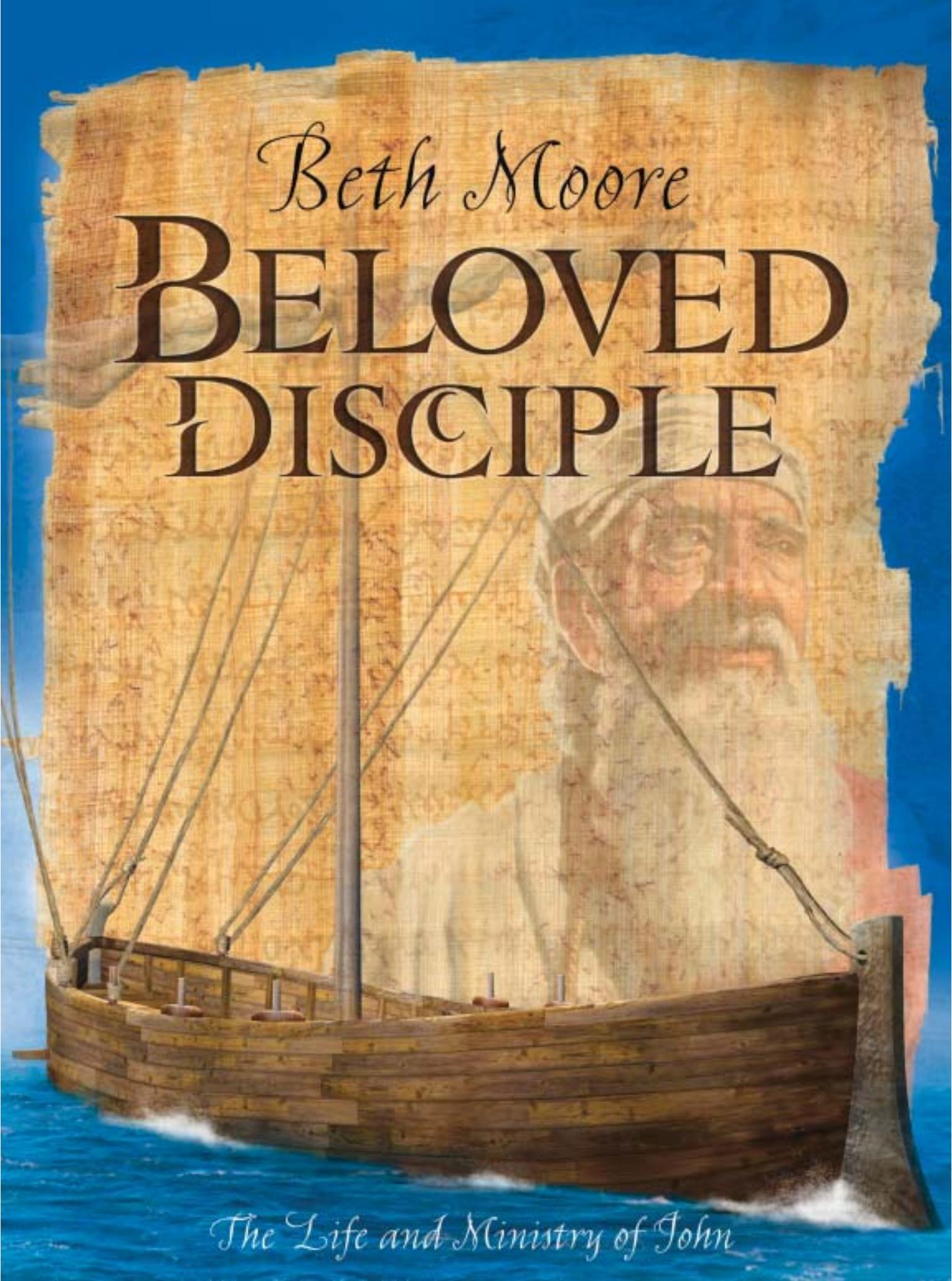


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BELOVED DISCIPLE

The Life and Ministry of John



Introduction

I have the privilege of writing this introduction only days after my husband escorted our firstborn down the aisle and into the arms of her handsome groom. My heart is moved by the tenderness of God's personal affections, which He demonstrates to each of us in His divine timing. How like Him to choose this precious time in my life to plan a wedding while writing a study that culminates with joyous anticipation of the wedding supper of the Lamb!

John the apostle had no idea that the events, experiences, and transitions in his life experience were all etched on a divine map to move him toward an unparalleled destiny. He alone was positioned to receive the Revelation. I wonder whether after the final vision John realized that he had been getting ready for a wedding from the start. He had first learned of Christ through the faithful tutelage of a Baptizer who was also called "the friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29, KJV). Then Christ chose a wedding in Cana to first reveal His glory to His small band of followers by turning water to wine. Christ also chose wedding themes for several of His most powerful parables. No doubt, Christ meant to make a point, and I believe the point of His arrow pierced its way into the heart of the youngest disciple.

