

CLOSER

HOW TO BE A STUDENT
WHO MAKES DISCIPLES

R O B B Y G A L L A T Y

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ABOUT THE *author*



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A MESSAGE FROM *Robby*

You are about to embark on a journey that will change your life. I'm not saying that the words of this book are somehow magical. I'm saying that studying the Word of God, practicing spiritual disciplines, and being and making disciples transforms you. How can I say that? I'm speaking from personal experience.

Jesus expected His followers to make disciples, not converts or decisions. The word "disciple" means *student* or *learner*. Before we can embark on the task of making disciples, we must be a disciple first. *You can't expect from others what you aren't practicing yourself*. My prayer is that you wouldn't just read the words of this study, but apply what you learn. Put it into practice. Set aside time to study. Memorize, meditate, and incorporate what you learn into your daily life. Develop a plan of action. If you fail to plan, you can plan to fail.

Remember, you aren't just learning for yourself—the gospel came to you because it was heading to someone else. Every believer is either passing the baton to someone behind them or they are fumbling the handoff. It's my prayer for you that you run with passion as you draw closer to Christ.

R. Gallaty

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Jesus established the model of discipleship by forming and leading the first discipleship group—and it worked. The men who emerged from that group took the gospel to the world and ultimately laid down their lives for Christ.

In *Closer: How to Be a Student Who Makes Disciples*, Robby Gallaty presents a practical, easy-to-implement system to help students grow in their faith. This eight-session Bible study offers a manual for making disciples, addressing the what, why, where, and how of discipleship. Discipleship groups can create an atmosphere for fellowship, encouragement, and accountability—building an environment where God can work. D-Groups, as Gallaty calls them, can teach students how to grow in their relationship with God, how to defend their faith, and how to guide others in their relationship with God.

HOW TO USE

In this book, you will find content for eight weekly group sessions, daily personal devotions, and leader guide notes. Each session consists of a group guide followed by four days of homework. Included in the back of this study, there is also a leader guide with helpful hints and an outline of for each group session. As you close group time, encourage students to complete the personal devotions that follow the group sessions.

Once students have completed this study, they will have grown their faith exponentially and learned techniques for studying Scripture that will increase their own understanding of God's Word and prepare them for creating discipleship.

SESSION ONE

C.L.O.S.E.R.
TO JESUS

I THOUGHT THAT I HAD HIT ROCK BOTTOM when I stole \$15,000 from my parents. I was only twenty-five years old, but I was already a drug dealer, hopelessly addicted to prescription medications, and was suddenly living with the police on my trail.

I hadn't started that way. I was born into a strict Roman Catholic family, and my parents sent me to Holy Cross High School, which was a Catholic boys' school in New Orleans. Even though it was a "religious" school, the extent of my worship was the hour or so I would sit in mass every Sunday. I'd do all of the rituals, say all of the sayings, and do my "Hail Mary's," but I'd leave each service entirely unchanged. I was completely unconcerned with what God wanted for me.

After high school, I ended up going to William Carey College, a small Baptist college in Mississippi, on a basketball scholarship. Imagine how out of place I was: a hulking New Orleans Catholic put in the middle of a Baptist college in Mississippi. I was suddenly the target of every evangelism class on campus!

While I was there, The Lord brought me a friend, Jeremy Brown, who cared enough about me to discuss what it really means to have a relationship with God. Jeremy's message was simple: If I would only cry out to God, He would forgive me of everything in my past.

But I didn't listen. I graduated from college and started a computer business with two friends. It looked promising. For six months, we poured everything we had into the company. But in the end, we just couldn't get it to take off. Exhausted, dejected, and broke, I needed something else.

Fortunately for me, I was a 6'6", 290-pound athlete who was fascinated with the world of mixed martial arts. I began training Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and was soon hired as a bouncer in a nightclub in New Orleans. I felt like I was indestructible and finally on the right path: I had a job that was paying me to fight. But I couldn't have been more wrong.

When have you felt like everything in your life was going wrong?

