difference reshape the way we measure the fruit of our own service?
2. The Gospels sketch a disciple as one who has followed, listened, loved, borne a cross, abided in the Word, and borne fruit. Which of these six features is most vibrant in our own discipleship right now, and which needs the Spirit's watering most urgently?
3. St. Gregory the Great says the Lord 'lived first and taught out of His living.' Where in our own ministry have we been tempted to teach ahead of our living? What would realigning that order look like this month?
4. St. Paul's chain in 2 Timothy 2:2 reaches across four generations in one sentence. Who are the one or two disciples the Lord has placed within our reach to invest in deeply — not just to teach but to form — and what is the next step with each of them?
5. Our Lord balances the cost of discipleship with the promise of a hundredfold return (Mark 10:29–30, NKJV). Where in our walk with Him has this promise already proved true, and how does remembering it strengthen us to keep walking when the cost is currently heavy?

Books & References

Scripture: Matthew 28:18–20; Matthew 9:9; Matthew 16:24; Luke 10:39–42; Luke 14:26–27; John 8:31–32; John 13:35; John 15:8; Mark 10:29–30; 2 Timothy 2:2 (NKJV throughout)

Further Reading:

- St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew, on Matthew 28.
- St. Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rule, Book II (on the life of the one who teaches).
- St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies (on apostolic succession and the rule of faith).

- St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, especially Homily LXIV.
- St. Isaac the Syrian, Ascetical Homilies (on likeness as the goal of learning).

All Scripture quotations in this lesson are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

Lesson Notes

Mentorship

SERVICE & SPIRITUALITY

If the last lesson set our eyes on discipleship as the general calling of every servant, this one narrows in on the particular relationship that has always been its backbone: mentorship. The Lord Himself chose twelve — and within the twelve, three — and within the three, one whom He loved especially. The saints, without exception, were shaped by someone. St. Paul had Barnabas and Gamaliel. Timothy had Paul. Silouan had John of Kronstadt. Anthony of the desert had an older, silent brother whose name we do not know. Every servant who becomes fruitful does so, in some significant way, because an older voice walked beside him when he most needed it. And every servant who wishes to multiply that fruitfulness will, in turn, walk beside younger servants when they most need it. Mentorship is the intimate face of the chain of generations, and it is one of the most tender works the Spirit does through us. In this lesson we will sit with the Lord's own mentoring of the Twelve, watch Paul mentor Timothy and Barnabas mentor Paul, and learn from the Fathers what a healthy mentoring relationship looks like, how it begins, how it ripens, and how it is gracefully handed on.

The Master Who Mentored the Twelve

No figure in history has mentored more carefully or more fruitfully than our Lord Jesus Christ. We sometimes think of mentorship as a program, a curriculum, a series of scheduled meetings. What the Gospels show us is something quieter and more powerful — a Master who chose a small group, lived with them for three years, and formed them, day by day, into the men who would shape the world.

The initial call was warm and personal:

“Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:14–15, NKJV)

Notice the order. That they might be with Him comes first. That He might send them out comes second. The sending is not possible without the being-with. Mentorship begins in presence, not in projects. A mentor who is never actually with his mentee — in the car, around a meal, on a walk, in silence during the Liturgy — has skipped the very ground on which formation happens. Our Lord gave three entire years to presence before any real mission was undertaken, and even during the mission, He kept calling them back to Himself to rest.

Within the Twelve He drew closer to three — Peter, James, and John — and within those three, John is called, in his own Gospel, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' This is not favoritism; it is capacity. A mentor cannot love everyone equally; he can only love everyone faithfully. Depth of relationship is limited by what human hearts can sustain. Our Lord Himself, being human as we are human, did not

spread Himself across three hundred equally close friendships. He had His three, and His twelve, and His wider circle, and His multitude — concentric rings, each loved, but not all at the same depth. This is a gentle permission for every mentor: we are not meant to mentor everyone. We are meant to mentor whom the Lord has given us, and to mentor them well.

St. John Chrysostom, preaching on the selection of the Twelve, saw the principle clearly:

“The Lord did not hurry in the choosing of His own. He prayed through the night before He named them. The shepherd who names his sheep without prayer will lose them without warning. The shepherd who names them under prayer will not lose even one, save the son of perdition, and him not from neglect.” — St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, XXXIII

Prayer precedes the choosing. This is the first quiet rule of a mentor's life. We do not pick up a mentee because the calendar had an empty slot; we pick up a mentee because, in prayer, the Lord has gently brought a particular soul to our heart and given us a quiet sense that we are to walk with this one for a season.

Barnabas, Who Opened the Door

One of the most moving mentoring stories in all of Scripture is the one we might miss on a first reading. It is the story of Barnabas and Saul — the story of an older, established servant who recognized the gift of a younger, troubled, newly converted man when no one else would take the risk of trusting him.

After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul returned to Jerusalem to join the disciples. No one believed that he had truly become a disciple. He had, after all, been the great persecutor. The Church was afraid of him, and understandably so. Every door was closed. And then comes a single sentence that changed the history of the Gospel:

“But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” (Acts 9:27, NKJV)

Barnabas took him. Barnabas brought him to the apostles. Barnabas vouched for him publicly. The whole future of Paul's apostolic ministry hangs on the willingness of one older servant to take a risk on a younger one whom no one else would touch. Without Barnabas, there might not have been a Paul as we know him. Without Paul, there might not have been a Timothy, or a Titus, or an Epaphras, or any of the hundreds of second-generation disciples those letters touch. One old man's courage, one afternoon, blessed two thousand years of the Church.

And notice how Barnabas kept walking with Paul afterward. When the Antioch church needed a teacher, Barnabas, already serving there, went all the way to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back to the work (Acts 11:25–26). When Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey, Barnabas's name is listed first (Acts 13:2). Somewhere along the way, as young Paul grew into his calling, the

names quietly reverse in the narrative — now it is Paul and Barnabas — and the mentor has become the junior partner in the partnership he himself called into being. Barnabas does not seem to have minded at all. A true mentor never minds being eclipsed by the one he has formed.