Every disciple and early follower of Christ left a legacy for future believers. John's legacy was love. After all, what is a wedding without love? Perhaps like no other disciple, John understood that relationship is the point. Every command of Christ and call to obedience is to enhance relationship and place the recipient in a posture the Giver can bless. All else is law. I may as well warn you. You won't find much law in this study. It just wasn't John's style. This study is about finding our way to the heart of Jesus and reclining so closely that our pulse begins to throb in tandem, loving what He loves and hating what He hates.

If John were here, I believe he would tell us, above all, to sell out to love. Legalists tend to get a little nervous when we talk about surrendering to love over service, but Scripture proves that those who loved most lavishly served most sacrificially. John was only one among good company. Mary of Bethany, Peter, and Paul were each compelled by holy passion. Affection will forever be the most efficient energy a believer can burn in her labors.

Allow me to give you the bottom line before we turn the first page in hopes that you might adopt John's attitude from the very beginning: John was free to love because he was so utterly convinced that he was loved. He called himself the beloved disciple. How differently would each follower live if we characterized ourselves above all else as the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ? This is the goal of our journey.

God is planning a wedding. Every moment of our believing lives is meant to prepare us for that day. John was like the wise virgins in Matthew 25, who did not know when the bridegroom would come but kept their lamps filled with oil. As you will discover in the last third of the study, even in exile when no one was looking, John kept his heart-lamp full with the oil of the Holy Spirit. No wonder Christ chose him to receive the final revelation. May John's legacy become oil in each of our lamps, preparing each of us for our Bridegroom.

I'll soon be turning in my mother-of-the-bride dress for fine white linen. Glory! But while I've still got another wedding on my mind, allow me to say that I was in no hurry for Amanda to make her final flight out of our nest. In fact, I really could have gotten in a bad mood about it ... except for our groom. I awakened on the morning of the wedding with indescribable gladness—even laughter—in my heart. I sat down and wrote Curt a letter to tell him why, for God had used him to make our joy complete. The profound passage in our family's life was not only bearable but also celebratory because I was totally convinced of our groom's love for his bride.

Dear One, you and I can celebrate our profound passage through this life because we can "know and rely on the love God has for us" (1 John 4:16). Leave it to John to pen those words. Our water is turned to wine and our joy is complete because our Bridegroom is Jesus the Christ, the living, breathing Son of God. Oh, for the day we'll see Him face-to-face!

As surely as God loved me and timed this study for me, He will do the same for you. My reasons happened to surround a wedding. Yours will be entirely unique to you. In whatever way Christ applies the truths of these pages to your precious life, let Him romance you along the way. No matter what may be going on in your life, never forget that you are a bride.

FRESH WINDS OVER GALILEE

Day 1

Since That Time

Day 2

The Identity of Family

Day 3

They Were Fishermen

Day 4

Old Ties and New Ties

Day 5

A Hard Act to Follow

I love new beginnings, don't you? I am honored to embark on this new beginning with you. Let's count on God to take us places with Him we've never been and to accomplish a work we didn't know He could. As James and John cast their nets on the sun-kissed waters of the Sea of Galilee, they had no idea that the Son of God was casting His net for them. Soon they would find themselves captured by His call and compelled by His love. Let's allow the same divine affection to catch us as we too are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

I hope you take part in weekly small-group gatherings, video presentations, and discussions. If not, you can work through this study by yourself. However, the accountability, encouragement, and shared experiences of a small group create an ideal learning process.

The Principle Questions will guide your discovery in the Word each week. Each day also provides a Personal Discussion Question (P) that you will apply to your life and discuss with your group.

Day 3 THEY WERE FISHERMEN

TODAY'S TREASURE

"Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him."—Mark 1:20

*This time frame is strictly a deduction I have made from comparing time references in John 1:43; 2:1, 12-13. I could certainly be mistaken if time lapses existed that weren't noted in these portions of Scripture.

Passover was just around the corner.* Soon the hillcrest of Eremos in northern Galilee would be covered in red anemones and blue iris. Spring had finally arrived but not a moment too soon for a band of fishermen who spent their days on the water. Winter temperatures ranging from 50 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit during the daytime may not have seemed so cold to landsmen, but fishermen would have told a different story. Sometimes their wet, sandaled feet felt like blocks of ice, and their fingers temporarily lost their dexterity from the cold. During the winter season their few hours at home were spent trying to thaw the chill in their bones. Just about the time they thawed, the boat had to be pushed from the shore back into the water. They were fortunate to get sunshine at all.