What was happening?

How did it turn out?

On November 22, 1999, an eighteen-wheeler swerved across two lanes of traffic at sixty-five miles an hour and slammed my car into the guardrail. I suffered hernias and bulging discs in my back and was in horrific pain. The doctor I went to attempted to fix that pain with four very powerful, very addictive painkillers.

I'd never taken drugs before, but I soon found myself addicted to these painkillers. I was using a thirty-day supply of medicine in two weeks. I had to find another way to feed my addiction, and soon began using my business knowledge to import and sell illegal drugs so I could fuel my growing habit.

Although the business looked booming on the outside—and it was, because New Orleans is a famous hotbed for drug use—I was dying on the inside. Between 2000 and 2003, I lost eight friends to alcohol and drugs, and six more to prison. Soon, the police began monitoring me and those in my group. It shut the business down.

Soon, I found myself in a predicament: I had a \$180-a-day drug addiction, but no income to support it. I couldn't pay the bills, so the gas, water, and electricity were cut off in my house. One day while visiting my father, I memorized his credit card number and began using it to buy things online to sell in pawn shops so that I could get money to pay my drug dealers. I stole \$15,000 from him in three months.

My parents called me when they found out—and they were rightfully livid. They sent me to rehab and things seemed okay for a moment. But one day while lifting weights, I reinjured my back, had to get surgery, and was prescribed the same four drugs that had sent me down this path in the first place. Soon, I was back in rehab for another unsuccessful treatment.

Then something miraculous happened in my life. On November 12, 2002, I remembered what Jeremy Brown had told me four years before: that no matter what I had done, Christ loved me and was waiting for me to call out to Him. It was on the floor of my room, not at a church service or under a revival tent, that I surrendered my life to Him. I spent twenty-four hours locked in my room with nobody but Jesus Christ, and I emerged a completely changed man.

If you've surrendered your life to Christ, what were the circumstances?

What was your life like before you encountered Christ?

What was it like after?

Spend some time writing out a three-minute version of your personal testimony.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

I immediately knew that I was called to be a pastor, but my Catholic upbringing had not taught me how to read Scripture, memorize it, or pray. For several months, I wandered aimlessly in my Christian life, unable to proceed.

That is when I met David Platt at Edgewater Baptist Church in New Orleans. He invited me to meet weekly with him for Bible study, prayer, and accountability. We met every week for the next five months to discuss the glory of God, the lost nature of man, and the good news of Jesus Christ. I soon enrolled in seminary and we added more people to our weekly meetings. We met every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 6:30 for the next eighteen months.

What I learned with David is what we call Discipleship. It was a period of time in which we were intensely devoted to studying and memorizing Scripture, keeping one another accountable, and praying. But this is not something David invented; He got it straight from the life of Jesus.

The Bible records that Jesus ministered to three distinct groups of people: large groups, small groups, and one group of three. Jesus' large group ministry consisted of speaking to crowds (see the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7) and the 70 followers He sent out in Luke 10. These are all too large to be considered groups focused on discipleship.

Out of that large group, Jesus called twelve to be His closest followers (Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-19). These are the most famous disciples in the Bible, because they followed Jesus closely for the three years He ministered on earth. This is the group He lived life with and spent the most time around.

Within that small group, He consistently took three of His disciples with Him for intensive times of equipping: Peter, James, and John. All three were fishermen and appear together five times in the Gospels—in Mark 1:29-31; Mark 5:37; Mark 9:2; Mark 13:3; and Matthew 26:37. This was His inner circle, the ones He lived most closely with, the ones He taught most directly and intimately. He lived out Solomon's wisdom from Ecclesiastes 4:9,12, which says, "Two are better than one... And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken."

Has anyone ever taken the time to pour into you—whether it was for academic help, spiritual guidance, athletic training, etc.?

If so, how did their effort help you learn?

How did it make you feel knowing that they were pouring themselves out to help you?

If you developed your own "inner circle" of three or four people, who would you include? Why?