St. Augustine noted this quiet grace in Barnabas and drew the lesson for every mentor:

“The gardener rejoices when the young tree he has staked begins to stand on its own, and when, in time, the fruit of the tree hangs higher than the gardener can reach. He does not mourn that he can no longer reach the branches; he marvels that the seed he once planted has grown so tall.” — St. Augustine, Sermon 340 (on pastoral love)

This is the disposition every mentor must learn, and the earlier the better. We are not in the business of growing ourselves larger by acquiring disciples. We are in the business of growing our disciples larger by spending ourselves on them — and rejoicing, quietly, when they pass us.

Paul and Timothy — A Mentor's Voice in Ink

The Church is indescribably blessed to have preserved for us the private letters of a mentor to his mentee. The two letters to Timothy are not formal epistles addressed to a congregation; they are the deeply personal instruction of an aging apostle to his beloved spiritual son. Every mentor who reads them carefully will find a mirror in them, and every mentee will feel, between the lines, what it is to be loved by a father in the faith.

Paul opens his first letter with the tenderest of addresses:

“To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Timothy 1:2, NKJV)

A true son in the faith. Not a subordinate, not a junior colleague, not a protégé — a son. This is the deepest mode of Christian mentorship, and it is the one we are always quietly aiming toward. We begin by walking alongside someone; if the Spirit blesses the relationship, over time, a quieter kinship forms, and we find ourselves relating to the person not as a project but as a child — or, for the mentee, relating to the mentor not as a resource but as a father in the Lord. This does not mean we replace their biological family or their father of confession; it means that an additional bond, rooted in the common life of the Spirit, has been given.

Paul's letters to Timothy are full of practical wisdom, but the thing a mentor learns most from reading them is the mixture of exhortation and warmth. Paul corrects Timothy — about letting people despise his youth, about being bold, about guarding the deposit of the faith — and yet every correction is laid on a bed of affection:

“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you.” (2 Timothy 1:3–5, NKJV)

Mindful of your tears. Greatly desiring to see you. Remembering your genuine faith. These are the words of a father who loves his son. The corrections that follow land differently when the soil has been prepared this way. A mentor who corrects without first loving will be resisted. A mentor who loves first and corrects second will find his correction received as blessing.

And at the end of the last letter — written, we believe, from the last Roman imprisonment, shortly before his execution — Paul asks Timothy to come and to bring the cloak he left in Troas, and the books, and especially the parchments (2 Timothy 4:13). It is the request of an old man to a young one whose love can be counted on to make the journey. Paul's mentorship of Timothy did not end in a triumphant ceremony; it ended in a small practical request at the bedside of a tired saint. That ending is a gift in itself: mentorship is, at its heart, simply the trust of one soul that the other will come when called.

What a Mentor Actually Does

Beyond the high picture, the daily work of mentoring is composed of five small, repeatable practices, each of them unspectacular and each of them indispensable.

First, a mentor prays for his mentee by name. Every morning. Over the years. The intercession of a mentor for his mentee is probably the single most formative thing in the relationship, even though the mentee may never see or hear it. Many of the secret graces that come into a servant's life in his twenties and thirties were prayed into him by an older servant long before the younger one even knew enough to ask. A mentor who is not praying regularly for his mentee has already stopped mentoring.

Second, a mentor listens more than he talks. Younger servants usually arrive at a mentor's door with questions; the mentor's first temptation is to answer. The wiser path is usually to ask another question, and then another, and to let the mentee's own soul come into view before prescribing anything. Our Lord often answered questions with questions. This was not evasion; it was pedagogy. He was drawing out of the soul what the soul already knew but had not yet said.

Third, a mentor speaks honestly but gently when correction is needed. The world has many encouragers and many correctors; it has very few tender correctors. A mentor who cannot say a hard word will eventually be of no use, because every servant needs correction at some point in his formation. A mentor who can only say hard words will be avoided, because no human soul can bear unending severity. The tender corrector — who speaks the truth, once, clearly, and then sits in silence while the truth lands — is the mentor who changes lives.

Fourth, a mentor models more than he explains. The mentee is watching. Over years, the mentor's handling of stress, disappointment, praise, interruptions, and tiredness will teach the mentee more than any formal lesson could. This is why the Desert Fathers often said the simplest thing a young monk could do was to sit in the cell of an old one and watch. Ninety percent of formation happens by osmosis. The mentor's first responsibility, then, is to be, himself, someone worth watching — not because he has arrived but because he is visibly still growing.

Fifth, a mentor sends his mentee out. The goal of mentoring is not to keep the mentee close forever; it is to form him into a servant who can stand on his own and, eventually, mentor someone else. A mentor who cannot let the mentee go has not really mentored him; he has trained a dependent. Our Lord's mentoring of the Twelve ended, on earth, with a sending: Go, and make disciples. Every Christian mentorship ends, sooner or later, at that same doorway.

St. Basil the Great, writing about the formation of the younger brethren in his monastic communities, captured the rhythm of healthy mentoring with his usual balance:

“Hold the young servant close enough that he may learn, but not so close that he cannot grow. A vine too tightly bound to its stake cannot yield its fruit; a vine not bound at all will fall over. Wisdom is in the right tension of the cord.” — St. Basil the Great, The Long Rules, Q. 36

For the Mentee — The Holy Work of Receiving

Mentorship is not only about what the mentor does. It is also, and perhaps equally, about what the mentee does. Every servant who wants to grow into a mature disciple will, at some point, need to learn the holy work of being mentored. This is harder than it sounds, especially for those of us who have been told, all our lives, to be independent.

