

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
PRESENTS

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

*"Whoever claims to be in him must walk as Jesus walked."
1 John 2:6 (RVL)*



A SEMESTER COURSE WITH RAY VANDER LAAN

Text by Brittany Grooters
Design by Brooke Pennington

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum
Instructor Guide

© 2024 Ray Vander Laan

Focus on the Family and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

RVL Discipleship is a trademark of Ray Vander Laan.

Copies may be made for personal and small group use. Any other use requires prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Quotations identified as ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-68428-622-5



COURSE SYLLABUS

"Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."

1 John 2:6 (NIV)

ONSCREEN TEACHER: Ray Vander Laan

COURSE INSTRUCTOR:

OFFICE:

HOURS:

PHONE:

EMAIL:



COURSE GOALS

The goal of this course is to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the context of how discipleship is portrayed throughout the Bible. The Western approach to discipleship is often focused on demonstrated biblical knowledge and the development of a personal sense of belief. This course is intended to take that one step further, encouraging students to develop a lifelong journey of not only learning *about* Jesus, but also *walking* as He walked.

In this course, students will develop a toolkit for studying the Bible in the context in which it was written, recognizing and unpacking basic Jewish teaching techniques and gaining an understanding of the major theme that ties all sixty-six books together. They will examine the roots of discipleship in the Old Testament, following Israel's experience as history leads us to Jesus. They will also unpack helpful cultural context in both the Old and New Testaments, exploring the role of rabbis and disciples in Jesus' time and examining how He followed this system in His own ministry. Finally, students will be challenged to consider what this means for their walk with Jesus today.

This course will rely on forty lesson videos from teacher Ray Vander Laan ("RVL"), Bible instructor and founder of That the World May Know Ministries. Instructors will be supplied with homework assignments and exam questions, and this course may be offered for credit on an in-person or online basis. This course may also be taken independently by homeschooled individuals.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Each student will choose one of the three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, or Luke—to focus on throughout the semester.
2. Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg. *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018).

CLASS TIME:

- Instructors of in-person classes will begin each class period with an introduction to the video lesson.
- Video lessons will be approximately thirty minutes long. Instructors have the option to ask their students to recite the *Shema* along with the intro in each video lesson.
- Instructors will lead in-person class discussions after each lesson video, using provided guided questions. (NOTE: In an online/independent study setting, instructors may choose to assign the provided guiding questions in their preferred online discussion forum or in journal format as classwork. Alternatively, they may choose to discard these questions altogether.)
- Instructors of in-person classes will use the provided supporting points to conclude the class session, wrapping up the material, and assigning homework.

HOMEWORK:

- **SYNOPTIC GOSPEL READING:** At the beginning of the course, students will choose one of the three synoptic Gospels to focus on throughout the semester. Students will follow a reading schedule and complete journal entries of their reaction to each assigned section.
- **SITTING AT THE FEET OF RABBI JESUS (SFRJ):** Students will read and complete the included study guide questions to each chapter of *SFRJ* throughout the semester.

MIDTERM / FINAL EXAMS:

Students will complete the provided midterm and final exams, study Bible passages and Hebrew vocabulary, and explain their relevance to discipleship. Depending on instructor preferences, these exams can be conducted on an open-Bible/open-note basis.

VIDEO LESSON BREAKDOWN:

This course is organized as follows into four units. Instructors may choose the number of lessons to introduce/assign per week based on length of the semester or the number of class periods their students will attend per week:

UNIT 1: JOIN THE MISSION

RVL presents a handful of tools for students to use in their approach to reading the Bible as disciples. These include: learning the Eastern way of communicating; six categories of context and how to recognize them in Scripture; the use of allusion in the Bible; recognizing theological chronologies; how parables were used; and so on. After these tools are introduced, RVL ends Unit 1 by outlining the central thread that ties the Bible (and the mission of a disciple) together—the idea of bringing *shalom* back to chaos.

1	Shema, Israel	<i>Shema</i> is an anthem for being “all in” as a disciple
2	The Hebrew Mind	The differences between Eastern and Western worldviews
3	Context Matters	Considering the context of the Bible in six major categories
4	Allusion	The literary concept of allusion as used in the Bible
5	Throw Your Stone	Joining God’s story
6	Walking Like Trees	Seeing but not seeing
7	Parables	Exploring Jesus as a teacher, and His use of parables
8	Tohu of Shalom	The central theme of the Bible—bringing <i>shalom</i> to chaos
9	Get Out of the Boat	The role of disciples in bringing <i>shalom</i> to chaos

UNIT 2: A REDEEMED PARTNER

RVL unpacks Israel's role as God's partner in the central mission of bringing *shalom* to chaos. Unit 2 explores the concepts of the "father's house" as model for God's Kingdom; the original covenant with Abraham and how it will connect to Jesus; how Israel was meant to be the image of God to the other nations; and how Jesus comes to perfectly live up to this role.

