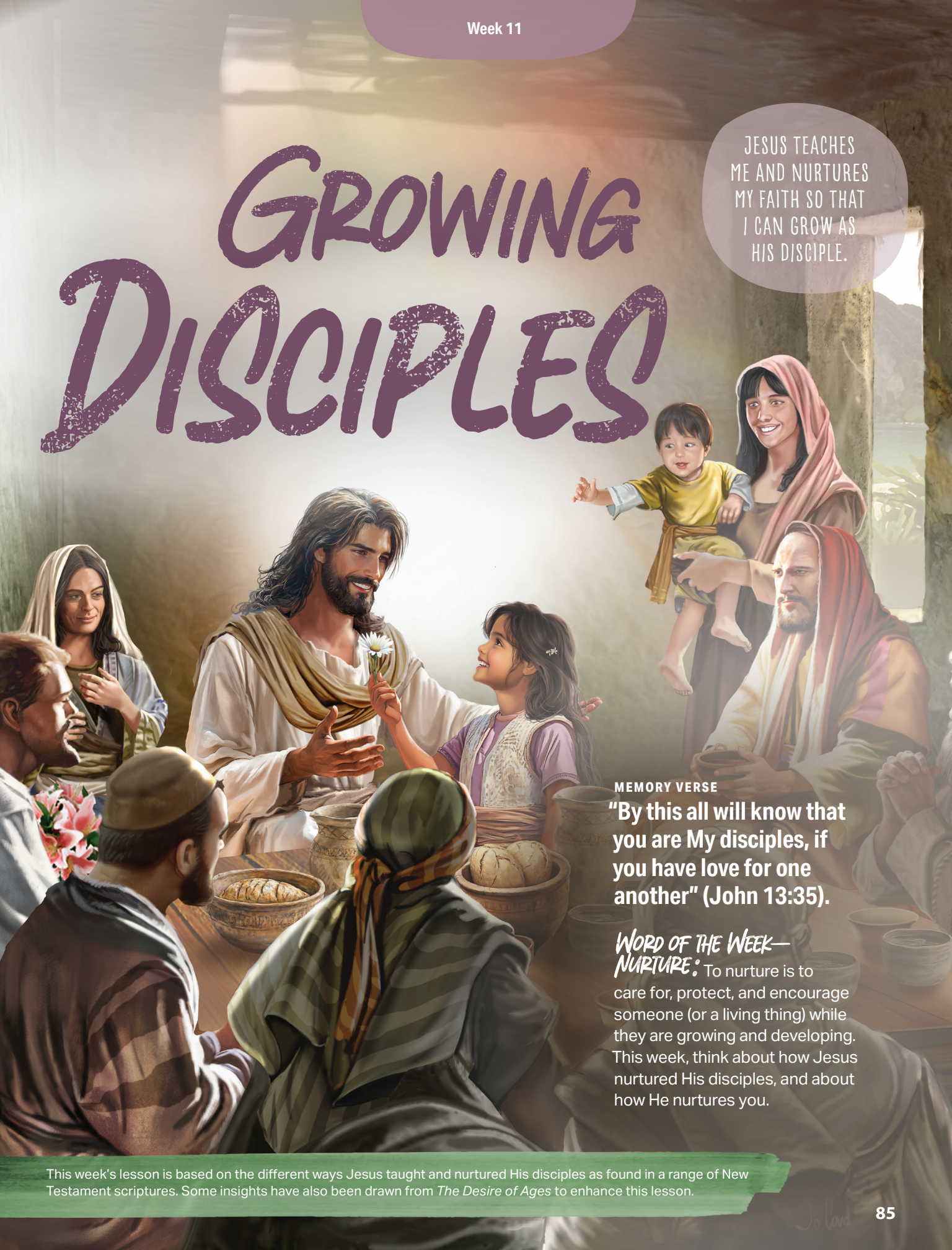
Growing Disciples

JESUS TEACHES ME AND NURTURES MY FAITH SO THAT I CAN GROW AS HIS DISCIPLE.



MEMORY VERSE

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

WORD OF THE WEEK—NURTURE: To nurture is to care for, protect, and encourage someone (or a living thing) while they are growing and developing. This week, think about how Jesus nurtured His disciples, and about how He nurtures you.

This week's lesson is based on the different ways Jesus taught and nurtured His disciples as found in a range of New Testament scriptures. Some insights have also been drawn from *The Desire of Ages* to enhance this lesson.

☐ SUNDAY

He Chose Them?