The first disposition the mentee must learn is openness. To be mentored is to allow another soul to see parts of our inner life we might have kept hidden. It is to confess struggles out loud, to ask questions we feel foolish asking, to reveal that we do not, in fact, have everything figured out. This openness is costly, and it is what separates a real mentoring relationship from a superficial one. The mentee who will not open his life cannot be mentored, no matter how wise the mentor.

The second is trust. The mentee must assume, until proven otherwise, that his mentor wants what is best for him. This is what allows the mentee to receive correction without flinching. Without trust, every correction feels like an attack; with trust, every correction feels like a gift. This is why choosing a mentor prayerfully matters so much — once the relationship begins, the mentee must be able to entrust himself to the mentor's care.

The third is patience. Mentorship is slow. The fruit takes years. The mentee who wants a fast answer to every question will be disappointed; the mentor often does not give the answer but asks the question that will let the mentee, in time, find the answer himself. A mentee who cannot bear the slowness of the process will leave before the formation ripens.

The fourth is gratitude. Mentors are not paid, and their deepest rewards are often invisible. The mentee who expresses, simply and honestly, that he has been helped, is already doing his mentor the greatest service the relationship can offer. A thank-you card, a quiet word after a meeting, a specific memory named years later — these small acts are how a mentee gives back to the one who has given him so much.

St. Paul's own thanks to his mentors shines through his letters. He mentions Barnabas again and again. He names those who taught him the faith before him. He even defers, at the Jerusalem Council,

to the older apostles whose ministry preceded his. The Apostle to the Gentiles never forgot that he had been mentored, and he never let pride about his own ministry erase his gratitude to those who had made it possible.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza, himself one of the most beloved spiritual fathers in the tradition, wrote to one of his own mentees a sentence that belongs on the desk of every young servant:

“Hold your elder in honor, and you will hold yourself in the way of growth. The soul that cannot receive from an older hand will remain forever in its own narrow thought. Receive, receive, and you will be given what you could never have reached on your own.” — St. Dorotheos of Gaza, Discourse I, On Renunciation

The Gift We Keep Passing On

Every servant who has been mentored well is, by that very fact, put under a quiet obligation. The grace he received was not given to him merely for himself; it was given to him so that, in time, he would pass it to another. Mentors are made by having been mentored. The older generation, which once poured into us, steps back and says, in effect, 'Now it is your turn.' We receive that turn not with ambition but with humility — and, above all, with gratitude.

There is no strict formula for when a servant is ready to begin mentoring others. A helpful rule of thumb is this: when we find ourselves able to walk a certain road without stumbling, we are probably ready to begin walking that road alongside someone who has not yet learned it. We do not have to be masters; we only have to be one or two steps ahead. A sixteen-year-old can faithfully mentor a twelve-year-old. A forty-year-old can faithfully mentor a twenty-year-old. The essential thing is not the gap in age but the honesty of the walk.

St. Paul's final words to Timothy about this chain of generations remain, two thousand years later, the clearest description of how the Church grows:

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2, NKJV)

Commit these to faithful men. Not to the most talented. Not to the most impressive. To the faithful. Mentorship is not for the charismatic few; it is for the faithful many. Every servant who has walked with the Lord long enough to have received something of His life has something worth passing on to someone a little behind him on the road.

May the Lord who mentored the Twelve and sent them to mentor the nations give each of us the mentor our soul needs and make each of us, in time, the mentor that some other soul needs. May He teach us to love our mentees with the quiet steadfastness of Barnabas, to write to them with the tenderness of Paul, and to send them out with the confidence of a Master who knows the Spirit will finish the work He has begun. And may the chain of generations, which our Lord Himself began on a mountain in Galilee, run right through our small service into hearts we will never meet on this side of the Kingdom.

Review Questions

1. Our Lord appointed the Twelve 'that they might be with Him' before He sent them out (Mark 3:14, NKJV). What does this order tell us about the priority of presence over projects in mentoring, and where have we been tempted to reverse that order in our own service?
2. Barnabas took a risk on Paul when no one else would (Acts 9:27, NKJV). Is there a younger servant in our life whom others have not yet taken seriously, and where might the Spirit be asking us to take a Barnabas-like risk on that person this year?
3. Paul addresses Timothy as 'a true son in the faith' (1 Timothy 1:2, NKJV) and places every correction on a bed of affection. Do our current mentees feel the affection first, or the correction first? What would it look like this month to lead with love in a specific relationship?
4. The lesson names five ordinary practices of a mentor: pray, listen, correct gently, model, send. Which of these are we doing well, and which one is the Spirit asking us to strengthen in the coming season?
5. The mentee's side of the relationship calls for openness, trust, patience, and gratitude. Where in our own receiving from a mentor or spiritual father are we currently holding back, and what would it look like to open that door a little wider?

Books & References

Scripture: Mark 3:14–15; Acts 9:27; Acts 11:25–26; Acts 13:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:3–5; 2 Timothy 2:2; 2 Timothy 4:13 (NKJV throughout)

Further Reading:

- St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew (on the choosing of the Twelve).
- St. Augustine, Sermons on pastoral love (esp. Sermon 340).
- St. Basil the Great, The Long Rules (on forming the younger brethren).
- St. Dorotheos of Gaza, Discourses (especially Discourse I on renunciation and receiving).
- Sayings of the Desert Fathers (on the relationship of elder and disciple).
- Fr. Matthew the Poor, Words for Our Time (on the Christian servant's spiritual kinship).

All Scripture quotations in this lesson are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

Lesson Notes

Disciples - St. Andrew

SERVICE & SPIRITUALITY

St. Andrew walks quietly through the Gospels. He is named less often than his brother, speaks less often than Peter, and leaves behind no epistle. Yet the Church remembers him as Protokletos — the first-called — and as the one who brought his own brother to Christ. In this lesson we learn from a servant who labored without the spotlight: a man of spiritual desire, of supple obedience, and of quiet influence. His story is good news for the many of us who will never stand on a great stage. We can still bring one person to Jesus. We can still say, with the simplicity of our Lord Himself, 'Come and see.'