10	<i>Beth Ab</i>	RVL unpacks the father's house family unit known as <i>beth ab</i>
11	Redeem the Marginalized	Jesus' goal—to redeem all of humanity
12	From Covenant to Cross	The blood covenant with Abraham to the blood of Jesus
13	Sixty-five Pounds of Flour	The overwhelming responsibility of hospitality in God's house
14	The Image of God	The <i>tselem</i> —or image—of God
15	To Caesar What Is Caesar's	Temple worship under Roman rule
16	Ears to Hear	A people of the ears
17	Remember You Were Slaves	How Israel's time in Egypt prepared them for their mission
18	The Finger of God	The "finger of God" is more powerful than anything in the universe
19	Sheep Don't Come Back	Jesus came to find the lost sheep of Israel
20	The Coin and the Son	Israel as God's partner in seeking the lost

UNIT 3: JESUS AS RABBI

RVL begins to explore Jewish discipleship by first introducing Jesus as a rabbi. Unit 3 will cover the importance of Jesus' life, not only His death; some of the ways He fulfilled messianic prophecy; aspects of first-century religious life and synagogue worship; and how Jesus conducted His ministry as a rabbi within the cultural context of His day.

21	Jesus Messiah	Jesus lived His life for a reason—His death was not the only thing that mattered. Defines the word <i>Gospel</i> in Roman context
22	Jesus' Family	Unpacking Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke
23	John's Question	John the Baptist asks Jesus from prison, "Are you the one who is to come?"
24	<i>Pratz</i>	The Kingdom of Heaven is subjected to violence, and the violent take it by force
25	Hero	Phillip as self-aggrandized hero; Jesus as servant hero
26	Man from Galilee	The unique centrality of community, discipleship, and text in first-century Galilee
27	<i>D'var Torah</i>	The <i>Tanakh</i> and <i>d'var Torah</i>
28	Synagogue	Synagogue as the center of Jewish life
29	Palm Sunday	The historical and cultural context of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem, focusing on the symbolism behind Palm Sunday and the Last Supper
30	Rabbis and Disciples	The role of the rabbi
31	The Yoke	The rabbi's interpretive approach to scripture was called "the yoke"

UNIT 4: TAKE HIS YOKE

RVL focuses on the role of disciples in the first-century Jewish context, unpacking cultural information and applying it to modern-day followers of Jesus. Unit 4 covers the Jewish education system; how to become a disciple to a rabbi and what their duties would be; Jesus' yoke as a rabbi (His interpretation of Scripture); and what it means to be one of His disciples today.

32	What Is a Disciple?	Introduction to Jewish education— <i>beth sefer</i>
33	<i>Beth Midrash and Talmidim</i>	Continued from previous lesson; the next step in the Jewish education system
34	<i>Haverim</i>	Discipleship is always done in community
35	How to Become A Rabbi's <i>Talmid</i>	How did a disciple find a rabbi? And how Jesus turned tradition upside down?
36	Bethsaida Moments	A lesson in following your rabbi wherever he goes.
37	Jesus' Yoke—Part 1	What is the greatest commandment? (first in a three-part series)
38	Jesus' Yoke—Part 2	<i>Pikuah nephesh</i> —love your neighbor as yourself
39	Jesus' Yoke—Part 3	Who is my neighbor?
40	The Kingdom of Heaven	Tying the course together—what it means to be a disciple of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

“Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

1 John 2:6



God outlined a clear map for His people—the Bible. Believers took that map and, in true “group project” fashion, some studied it more than others. (I mean, why trudge through the book of Numbers when you have pastors for that kind of thing?) Now imagine if Christians took the Bible, collectively learned the facts and how to explain it and teach it and use it to support their arguments . . . and then stopped there.

But God didn’t stop there.

What if believers not only knew the path that God had mapped out for them, but also chose to *walk in it*? That is the question this course is meant to address. That, in its simplest form, is what it means to be a disciple.

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum is a forty-lesson video course in considering discipleship through the cultural, historical, and contextual lens of Scripture. The teachings come from renowned Bible scholar Ray Vander Laan—known to students around the world as “RVL.”

Having been a believer since childhood, RVL wrapped up his seminary studies with a unique opportunity—a gift from family to travel and study in Israel. RVL began to look at the Bible from the context in which it was written, and by his second day in Israel, he knew that he would never be the same. The Jewish methods of learning through experience—touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, walking, and climbing through the stories of the Bible—changed the course of his life forever. The experience led to his commitment to studying Scripture in light of its Jewish context, both in Israel and in the United States. RVL’s Holy Land experience opened God’s Word to him like never before. He knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life helping people experience Scripture in the same way, by bringing the Bible to life for people around the world.

In the 1990s, RVL’s teaching became the basis for *That the World May Know*—a video series of faith lessons captured on location in the Middle East and Europe. Ever the passionate teacher, RVL developed a unique ability to interpret for predominantly Western and Christian audiences the powerful witness of the Hebrew and Christian Text—the Old and New Testaments—taken together as one great story. *That the World May Know* now includes sixteen volumes of study material, spanning locations including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Egypt. In addition to his video lessons, RVL has led thousands of people on study tours throughout the lands of the Bible.

But perhaps RVL’s greatest honor has been to continue teaching in the classroom. For more than forty years,

he has taught a senior level course on discipleship at Holland Christian School in western Michigan. This course is the capstone, the culmination of RVL's decades of dedicated study, focusing on the mission God gave to His people and how we are meant to live out that mission as His disciples. The class not only reveals the path God mapped out for His people, but it also challenges students to consider what it means to actually walk it out.

