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# The Walk

STEPS FOR NEW AND RENEWED  
FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

STEPHEN SMALLMAN



P U B L I S H I N G

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To Jack and Rose Marie Miller

Jack's vision to apply the gospel to the life of believers as well as unbelievers is the foundational principle of this book. Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of serving with Jack. I am one of a multitude of pastors whose lives and ministries were substantially impacted by the life and teaching of this unique and godly man.

Rose Marie: Your love and friendship to me, and particularly to Sandy, have given us the opportunity to see what the gospel looks like when it is lived out by a servant of Christ.



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# Preface

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I AM PROFOUNDLY grateful to Marvin Padgett and the editors of P&R Publishing for inviting me to write a book for new believers, and supporting the approach that I have taken. My first plan was an outline of themes or doctrines that those new to the faith should understand. As you will see, however, in the writing process I found myself drawn to go in a slightly different direction and to explore the meaning of discipleship and Jesus' call to follow him. I was captivated by the simple phrase in the first verse of Mark's gospel, "the *beginning* of the gospel." This suggested to me that Mark was inviting his readers to begin the journey of discipleship through the eyes of those first disciples. I have also tried to do that, letting Scripture speak for itself as the book moves from the beginning of the gospel in Mark to the meaning of the gospel explained by Paul in Romans. I have learned, from explaining this concept to people, that there is a great need to take every believer through this kind of study. Therefore, the book keeps mentioning not only *new* disciples, but *renewed* disciples.

Writing *The Walk: Steps for New and Renewed Followers of Jesus* has given me the opportunity to pull together things I have been teaching in different settings for years. I had always sought

## INTRODUCTION

was welcomed by them, and joined in their gatherings. The more he learned about Jesus and saw the loving character of those who were his disciples, the more Titus felt drawn in, even to the point of starting to think of himself as one of those disciples.

The primary source for the group's learning about Jesus was a short book called a *gospel* written by John Mark, a man who had grown up while Jesus lived, and whose mother was one of Jesus' earliest followers. The copy of the gospel had been given to them by one of Jesus' original disciples, Peter, who visited Rome from time to time. Titus came to love joining the group to listen to long portions of Mark being read and then hearing the elders explain the meaning. There was a power and beauty about Jesus that felt like a magnet drawing Titus to faith and a new direction for his life.

While Titus was meeting with the group, a letter arrived from another of the original leaders of the movement: the apostle Paul. Paul was known to many of the group members because they had been with him in other cities. But now Paul was planning to come to Rome, and rather than just sending a brief note to inform them of this, Paul had written a long and carefully composed letter to explain the same word used by Mark: *gospel*. Not only was there great excitement about the upcoming visit from Paul, but now the disciples in Rome had new material to study, and they eagerly read and discussed the letter now known as the epistle to the Romans.

Titus didn't understand everything he heard about Jesus, but he wanted to. He was "home," and yet not quite home. He still had not undergone baptism, a washing with water, which was the way to publicly signify that he was a disciple of Jesus. Titus came for the singing, the adoration of God through Jesus, and the teaching. But he didn't stay for the meal that the group

members celebrated to remember Jesus and to receive spiritual refreshment for the challenges of their lives—lives that often included ridicule and even violence against them. Titus was at a crossroads. Was he ready to be a full member of the community that followed Jesus? Was he ready to stand up and declare himself as a disciple of this man he was only beginning to understand?

### ARE YOU A TITUS?

You may be very close to the Titus I just described—new to any serious consideration of Jesus. You feel drawn to him, but you have only the vaguest idea of who he is. You are what I think of as a *new disciple*, and perhaps you are not even sure that you are a disciple. On the other hand, you may have grown up hearing about Jesus. The Bible stories about him are familiar to you—perhaps too familiar. But you have come to a place in life where you are ready for a fresh look at Jesus. Possibly some of your life experiences have shaken your faith; or perhaps, while you fully appreciate your heritage, you want to see Jesus through your own eyes, not those of your parents or church. I think of you as a *renewed disciple*. Whether you are a new or a renewed disciple, the gospel according to Mark was written to introduce you to Jesus, and that is where we will begin our study.