The First-Called

The earliest title the Church gave to St. Andrew is Protokletos, 'the first-called.' Before Peter was called from his nets, before James and John left their father in the boat, before anything that looks to us like the beginning of the Twelve, there is a quiet scene on the far side of the Jordan. The Baptist is standing with two of his disciples. Jesus passes by. The Baptist lifts his hand and says a single sentence that will split a life in two.

"Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, 'What do you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi' (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), 'where are You staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour). One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." John 1:35–40, NKJV

One of those two was Andrew. The Gospel does not pause to explain him. It simply records what he did: he heard, he followed, he stayed. When we think about our own calling, we sometimes expect something dramatic — a voice, a sign, a moment we could later describe to others. Andrew's calling was quieter. A pointing finger, a sentence about a Lamb, a half-day in the place where Jesus was staying. That was enough. The Lord does not always speak to us in thunder. Sometimes He speaks in a single sentence heard at the right hour, and the door of our life swings open.

The Byzantine tradition holds his title gently, not as a competitive rank over the other apostles, but as a testimony that the Lord's call reaches the hidden first, before the world notices. There is comfort here for every servant who wonders whether any of this began well. It began, for Andrew, not with a platform but with a willingness to walk a few steps and ask one question: 'where are You staying?' — and to accept the Lord's answer: 'Come and see.'

“What meaneth, 'Come and see'? He knew that they had not as yet clearly perceived the whole, and He reveals Himself to them by signs. For nothing is equal to experience and personal trial... and therefore He invites them to dwell with Him, as knowing that His very words would kindle in them a divine love.” St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John XVIII.1

Chrysostom notices something tender about that first invitation. Our Lord does not argue with Andrew. He does not recite doctrine. He opens His door and lets the young disciple stay. This is often how the Lord still calls us. He lets us sit with Him — in the liturgy, in a quiet reading of Scripture, in a conversation with a servant whose life has been shaped by Him — and the nearness does its own work.

The Brother Who Brought His Brother

Having stayed with Jesus for the remainder of that first day, Andrew does the most natural thing in the world for a man whose heart has just been moved. He goes looking for his brother.

“He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.” John 1:41–42, NKJV

This is the sentence that carries Andrew's whole ministry in miniature. He does not gather a crowd. He does not wait until he has mastered the teaching. He does not even make sure he himself is ready. He simply goes to the person closest to him and tells him what he has seen. Notice the word 'first' — 'he first found his own brother.' Before anyone else, he thought of Simon. Among the servants we will one day teach, the most difficult mission field will often be our own home: the brother we grew up beside, the sister who remembers our childhood, the parents who watched us stumble. Andrew went there first.

And he did not bring Simon to a sermon. He brought Simon to a Person. 'He brought him to Jesus.' This is the whole grammar of discipleship. We are not gathering followers for ourselves; we are gathering brothers for Christ. The work Andrew did that day changed everything that comes afterward in the Gospel. The man he brought became Peter. The sermon that Peter preached at Pentecost drew three thousand souls. Andrew is not credited in that number. He does not need to be. The Lord keeps a ledger of His own, and in that ledger the whole preaching of Peter rests in part on a brother's sentence spoken on a quiet afternoon in Galilee.

For our own service we learn two things. First, the fruit of what we do may not appear under our name. That is a hard truth for our pride and a beautiful truth for our peace. Second, the Lord works through proximity. He gave Andrew a brother; He has given each of us someone. A child to catechize patiently, a friend who is ready to hear, a cousin who is circling. 'He first found his own brother.' Perhaps our first work is the person already near us.

“Andrew, after having stayed with Jesus and having learned much... did not keep the treasure to himself, but hastens and runs quickly to his brother, to impart to him the good things which he had received. Mark how, from the very beginning, he shews the

fruit of a true friend, and of one who rightly loveth his brother.” St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John XIX.1

A Spiritual Hunger That Lasted

Long before Andrew was a disciple of Jesus, he was a disciple of the Forerunner. That one detail tells us something about the shape of his heart. He was already a man who went where the word of God could be heard. He stood in the wilderness, he listened to the stern preaching of repentance, he accepted baptism. When we meet him at the beginning of the Fourth Gospel, he is already formed as a seeker. He has not arrived at Christ by accident; he has spent months, perhaps years, positioning himself where God was speaking.

This is an often overlooked feature of Andrew's calling. Grace is sovereign, but grace also tends to find people who are already standing near a means of grace. The fisherman who has been listening to John the Baptist is the fisherman who is ready to follow the Lamb of God. The child who has been brought faithfully to the liturgy is the child whose heart is soft when the Lord finally speaks. Spiritual desire does not begin at the moment of our dramatic conversion. It begins, quietly, in all the places we chose to be near God when nothing dramatic was happening at all.

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” 1 Peter 2:2–3, NKJV

Peter — the brother Andrew brought — will one day write that line. It is possible that some of it was learned in the school of Andrew's patient longing. Peter knew what it looked like for a man to desire the word of God like a hungry infant, because he had watched his own brother do it.

“For as fire, when placed near tinder, quickly sets it aflame, so also the soul that has received the Word of God kindles the souls that draw near to it with the love of God.” St. Macarius the Great, Spiritual Homilies XVIII.7

Macarius's image is lovely and precise. Andrew did not set his brother on fire by the force of his personality. He set him on fire because he himself was already burning. A servant who is quietly hungry for God will find that other hungers gather around the warmth. We do not first have to become eloquent. We have to become honest. Are we still desiring God the way a small child desires milk? If the answer is yes, we will find that we are bringing people to Jesus almost without trying.

The Disciple Who Counted the Loaves

The second scene in which Andrew speaks is one of the most famous in the Gospels, but he himself is easy to miss in it. A great crowd has followed Jesus. Our Lord turns to Philip with a question meant to stretch Philip's faith: 'Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?' Philip does the arithmetic; he knows that two hundred denarii will not feed so many. And then, in the middle of the calculation, Andrew speaks.