That same class is the one you are about to experience.

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum is his senior class in video format, made available to the general public for the first time. In *The Curriculum*, participants will benefit from RVL's decades of study and experience as they consider what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus in the first century—and what it means for Christians today.

The class is organized into four units, each one focusing on different aspects of discipleship:

UNIT 1 | As students will discover throughout this course, Jesus' disciples really knew the Hebrew Scriptures. It is vitally important for His followers today to value the Bible in the same way. Unit 1 outlines how believers are meant to interact with the biblical text: 1) approaching it via the context in which it was written; 2) exploring how Jesus used the Scriptures in His teaching; 3) understanding how His followers were meant to be changed by what they learned; and 4) identifying the major paradigm that ties the whole Bible together.

UNIT 2 | Discipleship was formalized with the rise of rabbis in Jewish culture, but the concept really emerged much earlier. This idea of knowing God's path and faithfully walking in it began when He called Israel out of Egypt, setting them apart as a kingdom of priests to show the rest of the world what He was like. Building on the tools and central themes from Unit 1, Unit 2 explores the roots of discipleship—examining how God trained and established the nation of Israel in preparation for Jesus' ministry to come.

UNIT 3 | What was daily life like for the Jews of Jesus' day? How did they practice their faith under Roman occupation? And, most importantly, what did it mean to be a rabbi? This unit focuses on Jesus as a man—God made flesh—who chose to reveal Himself as a first-century rabbi to a first-century Jewish audience.

UNIT 4 | The final unit of this course builds on the foundations we've studied thus far and focuses on the practical role of disciples in the first century. Unit 4 unpacks cultural and scriptural implications and applies them to the lives of modern-day followers of Jesus.

This guide contains everything you need to facilitate the class. Whether you plan to offer the course in-person, online, or as an independent study/homeschool experience, *The Curriculum* is designed to help you bring RVL's teachings to your audience.

If anyone claims to belong to Jesus, they must learn to walk as Jesus walked. Join RVL and his students as you discover what that looks like for followers of Jesus today.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE— FOR INSTRUCTORS

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum can be facilitated in multiple formats. Whether you plan to offer this course as an in-person class, exclusively online, or in an independent/homeschool context, you'll find tips and advice for running the class model that best suits your situation.

The materials provided with this guide include:

- **Course syllabus**
- The first nine of forty **video lessons** (Unit 1) from Bible teacher Ray Vander Laan
- Nine **instructor lesson guides**, each of which corresponds to a video lesson. Each **guide** will include **Introduction** material to set up the video lessons, **Guiding Questions** for in-class discussion, a suggested **Homework** schedule, and **Conclusion** material to wrap up your class time.
- **Homework assignments**
- **Midterm/Final exams**
- **Glossary** of key terms
- **Map** of the Holy Land
- **"My Synoptic Gospel" worksheet**
- **Bibliography**

NOTE: The book *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* by Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg is part of the **required reading** for this course. The book is not included in the provided course materials, but can easily be obtained by your students from the store on the Focus on the Family website.

INDEPENDENT STUDY / HOMESCHOOL

RVL Discipleship is also conveniently designed to offer as a homeschool course or independent study. Instructors may choose how much or how little prep work they wish to put into setting up the course for their students. Here are some tips for offering this class to independent or homeschool learners.

- **Set up a schedule.** Use the syllabus to outline a schedule for your students to complete each of the forty video lessons.
TIP: You might choose to assign a certain number of lessons per week. You could also set goals by unit, giving your students a deadline for each of the four and letting them choose how to manage their time.
- **Make use of the instructor guides.** If you plan to actively facilitate this course, use the introductions and conclusions in each instructor lesson guide to set up and wrap up each video lesson for your students. Alternatively, you might choose to simply let your students read these on their own. Within the full document, your learners will also find the course syllabus, Hebrew glossary, and map.
- **Decide how to incorporate the guiding questions.** As with the online-only version of this course, you may choose whether to use the guiding questions that are provided in each instructor guide. You might discuss them aloud with your students; have your students answer them independently in journal format; or discard them altogether.
TIP: You might choose to create a set of forms for your students to use for the entirety of the course. You can create forms ahead of time for guiding questions and homework assignments, allowing your students to work their way through the course independently.
- **Schedule homework assignments.** Using the information outlined in the homework section, create a schedule for your students to complete each assignment. You may choose to assign homework on a weekly basis or all at once, letting your students complete assignments at their own pace.
- **Plan for exams.** Your students should complete the midterm exam roughly halfway through the course, after finishing Unit 2. The final exam will presumably be given at the end of the course, after completing the last video lesson. RVL's exams are generally offered on an open-Bible/open-note basis.

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

LESSON 5

THROW YOUR STONE



LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Review the concept of allusion using additional examples from the Gospels.
- Introduce the discipleship idea of “throwing your stone.”
- Challenge students to consider what *their* stone might be.

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

- Have students read the first chapter of *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* and complete the *SFRJ* “Study and Discussion Guide” questions.