MULTIPLICATION, NOT ADDITION

The final instruction Jesus gave His disciples was to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). This is when we see His method of discipleship come full circle: when the one who was disciplined turns into the one who disciplines others. Everything they learned in their time of being disciplined was not for them to keep to themselves, but for them to turn and teach someone else. We call this multiplication.

Imagine that a great evangelist could reach one person a day for an entire year. The first year, he’d reach 365 people, in the next year he’d reach another 365, totaling 730 people. That’s a lot! In 16 years, he would have reached 5,840 people with the gospel.

Now imagine that one person disciplines three other people. After a year, he would have reached only those three. But after that year, those three people find three people of their own to disciple. Then, the year after that, the people they disciple reach out and find three of their own. After one year, this disciple maker would have reached three, after the second he would have reached nine, then 27, then 81. After 16 years of this process, one man discipling three others would have reached 43,046,721 people!

Discipleship is slow because it is intentional. It is a time when you pour into someone’s life for the purpose of helping them grow deeper in their faith—and to desire to pour into someone else’s life in return. Over the next weeks, we are going to learn the principles that help someone grow closer to God so that they can be fully-devoted followers of Christ too. By practicing discipleship, we are going to actively make Jesus’ final instruction our primary work: making disciples who will make disciples.

Even though we’ve only scratched the surface of discipleship, what are some benefits that you can see?

What are some of the difficulties you could imagine?

As a group, discuss ways you might overcome obstacles to discipleship.

YOUR STORY IS GOD'S STORY

The distinguishing mark of a Christian's life is that there was a time when they first repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Every believer has one of these moments, and it's called a testimony. We should each be able to clearly communicate our testimony to others.

A common issue that comes up when sharing testimonies is that many of us don't know how to do it. That's okay. It doesn't have to be complicated. The easiest way to share is by breaking it down into three stages: 1) Describe who you were before Christ, 2) Explain the moment you came to know Christ, and 3) Tell how your life is different now. Let's take a look at each of these steps and what is helpful to include when sharing the story of how Jesus changed you. Then you can practice writing your testimony out by answering some of the questions provided.

1. WHO WERE YOU BEFORE CHRIST?

Ephesians 2:1-2 tells us, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously lived according to the ways of this world." The first step in sharing a testimony is to describe yourself, like Paul did in his letter to the Ephesians, before you decided to follow Jesus.

What was your attitude like? Were you easily irritated by certain things or did you choose to stick with an "I couldn't care less" approach to difficulties?

Where did you place your hope?

2. HOW DID YOU COME TO KNOW CHRIST?

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved, they responded with a simple answer in Acts 16:31: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." It doesn't matter where you've come from or what you've done; all that matters is that you simply turn from your former ways and accept the free gift that Jesus offers by believing in Him as the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again.

When did you first begin to understand Jesus' message of forgiveness and grace? How did you know your sin was separating you from a Holy God?

When did you confess that you were a sinner and needed Jesus to save you?

3. HOW ARE YOU DIFFERENT NOW?

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul explains what happens when we put our faith in Christ: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" Once we are made new by Jesus after professing our faith in Him, something changes in our minds. We aren't perfect, but the focus of our lives switches from ourselves to Jesus.

How is who you are now different than who you were?

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Do you know how many times *Christian* appears in the Bible? Only three times (Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Many people believe *Christian* was actually a sort of insult. Those who despised Christ displayed their disgust for His followers by calling them, sarcastically, “little Christs.” It probably wasn’t until years later that *Christian* began to be used in a positive light.

On the other hand, the term disciple appears 269 times in the New Testament, with 238 of those occurring in the four Gospels. (The root word is used 281 times in the New Testament and 250 times in the Gospels alone.)

Why is this so important? The answer is because Christ did not come to make Christians; He came to make disciples. Immediately before leaving this world to return to heaven, He commanded us—His disciples—to carry on that work in His absence.

But before a person can make disciples, he or she must first be a disciple.