“One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?'"

John 6:8–9, NKJV

His sentence is a little awkward. It ends with a question that answers itself — 'what are they among so many?' He is not sure what he is doing. But he is doing something none of the other disciples in the scene is doing: he has noticed a small boy, and he has spoken about him to Christ. Philip counted the money. Andrew counted the loaves. The difference matters. When we carry a need to the Lord, we can bring Him our arithmetic of scarcity, or we can bring Him the small offering that is actually in our hands. Andrew does the second, even while he is not sure it will be enough.

Our Lord took the loaves. He multiplied them. Thousands ate and were filled. And the quiet miracle beside the great miracle is this: a nameless boy carried his lunch home in a story that the whole Church would tell for twenty centuries, because a discreet apostle noticed him in the crowd. When we think we have nothing worth bringing, let us remember Andrew. He did not hand Christ a solution. He handed Christ a boy.

There is a posture here for our service. Much of what we do will feel like Andrew's sentence — uncertain, half-formed, not quite adequate. We will bring a student whose faith is wavering and not know the right thing to say. We will offer a small prayer group, a visit to a sick parishioner, a hand-written note, and wonder whether any of it matters. The Lord does not ask us for adequacy. He asks us to hand Him the loaves we actually have. The multiplication is His work.

The Bridge for Those Who Came from Afar

The third Johannine scene in which Andrew speaks is even more quietly revealing. It is Holy Week. Greeks — that is, Gentiles who had come up to worship at the Passover — approach the disciple Philip and ask an astonishing thing.

“Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.” John 12:20–22, NKJV

Notice the chain. The Greeks go to Philip. Philip does not go to Jesus by himself; he goes first to Andrew. And then Andrew and Philip together bring the request to our Lord. Why does Philip need Andrew? Something in the tradition of the Twelve had established Andrew as the one who knew how to bring strangers close. Perhaps it was because he had already done it for his own brother. Perhaps it was because he had done it for the boy with the loaves. Whatever the reason, when a Gentile seeker first appears in the Gospel of John asking to see Jesus, it is Andrew's name that the Holy Spirit gives us as the bridge.

This is the ministry of the discreet servant in a single sentence: 'we wish to see Jesus' — and a brother who will walk the request into the presence of the Lord. Many of the people who come to our churches will come that way. They will not announce themselves as seekers. They will approach a servant they

trust with a question that sounds practical, and underneath the question will be the ancient hunger of the Greeks at the feast. 'We wish to see Jesus.' Andrew's work is to hear that hunger and to make the introduction — not to become Christ for them, but to bring them to Him.

There is also a beautiful note for our own moment in history. The early Church remembered Andrew as the apostle who carried the Gospel beyond the familiar world — traditionally to Scythia, to the northern shore of the Black Sea, to places the other apostles had not yet reached. The disciple who first brought one Gentile to Christ at the feast later brought whole peoples. The pattern holds. The servant who has learned to welcome one stranger is the servant the Lord can send far.

The Quiet Leader

It is worth dwelling on the simple fact that Andrew is almost always introduced as 'Simon Peter's brother.' The evangelists are not being cruel; they are describing accurately. In the world's memory, Peter is the louder brother, the more visible figure, the rock. And yet the Fathers have always insisted that Andrew's discreet place is itself a grace, and that most of the Church's servants are actually called to live there.

“Andrew was the first fruit of the apostolic company. He led Peter to Christ. Let us then, brethren, imitate him. For if he, being the first, did not keep back for himself the grace of teaching, but brought others into the kingdom, much more ought we who are after him to labor earnestly for the salvation of our brethren.” St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John XIX.2

Chrysostom's point is pastoral. Most of us will not be Peter. We will not stand before crowds of three thousand. We will not write Gospels. Our parishes will not carry our names. But we are not therefore less fruitful. The measure of our service is not the size of the hall; it is the faithfulness of the bringing. A servant who, over a lifetime, has brought even one 'Peter' to the feet of Christ has spent his life well.

“He that wins souls is wise.” Proverbs 11:30, NKJV

Andrew's quiet leadership is also a leadership without rivalry. He stands beside a brother whose voice will always be louder, and there is no evidence in the Gospels of a sharp word, a competing claim, an attempt to rebalance the credit. He is a servant who has been freed from the need to be seen, and that freedom is itself a form of holiness. Many a servant has been undone not by persecution but by the slow acid of comparison — watching another servant be noticed, be praised, be promoted, while the Lord seems to pass us over. Andrew gently teaches us a different way to stand. The Lord saw him. The Lord named him. That was enough.

“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” Ephesians 6:5–6, NKJV

The Legacy of a Discreet Life

Tradition tells us that Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Patras of Achaia, and that from the cross he preached for two full days before he gave up his spirit. The cross that bears his name is not the cross on which his Lord died; it is a smaller, slanted cross, as befits an apostle who never sought to occupy the same space as his Master. The story moves us precisely because it is of a piece with everything else we know about him. He found Christ quietly. He brought his brother quietly. He counted the loaves quietly. He introduced the Greeks quietly. And at the end, he suffered for the Name quietly, though for two full days his mouth did not stop preaching the Savior he had spent his life bringing to others.

The fruit of a discreet life is almost always larger than the life itself could have imagined. The Patriarchate of Constantinople counts Andrew as its founder. Nations far from Galilee remember him as their apostle. And in every parish of our Church, every time a servant turns to a brother and says 'come and see,' Andrew's work is being quietly continued.

We finish, then, with a small and practical question. Who is the Peter in our life? Who is the brother, the classmate, the parent, the cousin, the friend standing close enough that the Lord may be asking us, not to preach to crowds, but to find that one person and bring him to Jesus? Andrew did not wait to feel qualified. He did not wait until his theology was tidy. He went and he found his own brother.