INTRODUCTION

(Lecture, 3-5 minutes)

In today’s lesson we will wrap up the idea of allusions in Scripture by looking at one more example—this time in a conversation between Peter and Jesus. As RVL introduces the passage, pay attention to Jesus’ answer. Do you recognize any words or phrases from somewhere else in the Bible?

We will then shift gears to begin considering what to do with everything we have learned so far. We’ve talked a lot about the importance of stories and how the Bible uses narrative and metaphor to communicate truth. It’s important for us to remember that God not only instructs us through Scripture; He uses it to reveal Himself. These stories are not meant to be simply instructional—they are meant to introduce us to the God who created everything.

A disciple of Jesus is not someone who only knows the stories. A disciple is someone who *joins* the stories. But what does that really mean? Let’s begin today’s lesson and then discuss.

RVL VIDEO LESSON

(30 minutes)

Encourage your students to take notes. Make sure the lights are dimmed during the video, but not too dark for students to see what they are writing. If you or your students need a break during the video viewing, consider pausing at the 15:36 time mark (after "Okay, now let's move to our next . . .").

KEY TERMS:

| *Yadah* | to know intimately, through deep experience

KEY SCRIPTURES:

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother and sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"

Matthew 18:21-22



*"If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."*

Genesis 4:24



“Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hand.’”

1 Samuel 17:45-47 (ESV)



GUIDING QUESTIONS

(15-20 minutes)

Instructors may use the following guiding questions to drive class discussion about the video lesson. For online courses/independent study, these questions may be used in the online discussion board of your choice. Instructors may also choose to discard these questions altogether in favor of focusing on the provided homework assignments.

TIP: Review the questions ahead of time, prioritizing the ones you think will be most important for your context and to make sure you have enough time for a good discussion.

QUESTION 1

Why do you think it's important for disciples of Jesus to be so forgiving?

TIP: Remind your students of the "burning coals" lesson. Consider having them take turns reading Romans 12 aloud, focusing in particular on verse 20. What happens when we love those who have wronged us? How do burning coals enter a situation?

QUESTION 2

David would be the king of Israel one day—an ancestor of Jesus Himself. Why do you think God had David train as a shepherd in his early life? How would you have expected God to train a future king?

TIP: If your class is a shy bunch, try to encourage discussion by directing the question to an individual student: "What do you think, ____?" Without judging his or her answer, you can follow up by asking the class, "What do the rest of you think?" If you know beforehand where you want the discussion to end up, this approach can help you steer the conversation in that direction.

QUESTION 3

What aspects of your life today feel a bit like David watching sheep—a bit ordinary, a bit mundane, a bit insignificant or not the type of work people ordinarily get credit for? How might God be training you as a disciple in this area of your life?

TIP: Try looking up the phrase “burning coals” in a Bible app, such as BibleGateway. Notice that burning coals are mentioned several times in reference to the tabernacle and throughout the Psalms, as well as other places. How do you see this metaphor for God’s presence being used in these passages?

QUESTION 4

So, what’s your stone? What are your skills or passions? What role are you in or working toward, or what responsibilities do you find yourself handling right now? How can you throw these stones as a disciple?

TIP: Think of how you might answer this question. Consider beginning the discussion with your own answer to get your students thinking. If you know some of their interests or passions, ask specific students to imagine how they might throw their stones in their specific situation.

CONCLUSION

(5 minutes)

It might seem easy to think that David was a special hero—someone truly exceptional whom ordinary disciples could never dream of “competing with.” But when David faced Goliath, he wasn’t anything special; he was just a wilderness kid with one discernible talent: throwing rocks. God didn’t ask the boy to be anything other than what he already was.

David knew God’s story. He believed in God’s story. But, most importantly, he was willing to be *in* God’s story, whatever that looked like. Somehow this young shepherd understood that if he brought his reliable skill to the table, God could transform David into the man He had created him to be. And because David was willing to throw his stone, the world had a chance to *yadah* the power of God.

So . . . will you join the story? You simply have to throw your stone. Nobody else can do it for you. Will you be a student, a friend, an athlete, a software engineer, a dentist, a garbage truck driver, or a parent in that story?

Will you throw your stone as a disciple so that the world may *yadah* God and His kingdom?

ASSIGN HOMEWORK

(5 minutes)

IF YOU STILL HAVE TIME IN CLASS

Have your students work on their synoptic Gospel or *SFRJ* reading and responses.



RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

LESSON 30

RABBIS AND DISCIPLES



LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the origins, purpose, and practices of rabbis in Jesus' day.
- Recognize how Jesus functions in this role during His ministry.
- Consider what this might mean for His disciples today.

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

- **Gospel Journal:** Have students read the next two chapters of their selected Gospel and journal about their responses.

INTRODUCTION

(Lecture, 3-5 minutes)

We've spent quite a bit of time in this unit considering why it matters that Jesus was fully human. We have also built a foundation of context for the Jewish world that Jesus lived and taught in.

In today's lesson, we will finally take a look at what it meant to be a rabbi with disciples in the first century. We will examine how this system developed and how it played out in Jesus' day.

Along with the synagogue system, the role of rabbis in Jewish culture began to develop during the time of the Exile. Cut off from the Temple, which had been brutally destroyed, scattered Israel recognized that they needed to change the way they had been living. They began to appoint teachers who were wise in the teachings of the *Tanakh* to instruct others. This practice of rabbis and eventually disciples continued to evolve during the Exile, and by Jesus' time it was a central part of Jewish life.