What does Luke 5:5 tell you about the hours fishermen sometimes worked?

Obviously, our little band of fishermen worked the graveyard shift at times. I can think of only one thing worse than fishing in the cold: not catching anything. It happens to the best of fishermen. When it happens to Keith, I always ask him the typical sanguine woman question: "But did you have fun with your friends anyway?" My personality is given to the philosophy that the question is not so much whether you succeeded or failed but whether you had fun. I wish I had a picture of Keith's face when I ask him that question. I'd put it in the margin for your amusement. But I don't care what anyone says; company greatly determines how difficult a bad situation can be. From the few facts we're given, I believe the fishermen we're joining today had pretty good company.

Focus for now on the implications Luke 5:8-10 had on the lives of these men before they encountered Christ. What relationship did Peter, James, and John share?

Competitors Business partners Companions

According to Luke 5:2-3, did these sets of partners share a boat?

Yes No

Read Matthew 4:18-22, focusing on the circumstances rather than Christ's call. Although they were partners, how were the fishermen teamed?

Read John 1:44. Where were Andrew and Peter from?

Judea The Jordan Nazareth Bethsaida

Let's discover another fun fact, and then we'll draw a few conclusions from what we've learned. Read Mark 1:20. What detail suggests something about Zebedee's financial status?

Let's tie these bits and pieces together. Take a look at a map and pinpoint the Sea of Galilee. This freshwater lake is called by three additional names in Scripture: the Sea of Chinnereth, which is the Hebrew word for *harp-shaped*, the general outline of the lake; the Lake of Gennesaret, named for a fertile plain nearby; and the Sea of Tiberias because it was associated with the capital of Herod Antipas.³ At the time Andrew, Peter, James, and John cast nets on those waters, a vigorous fishing industry was booming all over the lake. As you can see, many villages settled on its shores. Not only was it the food basket of the region, but the sight was also breathtaking. It still is. The way the lake is cupped in the center of surrounding hills looks to me like water in the palm of a large hand. With my own eyes I've seen how the early spring sunrise hangs lazily in the clinging mist. Since the first time I saw the Sea of Galilee, I have never wondered why Christ seemed to favor the villages near its shore over the metropolis of Jerusalem.

At the northern tip just where the Jordan River feeds the lake, you'll find Bethsaida. The word *Bethsaida* means "house of fishing,"⁴ and it lived up to its name. The Sea of Galilee boasts 18 species of fish,⁵ so fishing could be profitable almost anywhere. Bethsaida was located where the warm springs at the foot of Eremos Hill bubbled into the lake, attracting fish looking for a winter blanket. The fish that have since been labeled Peter's fish are tropical and often swarm the warmer temperatures where the springs flow into the lake, giving our fishermen a decided advantage over many of their competitors.

We know for a fact that Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida, and we can safely assume Zebedee also raised his sons in the village because they were all partners. As we will soon discover, at some point Andrew and Peter moved to nearby Capernaum, where Peter lived with his wife and mother-in-law (see Mark 1:21,29-30). We don't know for certain which of the two villages was the home of James and John at this point in their lives, but we do know they all continued to work together.

Obviously, Zebedee was the one who owned the fishing enterprise. Although I don't want to intimate that he was wealthy (because few villagers were), we'd probably be mistaken to think him poor. The reference to the hired servants tells us that he owned his own business, which was profitable enough to allow him to have servants in addition to two healthy and able sons. He might have easily owned both boats. Peter and Andrew could have fished from one (which was considered "theirs"), while a little farther away (see Mark 1:19) James and John fished from another.

Now that we have an idea what the fishermen's lives were like before they followed Christ, let's read all three Synoptic Gospel versions of their call. God wisely equipped us with four Gospels because we learn far more from hearing several accounts of anything especially noteworthy. The facts one writer included may not have been noted by another because each point of view is tinted by the individual's perspective and priorities. While writing *Jesus, the One and Only*, I learned I could almost always expect Luke to get a little more specific, which made perfect sense to me. He was a doctor, and a good doctor pays attention to details. You'll find this principle to hold true in our reading today.

When Andrew, Peter, James, and John cast nets on those waters, a vigorous fishing industry was booming.

We learn far more from hearing several accounts of anything especially noteworthy.

Read each segment of Scripture below and carefully record any facts unique to each Gospel in the appropriate column. Be sure to look for details!