"Come and see." John 1:39, NKJV

May the Lord who first said those words to Andrew at the tenth hour of a quiet afternoon say them again through us this week — in our homes, in our classrooms, in our parishes, in whatever hidden corner He has placed us. May He give us Andrew's hunger, Andrew's willingness to move, Andrew's freedom from comparison, and Andrew's simple love for the brother beside him. And may the Protokletos, the first-called, pray for us, that we who are called after him may bring to our Master the few loaves we carry, and watch Him multiply what we could never have multiplied ourselves.

Review Questions

1. Why is Andrew called Protokletos, and what does that title teach us about the way the Lord often begins His work in a life?
2. Andrew's first act after meeting Jesus was to go and find his own brother. Who are the people closest to us — at home, at work, in our parish — whom the Lord may be entrusting to our 'first' care?
3. Before Andrew ever met Jesus, he was already a disciple of John the Baptist. What does this tell us about the habits and places that prepare a servant to recognize Christ when He comes near?
4. In the feeding of the multitudes, Philip counted the money and Andrew counted the loaves. Where in our own service are we tempted to calculate scarcity instead of bringing to Christ the small offering already in our hands?

5. When the Greeks said, 'We wish to see Jesus,' Philip went first to Andrew. What qualities in a servant make others bring their seekers to him? How can we grow in those qualities?
6. Andrew lived his whole ministry in the shadow of a more visible brother without any sign of rivalry. What disciplines of the heart are needed so that comparison does not undo our service?
7. Reflect on the invitation 'Come and see.' How might we speak a version of those same words this week — to a student, a friend, a family member — without pressure, without argument, simply as a door opened to Christ?

Books & References

Scripture: Scripture in this lesson is quoted from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

Further Reading:

- The Holy Bible, New King James Version (NKJV). Thomas Nelson.
- St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John, XVIII–XIX. Translated in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 14.
- St. Macarius the Great, Spiritual Homilies. Translated by A. J. Mason. SPCK, 1921.
- The Synaxarium of the Coptic Orthodox Church, commemoration of the martyrdom of the Apostle St. Andrew (4 Kiahk).
- H. B. Swete, 'The Apostle Andrew,' in The Expositor, 7th series, Vol. 2.
- Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, Patristic Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John (chapters 1, 6, 12). St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria.

Patristic texts are cited in widely available English translations; where sense required, phrasing has been lightly modernized without altering meaning.

Lesson Notes

The Making of a Disciple - St. John the Beloved

SERVICE & SPIRITUALITY

The Church has given St. John the Evangelist many names — the Theologian, the Beloved, the Eagle of Patmos — but perhaps the deepest of them is hidden in the way he refers to himself in his own Gospel: 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' He did not start there. He began as a fisherman's son, a Son of Thunder, ready to call fire down from heaven. The long, gentle work of the Master remade him. In this lesson we trace the shaping of a disciple across a whole life — from a first afternoon at the tenth hour, through the inner circle and the leaning on the Lord's breast, to the foot of the Cross, to Patmos, to an old man in Ephesus still whispering, 'Little children, love one another.' The making of a disciple is slow work, and St. John is our most patient witness to it.

The Young Fisherman Who Was Listening

Before John was a theologian, he was a fisherman. His father Zebedee owned boats; his mother Salome was among the women who would one day serve the Lord with their means and stand beside the Cross. He and his brother James worked the nets on the Sea of Galilee — the steady, pre-dawn labor of men whose lives are shaped by weather and water.

And yet, somewhere along the way, young John began to listen for more than fish. When the fierce prophet of the Jordan began to preach repentance, John walked out to hear him. He became one of the Baptist's disciples. The Gospel shows us this quietly in the first chapter of his own account: two of the Baptist's disciples are standing with him when Jesus passes by, and the second of them, unnamed, is almost certainly John himself — he is too humble to write his own name in the story he is telling.

"Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, 'What do you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi' (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), 'where are You staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour)." John 1:35–39, NKJV

Notice the small and tender detail John remembers decades later: 'it was about the tenth hour.' An old man at the end of a long life still knows the afternoon hour in which his life was turned. Such is the memory of grace.

There is a quiet lesson here for the making of our own discipleship. Before our great calling, there is almost always a season of listening. John was already going out to hear the word preached. He was already among those who were willing to leave their boats for an afternoon of truth. The Lord did not find him at random; He found him where he had positioned himself to be found.

“Observe the care of the Evangelist. He has mentioned the hour, not carelessly, nor by accident, but to show the warmth and eager desire of those who came; for they were not content to have seen Jesus once, but remained with Him the whole day.” St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John XVIII.2

From that first tenth hour onward, John's life has a new center of gravity. The boats remain; the nets remain; but everything he does is now done in the pull of a Person he cannot stop remembering.

Son of Thunder

It is important for the shape of this lesson that we remember who John was before he became the Beloved. He and his brother James were given a nickname by our Lord Himself: Boanerges, Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). The nickname is not entirely flattering. It describes a certain heat of temperament — a readiness to raise the voice, a hand quick to seize the levers of power, a zeal that has not yet been purified.

The Gospels preserve for us, with great honesty, the moments in which that thunder rolled. A Samaritan village refuses to receive our Lord on the road to Jerusalem, and the two brothers step forward with a terrible suggestion.

“And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.’” Luke 9:54–56, NKJV

On another day, the two brothers — or their mother on their behalf, depending on the Gospel — come to our Lord asking for the seats at His right and left in the kingdom (Mark 10:35–40). The ambition is unvarnished. They want the places of honor. Our Lord does not crush them for the asking; He gently redirects their gaze to the cup He must drink.

It is easy to read those stories and wince for John. But they are part of the grace of his story, not a blemish on it. The disciple whom Jesus loved was not born loving well. He began as a zealous, ambitious, occasionally wrathful young man, and our Lord did not push him away for being that. Our Lord took him by the hand and slowly unmade the thunder and filled the emptied space with love. This is the real good news of John's life for the servants who come after him. We do not have to arrive at discipleship fully formed. We have only to come, and to keep coming, and to let Him do the long work of re-making.