So, to consider what it means to be a disciple in a modern context, let's look at Jesus as a Jewish teacher. Was Jesus considered a rabbi? In what ways was He countercultural in His ministry? How can this information help us to become better disciples our rabbi, Jesus, today?

Let's get into today's lesson, considering Jesus as fully human, as the promised Messiah, and also as a Jewish rabbi.

RVL VIDEO LESSON

(30 minutes)

Encourage your students to take notes. Make sure the lights are dimmed during the video, but not too dark for students to see what they are writing.

KEY TERMS:

Rab | great or much (Hebrew)

Rabbi | honored teacher (Hebrew)

KEY SCRIPTURES:

“When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’”

John 6:25



“If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:30-34



"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Matthew 7:11



"He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:

'Listen!'"

Mark 4:2-3



*"The earth is the lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.*

Who may ascend the mountain of the lord?

Who may stand in his holy place?"

Psalm 24:1-3



"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

John 3:36



GUIDING QUESTIONS

(15-20 minutes)

Instructors may use the following guiding questions to drive class discussion about the video lesson. For online courses/independent study, these questions may be used in the online discussion board of your choice. Instructors may also choose to discard these questions altogether in favor of focusing on the provided homework assignments.

TIP: Review the questions ahead of time, prioritizing the ones you think will be most important for your context to make sure you have enough time for a good discussion.

QUESTION 1

Let's recap. Where did the idea of rabbis begin? Where was Israel when they began to have rabbis as religious leaders?

After Israel was exiled to Babylon/Assyria, they wanted to change their ways. Cut off from the Temple and from the Promised Land, they began to appoint wise teachers to instruct the people in the ways of Scripture. This practice continued to evolve when they returned to the land and was a central part of life by Jesus' time.

QUESTION 2

What do the words *rab* and *rabbi* mean? When did people begin to more commonly call their honored teachers "rabbi" as a formal title or an ordained position? When people called Jesus "rabbi," what did they mean by that?

TIP: Encourage your students to look back at their class notes.

QUESTION 3

Was Jesus a "small r" rabbi in the first-century sense? What are some of the ways that Jesus practiced the same role as a rabbi of that time period?

1. *He was a teacher.*
2. *He was itinerant.*
3. *Jesus did not get paid, but depended on the hospitality of others.*

4. *He used the same teaching techniques as other rabbis:*
 - a. *Parables*
 - b. *Kal v'homer: "how much more"; implies, "How much more would God care for you?" (Hebrew)*
 - c. *Allusion (later called remez)*

QUESTION 4

What did Jesus say was the evidence, or demonstration, of belief in His teaching? So how does He expect His people to respond to Bible teaching? What does that mean for us today?

TIP: *Encourage students to recall the teaching on the Shema from Lesson 1.*

CONCLUSION

(5 minutes)

“Rabbi” was not an ordained title until forty years after Jesus’ ascension, but Scripture makes it clear that He conducted His ministry in the manner of a first-century, “little r” rabbi. For His first-century audience, this was the perfect role for the Messiah—the anointed king who runs ahead of the flock with 110 percent passion. This was the perfect role for God made flesh, who became fully human in the person of Jesus in order to model for us how to live.

As you continue your reading in the Gospels, pay attention to the ways that Jesus puts the rabbinical practices we discussed today into use. Remember that the goal of the rabbi was for God’s people to hear God’s words and to obey accordingly.

Take stock of the ways you have put Jesus’ teachings into practice in your own life—and the ways in which you haven’t done so. In your personal prayer time, ask Jesus for the courage and the *pratz* to imitate Him as your rabbi.

ASSIGN HOMEWORK

(5 minutes)

IF YOU STILL HAVE TIME IN CLASS

Have your students work on their synoptic Gospel or *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* reading and responses.



FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
PRESENTS

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

*"Whoever claims to be in him must walk as Jesus walked."
1 John 2:6 (RVL)*



A SEMESTER COURSE WITH RAY VANDER LAAN

Text by Brittany Grooters
Design by Brooke Pennington

STUDENT GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

“Whoever claims to be in him must walk as Jesus walked.”

1 John 2:6 (RVL)



God outlined a clear map for His people—the Bible. Believers took that map and, in true “group project” fashion, some studied it more than others. (I mean, why trudge through the book of Numbers when you have pastors for that kind of thing?) Now imagine if Christians took the Bible, collectively learned the facts and how to explain it and teach it and use it to support their arguments . . . and then stopped there.

But God didn’t stop there.

What if believers not only knew the path that God had mapped out for them, but also chose to *walk in it*? That is the question this course is meant to address. That, in its simplest form, is what it means to be a disciple.

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum is a forty-lesson video course in considering discipleship through the cultural, historical, and contextual lens of Scripture. The teachings come from renowned Bible scholar Ray Vander Laan—known to students around the world as “RVL.”