Matthew 4:18-22

Mark 1:14-20

Luke 5:1-11

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I can go no further without musing over Christ's divinely uncanny ability to waltz right into a life and turn it upside down, inside out, and every way but loose. Just think how many times those fishermen had prepared and cast their nets together. We would not be at all off base to imagine that they had caught fish together under Zebedee's instruction since they were young boys, perhaps no older than seven or eight. Picture how many years they had practiced a routine. They weren't fishing for the pure enjoyment of it as my husband does. Fishing was their job. I don't doubt they loved it as most men would, but don't think for a moment it wasn't work. I know you didn't miss Luke's inclusion, " 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything' " (Luke 5:5). They worked hard. Day in. Day out. Then one day Jesus walked up, and everything changed.

Oh, isn't that exactly like Him? Jesus walks up, catches us in the act of being—again today—exactly who we were yesterday, and offers to turn our routine into adventure. Hallelujah! Have you allowed Christ to do that for you? If you're bored with life and stuck in a rut of routine, you may have believed in Christ, but you may not yet have agreed to follow Him. Christ is a lot of things—but boring? Not on your life! Life with Him is a great adventure. You don't necessarily have to leave behind what you do if He proves your present course to be in His will, but I assure you, He will have you leave its boredom and routine behind. When Jesus Christ takes over our lives, life gets exciting!

As we begin our journey, plot where you feel you are in this season of your life. Keep in mind that even spiritual or religious practices can become routine. Also keep in mind that living in the great adventure doesn't mean you won't have challenges or suffering. It means you can see and take part in Christ's breathtaking work in your life, no matter what your circumstances are.

When Jesus Christ takes over our lives, life gets exciting!

Where do you see your life right now?

In a routine and a rut

Living the great adventure

No matter where we plotted ourselves, I pray that we will need an extension to the right margin at the end of our 10 weeks. May our lives be off the scale with excitement as we live the great adventure!

Let's notice another important fact inspired by God for Luke's account.

What name did Simon call Jesus in Luke 5:5?

Lord Master The Christ Friend Lamb of God

That's not the kind of title most people use for a stranger unless they know that the person is worthy of honor. I believe we can assume that these fishermen had familiarity with this man called Jesus. Remember, in day 1 we established that several of those who would become disciples of Jesus had been disciples of John the Baptist. The events occurred in the following sequence.

JOHN 1:35-51

Andrew and John with John the Baptist see Jesus. Andrew and John follow Christ. Andrew introduces Simon (Peter)

JOHN 2:1-11

Events at wedding feast in Cana (events described John 2:12—4:45)

MATTHEW 4:18-22;

MARK 1:16-20;

LUKE 5:1-11

Call of the four (Simon/Andrew, James/John)

Based on John 1:35-42, who were certainly disciples of John the Baptist?

Andrew Peter James Matthew

Many scholars believe that John the apostle was the other of the two disciples mentioned in John 1:35. John as a rule did not identify himself in his writings. We know for certain that Peter met Christ in advance of his encounter on the boat because John 1:42 tells us that Andrew brought him to meet Jesus.

The words “Jesus looked at him and said” sends chills up my spine. According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Greek word for *looked* means “to look on, i.e. ... to observe fixedly, or (absolutely) to discern clearly:—behold, gaze up, look upon.”⁶ I think Christ looked Peter straight in the eyes with a look that could have drilled a hole through him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter)” (v. 42).

Based on John the Baptist's faithful ministry, Peter, Andrew, James, and John knew Christ at least by reputation. Several of them also knew Him because of the prior encounter described in John 1. When Jesus approached them at their boats, God had them primed and ready to leave everything behind and follow Christ. I'd like to suggest that just as James and John were preparing their nets, they too had been prepared. The word *preparing* (see Mark 1:19) can also mean *repairing*. The exact word is used in Galatians 6:1 for restoring a fallen brother. Oh, how thankful I am that the same God who prepares also repairs and restores.

The same God who prepares also repairs and restores.

VIDEO RESPONSE SHEET

Group Session 1

Sometimes we also may have the desire to take our _____ and _____ in our worlds: in our _____, in our _____, in our _____, etc. We've got to be so careful what we rationalize by Scripture. Before we proceed, we are wise to remember a few important things. We'll make six points today based on the calling of John.

Read Mark 3:13-19 and John 2:12-17.

1. Christ could not _____ in His _____ or _____. **See Ephesians 4:26-27.**

Anger and rage are highly motivational, but they are extremely destructive.

2. Godly _____ is measured by the _____ of "_____."

3. God looks upon the _____ beneath the action. We can even have a _____ about a _____ and find ourselves disciplined by God.

4. Paradoxically, we receive our calling as _____ but can only fulfill it _____. **See Matthew 18:2-3.** "Unless you change and become _____, you will never _____."

5. Though _____ is important, Christ seems to have an affinity for _____.

6. The kind of change God desires comes one primary way. **See Mark 3:14:** "that they might be with him and that he might send them out."