Imagine you are a little Jewish boy growing up in Jesus' day. Like many other young boys, your dream is to one day become a disciple of a well-known rabbi, a Jewish teacher who studies the Scriptures and other Jewish writings. To make this big dream come true, you will need to go to Jewish school for many years. You won't have much time for play, because you will have to work very hard at your Bible-scroll lessons. Only then can you ask a rabbi to accept you as his disciple. Will you be good enough? If your excellent grades and perfect behavior are impressive enough, he may just say, "Yes, follow me."

If accepted by the rabbi, you would live with him and copy everything he does. You would learn to eat, sleep, talk, walk, and think exactly like him. Many rabbis believed that God was honored by perfect behavior, and that their own behavior was excellent. When you copied them and obeyed their rules, they believed God would be pleased with you too. Life would be good. You would wear fine robes and be respected as important by the "ordinary" people.

When Jesus came along, He turned this dream and everyone's ideas upside down! He chose His own disciples. And *whom* He chose shocked the people, especially the priests and rulers. Jesus chose: uneducated fishermen, not the top students from the best synagogue schools; a tax collector, considered a cheater and liar; a Zealot, someone who stirred up protests and likely broke the law; and "ordinary" people who lived as sinners. This was not the way things were done! The priests and rulers shook their heads and walked away.

Jesus knew a Bible verse those rabbis had missed. "The Lord says, 'Your thoughts are not like my thoughts. Your ways are not like my ways' " (Isaiah 55:8, ICB). Jesus chose an unexpected group of disciples to show us that God loves everyone, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He chooses us just as we are (imperfect sinners), then promises to teach us a new way of love as we follow Him (2 Timothy 1:9).

Mission Challenge: At the store or an after-school activity, share a smile and tell someone you notice what a good job they are doing. Share the simple statement: "Jesus loves you," or "God bless you."

Do: Write Jesus a thank-You note for choosing you to be His follower.

Think . . . Then Talk About It

- *Imagine again you are the young boy, studying all the time and trying desperately to be perfect. How would you feel when Jesus came along and chose His disciples?*

Pray: Thank Jesus for teaching you about His love.



MONDAY

A Different Kingdom

Everything about Jesus was different, not just His choice of disciples. He didn't dress in rich robes like the other rabbis or draw attention to Himself in the streets and synagogue. He didn't pray long prayers to impress others or think of Himself as more important. Jesus didn't teach His disciples in the same ways the other rabbis did either, and He definitely didn't teach them the same things!

Jesus' mission on earth was to show everyone what God is like, and what His kingdom of love is like. Jesus had come from heaven, so He knew all about God's kingdom of love. Now He wanted to show humans what God is like.

Kingdoms on earth are all about riches, crowns, palaces, and having lots of land and servants. Kings often go to war to try to steal land, or to protect their kingdom from other greedy kings. But God's kingdom is not about riches or about fighting. **Read Romans 14:17** and say out loud the three words that describe God's kingdom.

Jesus knew that the people were expecting Him, the Messiah, to overthrow the Roman rulers and set up a kingdom like all the others on earth. But Jesus made it clear that His kingdom is about living together peacefully. It is about having Jesus in our hearts—not about stone castles, or power, or owning lots of things. Accepting God's love and loving others would bring joy. This was one of the first and most important things Jesus wanted to teach His disciples. Following Jesus' example, Paul wrote, "So let us try to do what makes peace and helps one another" (Romans 14:19, ICB).

As a follower of Jesus, you are one of His disciples. Jesus is teaching you about His kingdom too. He knows that having lots of things or power or money won't make you truly happy. But when you have Jesus in your heart, "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), and you will have joy.

Do: In a journal or on a blank piece of paper, use pictures, words, or symbols to show the difference between God's kingdom and an earthly kingdom. Reflect on which you would rather have.

Pray: Thank God for teaching you, His disciple, about His kingdom of love and peace. Invite Him into your heart again today, so that He can set up His kingdom there.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *How easy or hard do you think it was for the disciples to understand Jesus' teachings about God's kingdom? Why? (John 6:35.)*

TUESDAY

Learning by Watching



Jesus didn't just *tell* His disciples about the kingdom of heaven—He *showed* them. Jesus, the Master Teacher, knew that life is a wonderful lesson book. Every day that His disciples were walking, talking, and being with Jesus, they were learning by watching Him.

The Bible doesn't tell us a lot about Jesus' life in the 30 years before His baptism, but Jesus was quietly showing people how to live God's way then too; His life was an example. When He began His public work for God and called His disciples, His life became an even bigger example.