Having been a believer since childhood, RVL wrapped up his seminary studies with a unique opportunity—a gift from family to travel and study in Israel. RVL began to look at the Bible from the context in which it was written, and by his second day in Israel, he knew that he would never be the same. The Jewish methods of learning through experience—touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, walking, and climbing through the stories of the Bible—changed the course of his life forever. The experience led to his commitment to studying Scripture in light of its Jewish context, both in Israel and in the United States. RVL’s time in the Holy Land opened God’s Word to him like never before. He knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life helping people experience Scripture in the same way, by bringing the Bible to life for people around the world.

In the 1990s, RVL’s teaching became the basis for *That the World May Know*—a video series of faith lessons captured on location in the Middle East and Europe. Ever the passionate teacher, RVL developed a unique ability to interpret for predominantly Western and Christian audiences the powerful witness of the Hebrew and Christian Text—the Old and New Testaments—taken together as one great story. *That the World May Know* now includes sixteen volumes of study material, spanning locations including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Egypt. In addition to his video lessons, RVL has led thousands of people on study tours throughout the lands of the Bible.

But perhaps RVL’s greatest honor has been to continue teaching in the classroom. For more than forty years,

he has taught a senior level course on discipleship at Holland Christian School in western Michigan. This course is the capstone, the culmination of RVL's decades of dedicated study, focusing on the mission God gave to His people and how we are meant to live out that mission as His disciples. The class not only reveals the path God mapped out for His people, but it also challenges students to consider what it means to actually walk it out.

That same class is the one you are about to experience.

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum is his senior class in video format, made available to the general public for the first time. In *The Curriculum*, participants will benefit from RVL's decades of study and experience as they consider what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus in the first century—and what it means for Christians today.

The class is organized into four units, each one focusing on different aspects of discipleship:

UNIT 1 | As you will discover throughout this course, Jesus' disciples really knew the Hebrew Scriptures. It is vitally important for His followers today to value the Bible in the same way. Unit 1 outlines how believers are meant to interact with the biblical text: 1) approaching it via the context in which it was written; 2) exploring how Jesus used the Scriptures in His teaching; 3) understanding how His followers were meant to be changed by what they learned; and 4) identifying the major paradigm that ties the whole Bible together.

UNIT 2 | Discipleship was formalized with the rise of rabbis in Jewish culture, but the concept really emerged much earlier. This idea of knowing God's path and faithfully walking in it began when He called Israel out of Egypt, setting them apart as a kingdom of priests to show the rest of the world what He was like. Building on the tools and central themes from the first part of the class, Unit 2 explores the roots of discipleship—examining how God trained and established the nation of Israel in preparation for Jesus' ministry to come.

UNIT 3 | What was daily life like for the Jews of Jesus' day? How did they practice their faith under Roman occupation? And, most importantly, what did it mean to be a rabbi? This unit focuses on Jesus as a man—God made flesh—who chose to reveal Himself as a first-century rabbi to a first-century Jewish audience.

UNIT 4 | The final unit of this course builds on the foundations we've studied thus far and focuses on the practical role of disciples in the first century. Unit 4 unpacks cultural and scriptural implications and applies them to the lives of modern-day followers of Jesus.

Anyone who claims to belong to Jesus must learn to walk as He walked. Join RVL and his students as you discover what that looks like for followers of Jesus today.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE— FOR STUDENTS

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum is designed to be accessible for in-person classes and online/independent study. While exams, homework, and class discussion (whether in-person or virtual) will be organized by your instructor, this Student Guide will walk you through each lesson of the course.

The materials provided with this guide include:

- **Course syllabus**
- Forty **video lessons** from Bible teacher Ray Vander Laan
- Forty **lesson guides**, each of which corresponds to a video lesson. Each guide will include **Introduction** material to set up the video lessons, **Guiding Questions** for in-class discussion, a suggested **Homework** schedule, and **Conclusion** material to wrap up your class time.
- **Homework assignments**
- **Glossary** of key terms
- **Map** of the Holy Land
- **“My Synoptic Gospel” worksheet**
- **Bibliography**

NOTE: The book *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* by Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg is part of the **required reading** for this course. The book is not included in the provided course materials but can easily be obtained from the store on the Focus on the Family website.

LESSON WORKFLOW:

If you are taking this class in person, your instructor will guide you through each lesson. You should use each lesson guide to study for exams, keep track of key Scriptures and vocabulary, and follow along with discussion questions.

If you are working through this course on an online or independent/homeschool basis, each lesson guide will walk you through the following workflow:

1. Begin each lesson with the **introduction** from each day's **lesson guide**. In-person instructors will use this as lecture time, while online/independent students might read this section on their own.
(Lecture, 3-5 minutes)
2. Play the **video lesson** for the day. You should take notes independently, as all exam questions will come from these video lessons.
(Video, 30 minutes)
3. Follow your instructor's directions to complete the **guiding questions** from the day's lesson guide. In-person classes will conduct these discussions during class time. Online or independent contexts may choose to either assign these prompts on a discussion board, have you turn in independent written answers, or discard them altogether. Follow your instructor's lead.
(Class Discussion/Written Response, 15-20 minutes)
4. End each lesson with the **conclusion** from each day's lesson guide. In-person instructors will use this as lecture time, while online/independent students might read this section on their own.
(Lecture/Reading, 3-5 minutes)

Your instructor will ultimately decide on a homework schedule, but this Student Guide provides a suggested schedule that you may work through independently if allowed.