“He called them Sons of Thunder, signifying that they would be heralds of the mysteries, full of power; yet the same men who once would have called down fire from heaven were afterwards sent to receive the Holy Spirit in the fire of Pentecost, that they might warm, not consume, the nations.” St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily LVI

In the Inner Circle

As the Gospel unfolds, our Lord draws a smaller circle within the Twelve. Peter, James, and John are taken where the others are not — into the house of Jairus for the raising of the little daughter (Mark 5:37), up the holy mountain for the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), into the inner garden at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). These three see the Lord in glory and the Lord in agony. They are the closest witnesses of both.

The Fathers have long asked why these three. Chrysostom answers gently: 'each of these three was elevated above the rest — Peter by exceedingly loving Him, John by being exceedingly loved by Him, and James by his ready response.' The Lord's choices are not capricious; He forms His closest disciples in the places of greatest disclosure because He is preparing them for the greatest service.

For John in particular, the Transfiguration was decisive. He saw uncreated light pour through the face of his Master. He heard the voice of the Father testify, 'This is My beloved Son.' Decades later, when he begins his Gospel, it is this memory that breaks the surface.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14, NKJV

'We beheld His glory.' The old apostle is remembering a mountain in Galilee, a cloud, a face bright as the sun. The making of a disciple passes, at least once, through an encounter in which we no longer simply believe in the Lord — we see Him. For us, that seeing may not be a Tabor. It may be a liturgy in which the veil grows thin, a prayer in which His presence becomes almost solid, a moment of suffering in which He holds us. The form differs; the gift is the same. The Lord is revealing Himself, quietly, to form us.

And Gethsemane matters too. Our Lord took John into the garden precisely because He wanted to be loved there. The disciple who will later preach the love of God learned love first by being trusted with his Master's sorrow. A servant is not finished being formed until he has been given some share in his Lord's grief — a sick person to sit with, a broken family to weep beside, a sin whose weight he begins to feel. The inner circle is not a circle of privilege. It is a circle of participation.

The Head on the Master's Breast

Of all the images in the Gospel of John, the one the Church has treasured most is the one in the upper room. The supper is ending; our Lord has washed the feet of His disciples; He has begun to speak of a betrayer. And then, with a restraint that is somehow more eloquent than a paragraph, the evangelist writes:

“Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved... Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?'" John 13:23, 25, NKJV

The Beloved Disciple — and by now the Gospel has trained us to know that this is John — leans his head on the chest of his Master. The Greek word the Fathers love for this posture is 'epistethios,' literally 'upon the breast.' It is the same word used when the Evangelist tells us that the Only-Begotten Son is 'in the bosom of the Father' (John 1:18). A man who has learned to rest his head on the heart of Jesus has been drawn into the very pattern of the Son's own rest in the Father.

For the making of every disciple, this is perhaps the deepest image we will ever meet. Theology begins on the chest of Christ. We do not first figure the Lord out and then draw close; we draw close, and the knowing follows. John wrote the loftiest Gospel in the New Testament — the one that soars like an eagle into the eternal Word — because he had first learned to sit still against his Master's heart.

“He who reclined upon the bosom of the Master drank in the mysteries of the Godhead; and from that bosom, as from a fountain, there flowed forth to us the theology of the only-begotten Son.” St. Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate CXXIV.5

The practical shape of this for our own discipleship is very clear. Before we teach a class, before we draft a retreat, before we answer a question put to us by someone who is struggling, we need time on the breast of Christ. That is what the prayer rule is for. That is what the Eucharist is for. That is what the long, silent moments of the liturgy are for. Theology done without that rest becomes noise. Theology done from that rest becomes life-giving. A servant who has not learned to lean has nothing much to pass on.

At the Foot of the Cross

Of the male disciples, John alone is recorded at Golgotha. The rest are scattered in their fear; Peter is weeping in a corner of the city over his denial. But John stands — young, perhaps trembling — beside our Lady and the other faithful women. He is there when the Roman nails bite into his Master's hands. He is there when the sun goes dark. He is there when the voice he had heard by Galilee says, 'I thirst,' and 'It is finished.'

And because he is there, he is entrusted with the holiest of charges.

“When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” John 19:26–27, NKJV

Our Lord, in the moment of His own utmost poverty, gives away the last treasure He has left on earth. He gives His mother to John. He gives John to His mother. The Fathers have seen in this a gift not only to one apostle but to the whole Church: through John, every disciple receives the Theotokos as a

mother, and through her, every disciple receives an image of the tenderness of the Lord's own care for us.

There is a test embedded in this scene for every disciple who comes after. Are we at the Cross? When our Lord is being crucified in some corner of our city — in the poor, in the suffering, in the forgotten — are we among the disciples who have fled, or among those who have remained? And are we the kind of servant to whom Christ could entrust His mother? Could He, dying, say to us, 'Take care of My people'? And would He trust us with it?

“The Lord, as He was about to depart out of this world, gave His disciple a mother; and she, who had stood by her Son in His passion, was given to His beloved in her motherhood, that both might find consolation, and that the Church herself might learn what it is to take the Mother of God into her home.” St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* III.23

John did take her home. From that hour — the Greek insists on the immediacy — the young apostle's house became, in a quiet way, the first shelter of the Mother of God. The disciple who had leaned on the Lord's breast now kept the Lord's mother under his roof. A disciple's home is always opened wider by discipleship; his family is always enlarged by his Master's love.

Patmos and the Eagle's Eye

Tradition tells us that after the Ascension, John stayed in Jerusalem until the falling asleep of the Theotokos, and that he then traveled to Ephesus, where he pastored the churches of Asia for the rest of his life. In the reign of Domitian — probably in the 90s after Christ — he was arrested for his witness, taken to Rome, thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil (from which the tradition says he emerged unharmed), and exiled to the small island of Patmos in the Aegean.