While other rabbis were teaching their followers what they thought it meant to be holy, Jesus was busy showing His disciples about giving. When Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana, they learned about giving surprise blessings. When Jesus fed the multitudes on the hillsides, they learned about giving real food and spiritual food. When Jesus healed the sick and sad people that flocked to Him, they learned about giving healing and comfort. And when He taught the crowds, He was giving them knowledge about a loving God.

Why did Jesus focus so much on showing His disciples about giving? **Read James 1:17.** Jesus was following God's example when He nurtured people's faith by giving them what they needed. It was important for the disciples to learn to follow Jesus' example too, so that they could continue giving to the people and nurturing their faith long after He had gone back to heaven. As the disciples watched the different ways Jesus gave, their faith was being nurtured too.

Parent Faith Talk: Share with your child some important things you have learned by watching others.

Do: With your family, search online for a "selective attention test" video and do together, as a fun test of how well you watch, notice, and learn. You may beat the grown-ups!

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *Jesus didn't just tell the disciples to give—He showed them how. As a disciple of Jesus, how might you learn to be giving?*

Pray: Thank God for giving us Jesus.





WEDNESDAY

Learning in Nature

If you were looking for Jesus the teacher and His student disciples, you wouldn't have found them at desks in a classroom. Instead, you would have found them out in the fresh air, gathered under the sky on a quiet hillside, in a grassy field, or by a sparkling lake.

Jesus loved to teach out in nature, away from the busy cities where His listeners would become distracted. He knew that people were more open to His teachings when they were surrounded by the beautiful things God created. Their faith would grow as they saw God's power in the tall-growing trees, the lapping waves, or the blooming flowers around them.

Jesus also knew that nature could help Him teach, for Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens tell the glory of God. And the skies announce what his hands have made" (ICB).

Jesus drew the people's attention to things close by to teach them important truths. What lesson did Jesus teach while directing His disciples to look at the birds flying overhead? *Read Matthew 6:25-27.* Then Jesus turned to the beautiful lilies blooming in a field to make another point. What did Jesus teach? *Read Matthew 6:28-30.*

Jesus taught big and small groups of people in the outdoors. Because the disciples were always with Him, they heard His beautiful teachings over and over. Each time a truth from nature was repeated, their faith would be nurtured, and they would grow closer to Jesus. The more they heard, the more they understood. The more they understood, the more they were able to share God's love with others. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

When we spend time with God out in nature, it is easier for us to be close to Him. Then Jesus can more easily nurture our faith as we grow to be His close disciples.

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *Where in nature do you feel close to God?*
- *How has God nurtured your faith out in nature?*

Do: Look up several of the following verses to discover more lessons Jesus taught from nature. Read **Luke 8:4-8, 11-15; Luke 15:4-7; Matthew 24:31, 32**. You may like to draw a picture for each.

Mission Challenge: Write a list of things God has given you. Then write a list of things you can give to others. Try not to think of just objects, but rather ways to make someone happy, meet a need, or know Jesus. Put a smiley face next to the one you'll do this week.

Pray: Go for a prayer walk out in nature or watch the sky from a window. Thank God for the things you see, and for the lessons you can learn from His creation.



THURSDAY

Powerful Stories

Fishermen and farmers, moms and children, shepherds and carpenters—all sorts of people came to listen to Jesus, for His teachings were so new and beautiful. Most of them didn't know how to read, so they relied on the priests to read to them from the Bible scrolls each Sabbath. Sometimes they didn't understand what they heard. But they understood Jesus. He made things simple and real. That's why "the common people heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37).

Jesus told the people stories and taught powerful lessons based on everyday things they knew about. He talked about sheep and eagles, salt and light, candles and flowers, seeds and grapes, doors and gates. Each story grew their faith in the God who loved them. For example, what did they learn about God's love when Jesus spoke the words of *Luke 12:6, 7?*

The 12 disciples were always learning as they sat with the crowds that followed Jesus, but sometimes Jesus also taught them when they were alone together, explaining things they found difficult to understand (Mark 7:17).

Jesus nurtured and grew the disciples' faith in extra ways because they were His special helpers. The disciples needed to learn as much as they could so that they would be able to nurture the faith of others. This was important, because they had been chosen to carry on Jesus' work on earth when He returned to heaven. Then they would tell stories and teach powerful lessons to grow more disciples for God's kingdom. As Jesus' disciples, we can also learn from His stories and share them with others.