GENERAL TIPS:

OPT FOR THE HARD COPY

Students are encouraged to use a physical copy of their Bible. Physically turning pages and recalling the order of the sixty-six books helps develop a familiarity with God's Word that this course wants to emphasize.

THINK ABOUT APPLICATION

While it's not an official aspect of the required coursework, you should always be thinking about how to apply the lessons from each unit in practical ways. What does each unit communicate about living as a disciple? What might it look like to hear these ideas and implement them in your daily life?

REMEMBER THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

If you are interested in further study, check out the bibliography section near the end of this guide. This list is a great place to start in order to expand your knowledge of the Bible in context.

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

LESSON 5

THROW YOUR STONE



LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Review the concept of allusion using additional examples from the Gospels.
- Introduce the discipleship idea of “throwing your stone.”
- Challenge you to consider what *your* stone might be.

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

- Read the first chapter of *SFRJ* and complete the *SFRJ* “Study and Discussion Guide” questions.

INTRODUCTION

(Lecture, 3-5 minutes)

In today’s lesson we will wrap up the idea of allusions in Scripture by looking at one more example—this time in a conversation between Peter and Jesus. As RVL introduces the passage, pay attention to Jesus’ answer. Do you recognize any words or phrases from somewhere else in the Bible?

We will then shift gears to begin considering what to do with everything we have learned so far. We’ve talked a lot about the importance of stories and how the Bible uses narrative and metaphor to communicate truth. It’s important for us to remember that God not only instructs us through Scripture; He also uses it to reveal Himself. These stories are not meant to be simply instructional—they are meant to introduce us to the God who created everything.

A disciple of Jesus is not someone who only knows the stories. A disciple is someone who *joins* the stories. But what does that really mean? Let’s begin today’s lesson and then discuss.

RVL VIDEO LESSON

(30 minutes)

Remember to take thorough notes, as all exam material will come from these video lessons.

KEY TERMS:

Yadah | to know intimately, through deep experience

KEY SCRIPTURES:

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother and sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'"

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'"

Matthew 18:21-22



*"If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."*

Genesis 4:24



“Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hand.’”

1 Samuel 17:45-47 (ESV)



GUIDING QUESTIONS

(15-20 minutes)

Your instructor will direct you in how to use the following section. In-person classes may follow along with these questions as you discuss answers during class time. If you are doing this course online or independently, you may find that your instructor assigns these questions through a discussion board or as written responses—or may discard them altogether. Follow your instructor’s lead regarding this section.

QUESTION 1

Why do you think it's important for disciples of Jesus to be so forgiving?

QUESTION 2

David would be the king of Israel one day—an ancestor of Jesus Himself. Why do you think God had David train as a shepherd in his early life? How would you have expected God to train a future king?

QUESTION 3

What aspects of your life today feel a bit like David watching sheep—a bit ordinary, a bit mundane, a bit insignificant or not the type of work people ordinarily get credit for? How might God be training you as a disciple in this area of your life?

QUESTION 4

So, what's your stone? What are your skills or passions? What role are you in or working toward, or what responsibilities do you find yourself handling right now? How can you throw these stones as a disciple?

CONCLUSION

(5 minutes)

It might seem easy to think that David was a special hero—someone truly exceptional whom ordinary disciples could never dream of “competing with.” But when David faced Goliath, he wasn’t anything special; he was just a wilderness kid with one discernible talent: throwing rocks. God didn’t ask the boy to be anything other than what he already was.

David knew God’s story. He believed in God’s story. But, most importantly, he was willing to be *in* God’s story, whatever that looked like. Somehow this young shepherd understood that if he brought his reliable skill to the table, God could transform David into the man He had created him to be. And because David was willing to throw his stone, the world had a chance to *yadah* the power of God.

So . . . will you join the story? You simply have to throw your stone. Nobody else can do it for you. Will you be a student, a friend, an athlete, a software engineer, a dentist, a garbage truck driver, or a parent in that story?

Will you throw your stone as a disciple so that the world may *yadah* God and His kingdom?

HOMEWORK

(5 minutes)

Follow your instructor’s directions regarding your homework schedule.



FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
PRESENTS

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

*"Whoever claims to be in him must walk as Jesus walked."
1 John 2:6 (RVL)*



A SEMESTER COURSE WITH RAY VANDER LAAN

Text by Brittany Grooters
Design by Brooke Pennington

STUDENT GUIDE

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

LESSON 30

RABBIS AND DISCIPLES: JESUS AS TEACHER



LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the origins, purposes, and practices of rabbis in Jesus' day.
- Recognize how Jesus functioned in this role during His earthly ministry.
- Consider what this might mean for His disciples today.

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

- Always follow your instructor's directions regarding the suggested homework, as he or she may choose to modify this schedule.
- Read chapters twenty-one and twenty-two and journal your responses. *(Those who read Mark should read and respond to two chapters from John.)*

INTRODUCTION

(Lecture, 3-5 minutes)

We've spent a lot of time in this unit considering why it matters that Jesus was fully human. We've also built a foundation of context for the Jewish world that Jesus lived and taught in.