There, an old man alone on a rock, he was given a final gift. The Risen Christ visited him again, as He had visited him once by the Jordan at the tenth hour, and unveiled to him the end of all things.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,' and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches...' Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw... One like the Son of Man... His eyes like a flame of fire... And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.'” Revelation 1:10–17, NKJV

The hand the Risen Lord lays on John in Patmos is, in a sense, the same hand John had leaned against at the Last Supper. The discipleship that began in intimacy at the table now ends in intimacy on the island. The Lord is the same. The disciple has been kept.

The Church has traditionally given John the eagle as his symbol, because only the eagle can gaze directly into the sun. In Patmos, John was given to see the uncreated glory of the Lamb upon the

throne, the City coming down from heaven, the river of life flowing from the throne of God. A servant who has been faithfully formed across a lifetime is given, at the end, a clearer sight than he had at the beginning. We should not expect our spiritual vision to be at its brightest in our youth. It is often the old priest, the old mother, the old catechist, who has grown truly clear-eyed, because a long fidelity has washed their sight.

“The eagle is John; for he sought the heights, and flying above the clouds of human weakness, beheld with the keen and steady gaze of his heart the light of unchanging Truth.” St. Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate XXXVI.5

Little Children, Love One Another

The last portrait of the Beloved Disciple comes not from Scripture but from the living memory of the early Church. St. Jerome preserves for us a story he received from faithful witnesses, about the old apostle's final years in Ephesus. John had grown too frail to walk to the assembly of the faithful by himself. Younger disciples would carry him. When he arrived, he would say, again and again, only one sentence.

“When the blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age, and with difficulty was carried to the church in the arms of his disciples, and was unable to give utterance to many words, he used to say no more at their several meetings than this, 'Little children, love one another.' At length the disciples and fathers who were there, wearied with always hearing the same words, said, 'Master, why do you always say this?' And he replied in these memorable words: 'It is the Lord's commandment, and if it alone be kept, it is sufficient.'” St. Jerome, Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians III.6

There is almost nothing more beautiful in the life of the Church than this. The apostle who had begun as a Son of Thunder ended as an old man repeating one sentence. The long work of the Master had worn away every other word. What remained was pure gold.

This is the target of discipleship. Not a great ministry; not a famous name; not an impressive theology; but a life in which, at the end, we can say only what is essential, and what is essential turns out to be the commandment of the Lord. The making of a disciple is, in the end, the making of a lover. Everything else we gather along the way — knowledge, skill, reputation, even our cherished opinions — is sifted and most of it is let go. The love remains.

And so we come back to the scale of the parable. We began this lesson with the mustard seed.

“It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” Luke 13:19, NKJV

A young fisherman at the tenth hour of a quiet afternoon is a very small seed. Decades later, an old man whispers 'little children, love one another' into a crowded church, and the branches of that one life have already begun to cover the world. They are still covering it. We sit under those branches

whenever we open the Fourth Gospel. We sit under them whenever we read 'God is love.' We sit under them whenever we lift our heads to find the Mother of God keeping watch over the Church.

May the Lord who called the young John at the tenth hour, who trained him in the inner circle, who let him lean upon His breast, who entrusted His mother to him at the Cross, who kept him through exile and the sight of glory, and who in the end distilled his whole life down to a single commandment — may the same Lord undertake the same patient work in us. We do not need to begin this lesson as finished disciples. We have only to place ourselves where He is passing, to follow when He says, 'Come and see,' and to trust Him with the long making of the rest.

Review Questions

1. The evangelist John notes that he first followed the Lord 'about the tenth hour.' What does this small remembered detail teach us about the way grace marks a life, and can we name a 'tenth hour' of our own?
2. Before he became the Beloved, John was a Son of Thunder — ready to call down fire on a Samaritan village. What temperaments in our own hearts may the Lord be patiently unmaking, and how have we seen Him do that work already?
3. Our Lord drew Peter, James, and John into an inner circle in which they saw both Tabor and Gethsemane. What are the 'inner circle' moments of our own service — the places of both disclosure and participation in His grief?
4. The Beloved Disciple leaned on the Master's breast at the Last Supper. What disciplines of prayer and silence allow a servant today to 'lean' before teaching, so that our theology flows from rest and not from noise?
5. John alone is recorded among the male disciples at the foot of the Cross, and there he received the Mother of God into his home. Where is our Lord being crucified in our own city, and is He able to entrust His people to our care?
6. On Patmos, the old apostle received the Revelation — a clearer sight than he had at the beginning. What might it mean for us to trust that our spiritual vision is meant to grow clearer, not dimmer, as our fidelity lengthens?
7. Jerome preserves for us the image of the aged apostle repeating only one sentence: 'Little children, love one another.' If our life were distilled to a single sentence at its end, what sentence would we hope the Lord had taught us to say — and what choices now would shape it?

Books & References

Scripture: Scripture in this lesson is quoted from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

Further Reading:

- The Holy Bible, New King James Version (NKJV). Thomas Nelson.
- St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John, XVIII–XIX, LXXXV. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 14.
- St. Augustine of Hippo, Tractates on the Gospel of John, especially Tractates XXXVI and CXXIV. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 7.
- St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Homilies on Luke). Translated by R. Payne Smith.
- St. Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job. Translated in the Library of Fathers series (Oxford).
- St. Jerome, Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, Book III (on Gal. 6:10), in which the tradition of 'Little children, love one another' is preserved.
- Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, Patristic Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John. St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria.
- Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, The School of Alexandria Before Origen, chapter on St. John the Evangelist.

Patristic texts are cited in widely available English translations; where sense required, phrasing has been lightly modernized without altering meaning. The Jerome fragment on the aged John is traditional and appears in his commentary on Galatians.

Lesson Notes