The scenario I have just suggested is not far from what could have been the case. The gospel according to Mark was probably the first of the accounts of the life and mission of Jesus that were called *gospels*, and strong tradition suggests that it was originally written to support the apostle Peter's early ministry in Rome. Furthermore, many in Rome were disappointed by the various spiritualities of that day and weary of the decadence

## INTRODUCTION

and oversexualized culture of the Roman world. People were attracted to reports about this obscure man named Jesus—some considered themselves believers, and others were not ready to go that far, but they wanted to know more about this man and his teaching. The letter Paul wrote to the Romans sometime in those early years took them on additional steps into discipleship. Paul wrote assuming that they knew something about Jesus and had made some progress in following him. Those first disciples formed the church of Rome, so Paul was coming to teach the gospel *to the disciples*. As we will see, his purpose was somewhat different from Mark's, but he was still emphatic about building on the foundation of the gospel. So I will define the steps found in Paul's letter as *gospel discipleship*.

One of many terms the Bible uses to describe the life of a follower or disciple of Jesus is *walk*, which is the title I have chosen for this book. A walk can be a pleasant stroll so that we stretch our legs, or it can be a deliberate commitment to get to a destination. Obviously, the walk of following Jesus is the latter. We move toward our goal one step at a time, and that is how you should expect to walk with Jesus. Whether you are a new or a renewed disciple, your first step is to meet Jesus himself. In *The Walk* we will do that by reading the gospel written by Mark. Then we will take additional steps in discipleship through a study of Paul's letter to the church of Rome.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*Begin with Jesus.* The only prerequisite for profiting from *The Walk* is a sincere desire to know more about Jesus. That desire includes a readiness to follow up with action steps, because it

will become immediately evident in your study that Jesus is not someone to study merely as an interesting person or a key figure in history. Jesus calls us to follow him. Take your time to respond—but in the end we say either *Yes* or *No* to the call of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

*This is “Discipleship for Dummies.”* As I prepared this study, I assumed that you would be starting with no basic knowledge of Jesus and discipleship. I kept asking myself whether my words would make sense to Titus. My model was the popular For Dummies™ series of books that helped me so much in learning to use a computer. The authors of those books have never forgotten what it is like to start at the beginning. They realize that a great many of us aren’t sure what button to push to turn the computer on and what to do next when strange things start happening on the computer screen. Some of us don’t even know the words to use to describe what we are seeing, which means that a typical instruction manual doesn’t help because even the language is new.

I began my spiritual pilgrimage over fifty years ago, just like Titus. If ever there was a “dummy” regarding things about Jesus, it was I. And I have prayed that I will never forget what it means to begin with a general belief in God and an awareness of a book that “everyone” was supposed to know about called *The Holy Bible*. Growing up in the 1950s when there was more general knowledge of religious truth, even I needed to “begin at the beginning,” so I suspect that this need is even greater in

1. Appendix A contains suggestions for additional reading. This includes books and other resources for those who have basic questions of faith, such as the existence of God and the reliability of the Bible. These are very important questions for many readers, and they deserve thoughtful answers. My purpose in this book, however, is to speak to those who want to know what it means to follow Jesus.

## INTRODUCTION

our day. If you are a Titus, you are not alone. And don't feel intimidated by the people around you who seem to know a lot more, because if you ask them to define the "churchy" words they use, you may find out that they stumble.

*This is written as a handbook, not a "complete package."* If you were reading a "dummies" book about your computer, it would assume that you were looking at the computer as you read. Otherwise, what you were reading might be interesting, but it wouldn't be particularly useful until you put it into practice. In the same way, I will be calling your attention to what is written in the Bible—but this means that you need to stop and read the Bible for yourself. Ultimately I hope and pray that my book launches you on a serious study of the Bible itself, along with a growing desire to know more and more of the God who reveals himself there. And because the Bible warns about being a hearer of the Word but not a doer, you will be given assignments to help you start along the path of following Jesus. These assignments will point you in the right direction, and they are steps *you* must take. You are the one who must walk one step at a time.

Your first assignment: Buy a Bible if you don't have your own copy. I strongly recommend that you get a modern translation. I will be quoting from the New International Version (NIV), but there are many other good ones. This Bible should become a familiar companion, one that you can mark up and make notes to yourself in. If you are now part of a church, you should note the translation used in the preaching and teaching, and try to use that for your own study.

I also recommend that you start to keep a journal, at least while you study this book. You could do this in a notebook or

on your computer. Try to begin a habit of writing down what you are learning and the thoughts that flow from it. Write your reactions to what you read in the Bible and to conversations with others, and even begin to write out your prayers.

*Consider ways to study with others.* This book is written to be used in a class, in a group, or with one or two others. Even if you don't have a leader, you should consider finding someone to do this study with you. Any learning, and particularly a study of discipleship, is far more profitable when done with others.