In today's lesson we will take a look at what it meant to be a rabbi with disciples in the first century. We will examine how this system developed and how it played out in Jesus' day.

Along with the synagogue system, the role of rabbis in Jewish culture began to develop during the time of the Exile. Cut off from the temple, which had been brutally destroyed, a scattered Israel recognized that they needed to change the way they had been living. They began to identify teachers among the people—fellow Jews who were wise in the teachings of the *Tanakh* and could instruct others. The role of rabbis, and eventually disciples, continued to evolve during the Exile, and by Jesus' day it was a central part of Jewish life.

So as we consider what it means to be a disciple in a modern context, let's look at Jesus as a Jewish teacher. Was Jesus considered a rabbi? In what ways was He countercultural in His ministry? And how can this information help us to become better disciples of our rabbi today?

Let's get into today's lesson, considering Jesus as fully human, as the promised Messiah, and also as a Jewish rabbi.

RVL VIDEO LESSON

(30 minutes)

Remember to take thorough notes, as all exam material will come from these video lessons.

KEY TERMS:

- | **Rab** | great or much (Hebrew)
- | **Rabbi** | honored teacher (Hebrew)

KEY SCRIPTURES:

“When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’”

John 6:25



“If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:30-34



"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Matthew 7:11



"He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 'Listen! . . .'"

Mark 4:2-3



*"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.*

*"Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?"*

Psalms 24:1-3



"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

John 3:36 (ESV)



GUIDING QUESTIONS

(15-20 minutes)

Your instructor will direct you in how to use the following section. In-person classes may follow along with these questions as you discuss answers during class time. If you are doing this course online or independently, you may find that your instructor assigns these questions through a discussion board or as written responses—or may discard them altogether. Follow your instructor’s lead regarding this section.

QUESTION 1

Let’s recap. Where did the idea of rabbis begin? Where was Israel when they began to have rabbis as religious leaders?

QUESTION 2

What do the words *rab* and *rabbi* mean? When did people begin to call their honored teachers “rabbi” as a formal title or an ordained position? What did people mean when they called Jesus “rabbi”?

QUESTION 3

Was Jesus a “small r” rabbi in the first century sense? What are some of the ways that Jesus practiced the same role as a rabbi of that time period?

QUESTION 4

What did Jesus say was the evidence, or demonstration, of belief in His teaching? How does He expect us to respond to His teaching today?

CONCLUSION

(5 minutes)

“Rabbi” was not used as an ordained title until after Jesus’ ascension. Yet Scripture makes it clear that He conducted His ministry in the manner of a first-century, “little r” rabbi. For Jesus’ first-century audience, this was an ideal role for the Messiah—the Anointed King who runs ahead of the flock with 110 percent passion. And it was the perfect role for God-Made-Flesh, who became fully human in the person of Jesus in order to model for us how to live.

As you read the Gospels, pay attention to the ways that Jesus puts the rabbinical practices we discussed today into use. Remember that the goal of the rabbi was for God’s people to learn God’s Word and to obey accordingly.

Take stock of the ways you’ve put Jesus’ teachings into practice in your own life—and the ways in which you haven’t done so. In your personal prayer time, ask the Lord for the courage and the *pratz* to imitate Him as your rabbi.

HOMEWORK

(5 minutes)

Follow your instructor’s directions regarding your homework schedule.



ABOUT RVL

Since receiving his Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1976, Ray Vander Laan has been actively involved in studying and teaching Jewish culture using the methods of Jewish education. He has continued graduate studies in Jewish Studies in the United States, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt. He has been a teacher for more than thirty-five years and is an ordained minister with the Christian Reformed Church. He has also authored a book titled *Echoes of His Presence*, published by Focus on the Family. Vander Laan founded That the World May Know Ministries in 1998 and has taken more than 10,000 people with him on his study tours of Israel, Turkey, and Egypt.

Ray's preaching and teaching ministry is focused on understanding the Bible in light of the historical and cultural context in which God placed it. This perspective on the Bible highlights God's call for His people to be a transforming influence on their culture. He uses research of the top scholars in the fields of archaeology, history, and biblical study as tools to explore the scriptural text ever more deeply. His gifts, expertise, and calling are to link that cultural information and the Bible so that its message applies to our lives today in very practical ways.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob & The Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL: 2003).

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976).

Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL: 2008).

Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018).

Lois Tverberg, *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus: How a Jewish Perspective Can Transform Your Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2019).

Lois Tverberg, *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewish Words of Jesus Can Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

Marvin R. Wilson, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2021).

RESOURCES/WEBSITES

Our Rabbi Jesus: www.OurRabbijesus.com

The Bible Project: www.BibleProject.com

En Gedi: www.EnGediResourceCenter.com

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. We provide help and resources for couples to build healthy marriages that reflect God's design, and for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles.

We're here to come alongside families with relevance and grace at each stage of their journey. We support families as they seek to teach their children about God and His beautiful design for the family, protect themselves from the harmful influences of culture, and equip themselves to make a greater difference in the lives of those around them.

No matter who you are, what you're going through, or what challenges your family may be facing, we're here to help. With practical resources—like our 1-800 Family Help line, counseling resources, and websites—we're committed to providing trustworthy, biblical guidance and support.