Fast Facts: The average human head has about 100,000 hairs. It is normal to lose 50 to 100 hairs a day, and new hairs grow to replace them. God knows all of this about you!

For You, Parents: Be encouraged that Christ wants to nurture and grow your faith too. "All that Christ was to [His] disciples, He desires to be to His children today" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 75).

Think . . . Then Talk About It

- *How might Jesus nurture your faith, based on things around you? For example, the seeds in an apple might remind you of God's power to make things grow. What could you learn from an opening flower bud, or an egg, or something else you can see?*

Pray: Ask God for an opportunity to share one of Jesus' stories with someone.

☐ FRIDAY

Teach Us to Pray

The disciples were always watching and listening closely to Jesus so they could learn His way of love. One day they were quietly listening to their Teacher pray. Jesus prayed a lot, and His prayers were simple and beautiful. It was as though He was talking to a good friend whom He knew very well.

The disciples had heard people pray long, loud prayers to impress others, but they had never seen anyone talking alone with God in a quiet place. They wanted to be able to pray just as Jesus did, so one of them asked, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Jesus was very happy to teach them to pray, because He knew that talking to God would help them get to know God as their best friend and allow God to change their hearts to be loving like His. This is one of the best and most important things a growing disciple can do.

Before Jesus taught them to pray by praying His own beautiful prayer, He reminded them that God loves to hear prayers that are honest and real. He didn't want them to thoughtlessly say the same old lines, or to show off. Heartfelt prayers are the kind of prayers that nurture faith and help disciples trust God and feel close to Him.

How did Jesus pray? **Read Matthew 6:9-13** out loud, then silently as your own prayer. Jesus loves to hear us pray to Him anytime and anywhere. **Read Jeremiah 29:12.**

Think . . . Then talk about it

- *How much do you think the disciples' prayers changed after Jesus taught them to pray?*

Friday Night

Share and Praise

- Sing "The Lord's Prayer" together, along with the song on the AIJ website, or make up a song to go with the prayer if you don't know it.
- Do you tell God big and small things, as Jesus did? Discuss how you can be "real" in prayer, talking to your best friend, Jesus.
- Listen to or sing the hymn "Sweet Hour of Prayer" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 478). Talk together about how good it is to talk with Jesus, our best friend.

Family Journal

- How did Jesus nurture and teach His disciples?
- Why do you think Jesus has been called the greatest teacher the world has ever seen?
- How will you "follow Jesus" and learn from Him?
- What did you notice in nature this week that taught you something about God?

Pray

Ask Jesus to help you continue to grow as He teaches you through stories, nature, lessons in the things you see around you, and through prayer.



Nature Spotlight:

Keep Growing!

The tallest mountain in North America is Denali (Mount McKinley) in Alaska. It is well named because Denali means "the high one."

Denali is a towering mountain that is made of granite, a very hard rock. It covers an area of 7,400 square miles and sits on an earthquake fault line. This line is where two large, moving pieces of the earth's outer layer meet. The moving pieces are called tectonic plates.

As the tectonic plates under Denali push against each other, the mountain gets squeezed and pushed slowly upward. This causes Mount Denali to grow by about .04 inches (one millimeter) each year. That might not seem very fast compared to how quickly you grow taller, but it means that in 100 years the mountain would grow four inches (10 centimeters) taller.

Just as the pushing tectonic plates under Denali help it to grow, Jesus helps you to grow as one of His disciples. And just as Denali keeps growing every year, your faith can keep growing every year too.

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Nature Photo Safari

Head outdoors with your family this Sabbath for a closer look at God's love and power in nature. Ask a grown-up if they'll let you use their phone or camera (with help) to take some pictures of what you discover. A notepad and sketching pencil can be easily used instead.

Get Growing: Take a picture of a living thing that starts out small. Can you photograph the same thing when it has grown bigger too? Look for a few examples. Trust that Jesus will nurture your faith too.

Bible Pictures: Can you find any living things, or ordinary objects, that are similar to the ones Jesus mentioned in the stories we studied this week?

Close-Up: As a disciple you can watch the life of Jesus closely to learn His way of love. What close-ups of nature can you capture that show something unexpected and beautiful?

Big and Wide: Take a photo that captures the land and sky and looks peaceful. God's kingdom is one of peace. Look for an interesting focus, such as a shapely tree.

Portrait Shot: Take photos of your family. Try to make them natural, not posed. (Get them to laugh or play a game!) Keep them to remember that God's kingdom is about loving others.