*Take your time.* To be a disciple of Jesus is a lifetime commitment. Getting started (or restarted) should be done thoughtfully. Even if you quickly read through this book, it is designed for you to go back and review and follow through on the suggested action steps. When you commit to doing the assignments at the end of each chapter, reading and studying one chapter a week may be about as fast as you will want to go. I even suggest taking a year, so that you study and discuss one chapter a month.

### **Summary of How to Use This Book**

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- Begin with a sincere desire to follow Jesus.
- Don't worry about being a "dummy."
- Get a Bible and start a journal.
- Consider ways to study with others.
- Take your time.



## PART ONE

# THE BASICS

The purposes for this section called “The Basics” are twofold. In the first place, I hope to give you some time to reflect on questions that lay the foundation for a study of discipleship. You can see what they are by noting the titles of the three chapters below. Being part of a church and getting started with Bible reading and prayer don’t automatically make you a disciple, but these are essential tools for the life of discipleship.

But the second reason may be the more important one. While you are considering a few basic questions, you will also be introduced to Jesus by reading the gospel written by Mark. As you will see, I don’t have a set reading schedule or a specific study guide. I just want to encourage you to read about and consider Jesus. If the essence of discipleship is following Jesus, then we need to know who Jesus is and what he calls us to. If we don’t get that straight right from the beginning, we will quickly stray from the path. The rest is important, of course, but subsidiary to the essential truth that discipleship means following Jesus.

Chapter 1: What Is a Disciple?

Chapter 2: Do I Have to Go to Church?

Chapter 3: Learning to Read the Bible and Pray



## CHAPTER 1

# What Is a Disciple?

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THE UNITED STATES recently observed a grim anniversary. Forty years earlier, on April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated by a sniper's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee. Many newspaper and magazine articles and television specials recalled the events of that terrible day, and in almost every instance those who had been Dr. King's closest followers were interviewed about their memories. Usually they were called "disciples" of Dr. King. Most of them had gone on to further the cause of civil rights, but their accomplishments were achieved because of their relationship with and the inspiration of their leader.

Such a modern example of discipleship could be repeated over and over. I think most of us get the general idea of what it means to be a disciple. A disciple is one who is devoted to learning the ways and following the example of a teacher or master. But what about being a disciple of Jesus? That is why we are doing this study. The best place to begin our answer to that question is to read the gospel written to do just that—the gospel according to Mark.

**Read Your Bible: Mark 1:1–20**

(For this chapter I am including the actual text of the reading. But for the other chapters, I expect you to stop reading this book and read the suggested portion from your own Bible. If you are with others, it will be even more profitable if someone reads aloud and the rest follow along. Then talk together about what you have read. Don't get too caught up in detail—this is your introduction to Jesus, and you can come back again and again to get a fuller picture.)

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way”—  
“a voice of one calling in the desert,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'”

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out

## WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Now let’s think about what you just read. Even if this passage of the Bible is familiar to you, try to consider it through the eyes of our fictional friend Titus, who had no background in the teaching of the Bible. If his introduction to being a disciple was Mark, it meant that he had to jump right in and think about Jesus before anything else could be considered. The very first verse of Mark is: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The word *gospel* denotes an announcement of good news. Mark calls this the *beginning* of the gospel, so we know there will be much more to learn. But before we go any further, we need to know that the good news proclaimed in the Bible is about Jesus, who is Christ and who is the Son of God.

**Time Out:**

You need to know that *Christ* is not Jesus' last name. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. *Messiah* means "an anointed one," that is, someone who had oil poured on his head making him a king. Jesus of Nazareth (his hometown) is identified as the One promised for centuries to deliver the Jewish people. So Mark identifies him as Jesus, who is *Messiah* and also the *Son of God*.

In the next few verses of Mark we are introduced to John, also called John the Baptist, who prepares the people for the coming of Messiah (another John also appears in this chapter, the fisherman who became Jesus' disciple). When John baptized Jesus, the Spirit from heaven came on him and a voice spoke from heaven, calling Jesus his beloved Son. So we are at the beginning of the gospel, and already we are learning about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—the Holy Trinity! We are also introduced to Satan, the evil one who tempts Jesus in the desert.

Obviously, we have much more to learn, but before we can think much about what has already happened, Mark immediately confronts us with the *call* of Jesus. Refer again to the portion you are reading—Jesus came into Galilee (a region in the north of Israel) "proclaiming the good news of God," which is another way of saying that he preached the gospel. Here is what he preached: "The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus constantly spoke and taught about the kingdom ("the kingdom