A disciple is, essentially, a learner who is set on growing and developing. We see disciples in our society all over the place: A tutor is assigned only to classes that he or she has already completed and mastered. Driving lessons are taught by an adult that has a driver’s license and many years of experience driving. Someone training to be a doctor finishes medical school and must shadow an experienced physician. A disciple is simply someone who learns from a teacher!

We are going to learn a lot about the process of making disciples over the next eight weeks. But our focus is not going to be on driving lessons or medical school, it will be on the Word of God. As we seek to get shaped into the image of Christ, we will be learning directly from God through His Word.

What is the difference between being called a “Christian” and being a disciple, especially in today’s culture?

What are your goals as you start this discipleship journey?

Take stock of your life for a moment. In what ways is your walk with the Lord strong? In what ways could it be improved?

WHAT IS A D-GROUP?

In Ecclesiastes 4:12, King Solomon wrote, “If someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.”

As we embark on a journey of discipleship, we are going to keep this principle in mind: There is strength in numbers. This is just as true when walking down the street as it is in spiritual growth. When you have brothers or sisters standing by you and growing alongside you, all of your efforts will be multiplied and strengthened.

A Discipleship Group, or D-Group, is a group of three to five gender-exclusive (guys with guys, girls with girls) believers meeting together for the purpose of accountability, reading God’s Word, and Scripture memorization. They help one another grow into the image of Christ.

Following are some important concepts when it comes to D-Groups:

Transparency: Things will come up in a D-Group that are personal and sometimes hard to share. But you will only get out of it what you put in. If you are willing to be open and honest with the people in your group, you will find that dealing with the struggles you face becomes much easier—you will be able to confront them head-on and will have the strength of your group to help you.

Confidentiality: As group members begin to share difficult things with you, it’s important that they know they’re sharing in confidence. Personal and difficult life experiences are hard to tell sometimes. Respecting one another’s privacy will strengthen the bond that you share together.

Commitment: Each person’s individual commitment level will affect the entire group. If one of your members is not as committed to growing consistently or to participating in the discussion or study as the rest of the group is, you will be dragged down together. Have you ever heard the saying, “A chain is only as strong as its weakest link”? The same is true here. Strive for commitment when embarking on a journey of discipleship with fellow believers.

How comfortable are you sharing things about yourself, even if they’re not pretty or polished?

Is there a truth about you that you think would change the way people think about you? What is it?

If someone else had something they were nervous to share, what would you do to reassure them that they could share it safely with you?

TRAINING IN GODLINESS

Have you ever seen the Rocky movies? They're famous because they depict the hero, Rocky, facing opponents who are more experienced, stronger, or bigger than he is. Rocky's the underdog in every fight and has to overcome incredible odds to face off against the final opponent in the climax of the movies.

Some of the best scenes in those movies are the training montages. We see Rocky lifting weights, running drills, punching bags, and getting progressively better all in a matter of minutes. On the one hand, these scenes are good because they show the importance of training and improving, even if just slowly at first. However, they also do the viewer a disservice because they make intense training look easy.

As a disciple develops into a Christ-follower, he embarks on a lifetime of training. Unlike Rocky, however, we don't get a three-minute montage set to great music to zoom through. For us, spiritual training is a daily habit.

These are some spiritual disciplines that have helped believers grow closer to God for centuries.

Prayer (Communicate with God)

Meditation (Focusing on God)

Fasting (Relying on God)

Study (Learning about God)

Simplicity (Seeking God first)

Submission (Putting God's will first)

Solitude (Getting alone with God)

Service (Selflessly helping those around you)

Confession (Acknowledging sin before others)

Worship (Giving glory to God)

As we get tired or start to lose focus on our goal of becoming like Christ, these tools can help you redirect your attention back on what matters: God and His glory.

Which of these disciplines have you practiced before?

Which looks most appealing to you? Which looks the most frightening?

What are some ways you can focus on growing toward God daily?

How do you think that using spiritual disciplines could help you train for righteousness?