Preface

This book has been several years in the making and would not have to come to fruition without the assistance of many. Special thanks are due to Clint Arnold for his counsel early in the planning stages, as well as to the team at Kregel Academic, notably Dennis Hillman and Shawn Vander Lugt, for their patience and professionalism. We are also grateful to David Kim for compiling the indices, and of course to the book's contributors for their insightful essays.

This volume is the product of a team of scholars who share a passion for its primary subject matter (discipleship) as well as a deep appreciation for the leadership, scholarship, and friendship of Dr. Michael J. Wilkins, to whom the contributors dedicate this volume on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. If the book accomplishes anything, we hope that it will contribute to the church's understanding of what it means to follow Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century. And if it accomplishes that, then we know Mike will have been appropriately honored. For there is nothing Mike himself is more committed to than following in the footsteps of Jesus his master and equipping others to do the same.

Mike has long devoted himself to the cause of Christian discipleship. Born August 7, 1949, in Southern California, Mike began to follow Christ upon his return from the war in Vietnam, receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior on December 31, 1971. Shortly afterward, Mike enrolled at Biola College, where he earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and social science (1974), followed by a master of divinity at Talbot Theological Seminary (1977) and a doctor of philosophy in New Testament Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary (1986). Both his master's thesis and doctoral dissertation concentrated on discipleship in select portions of the New Testament—the latter written under the supervision of celebrated New Testament scholars Ralph P. Martin and Donald A. Hagner, and examined by Jack Dean Kingsbury of Union Theological Seminary, Virginia. A revision of Mike's dissertation was published as *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής* (1988) in Brill's prestigious Supplements to Novum Testamentum series. The volume has enjoyed a long shelf life, with a second edition released initially by Baker Books (1995) and later again by Wipf & Stock Publishers (2015).

For Mike, however, discipleship is not merely a pet research topic or a convenient pathway towards an academic qualification. Discipleship is for him the very purpose and goal of life. Thus, Mike's career has been punctuated by positions and achievements that do not often appear on the CV of the traditional university professor. The target audience of his scholarship, for example, has not exclusively or even primarily been theologians and professional exegetes, but folks from all walks of life who are fellow travelers on the journey of personal transformation into the image of our Lord Jesus. In addition to the technical monograph that was borne out of his doctoral studies, Mike has authored numerous books and essays on discipleship that seek to encourage and educate pastors, students, and ordinary lay people—including *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (which Mike affectionately calls "the fruit of [his] academic, professional, and personal walk with Jesus" [xiii]), and *In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life* (which Mike describes as "a very personal book" in which he shares "[his] own experience of the Christian life" [10]). He also wrote the volume on *Matthew* for the NIV Application Commentary series, a thousand-page tome that was recognized as a finalist for the 2005 ECPA Gold Medallion Award. In the commentary, Mike skillfully guides the specialist and nonspecialist alike through what he calls the first evangelist's "manual on discipleship" (21). Yet this is a project that has not only shaped its readers, but whose undertaking proved to be transformative for Mike himself, as he candidly shares in the preface:

> As I have walked with Jesus in his first-century historical setting through Matthew's meticulous written reflections, as I have been instructed through Matthew's theological intentions for his community, and as I have opened myself to allow Matthew's insights to Jesus's identity and mission to penetrate my heart, soul, mind, and strength, I have been changed. The experience of writing this commentary has been one of the most deeply enriching spiritual experiences of my life. (13)

Ever mindful of his walk with Christ and the encouragement his own journey might offer to others, one wonders if it is even possible for Mike to write a book impersonally or dispassionately.

Mike also has significant experience working on the front lines of congregational ministry. He has served as senior pastor of churches in Carlsbad (1977–1980) and in Cayucos (1981–1983), California. He was also for a number of years a part-time pastor at San Clemente Presbyterian

Church (1984–2000), where he continues to serve in a lay capacity. An avid surfer, it is hardly surprising that Mike, together with his dear wife Lynne, has invested more than four decades to shepherding the locals in some of Southern California's finest beach communities.

Arguably the bulk of Mike's ministry contributions, however, have centered on the campus of his alma mater, Biola University. Appointed as a faculty member in 1983, Mike has been instrumental in teaching students and mentoring colleagues for more than thirty-five years. During his impressive tenure at Biola, Mike has served as chairman of the university's undergraduate Biblical and Theological Studies department (1985–1987), as chairman of the graduate department of New Testament Language and Literature (1987–2000), as Dean of the Faculty of Talbot School of Theology (1992–2013), and most recently as Distinguished Professor of New Testament Language and Literature (2008–present). Mike is the recipient of numerous institutional awards not only for teaching and scholarship, but also for mentoring and leadership. Frankly, it would be difficult to quantify—and nearly impossible to exaggerate—the impact of his institutional service on the professional development of his colleagues and the ethos of the wider Biola community. What is clear is that Mike approaches his appointment at Talbot not simply as professor or administrator, but as a disciple seeking to foster the spiritual growth of other disciples.

Discipleship is indeed Mike's vocation, the Great Commission his passion. While his ministry is sure to continue on for many years ahead, he has already left an indelible mark on countless local churches, university campuses, scholastic societies, and individual lives. The contributors to this volume are but a few of those whom he has blessed through friendship and faithful service in the Lord. It is therefore our great privilege to present this volume to Mike as an expression of our profound gratitude and respect. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matt. 9:37, ESV). Thank you, dear friend, for your labor.

The editors
May 20, 2019
Southern California

INTRODUCTION

Following Jesus Christ Today

John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss

> We confess that, although our Church is orthodox as far as her doctrine of grace is concerned, we are no longer sure that we are members of a Church which follows its Lord. We must therefore attempt to recover a true understanding of the mutual relation between grace and discipleship. The issue can no longer be evaded. It is becoming clearer every day that the most urgent problem besetting our Church is this: How can we live the Christian life in the modern world?
>
> —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*[1]

Written at the dawn of the Second World War, Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* famously and relentlessly chided the antinomianism that pervaded German Protestantism after the Nazis co-opted the German national church. Bonhoeffer's solution, to resuscitate the notion and necessity of personal discipleship, was simple yet costly: simple, because the solution was so obviously biblical; costly, because of the ethical demand discipleship places on the individual—a cost Bonhoeffer himself paid in full when, as a result of his intense political activism, he was arrested and executed by Hitler's cruel regime. "Suffering," as Bonhoeffer came to know all too well, "is the badge of true discipleship."[2]

Eighty years have passed since the publication of Bonhoeffer's classic book, yet its message remains equally relevant today. Indeed, *The Cost of Discipleship* is, in many respects, a timeless work whose refrain must be repeated in each and every generation. For while many themes within

---

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. (trans. R. H. Fuller, New York: Touchstone, 1995), 55; originally published as *Nachfolge* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1937).

2 Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 91.

theological discourse are considered to be of first importance, none can claim to be of greater significance to the overall message of the New Testament than *discipleship*—the process of being called by and conformed to Jesus Christ. Engagement in this process is Jesus's fundamental commission to his church (Matt. 28:18–20). Indeed, the entire New Testament bears witness to this vocation and seeks to foster precisely this relationship between wayward humanity and its redeemer and Lord. Not only that, but it is the right conceptualization of discipleship that ties together so much of daily Christian practice. As Richard Longenecker maintains, "The concept of discipleship lies at the heart of all Christian thought, life, and ministry."[3]

Unfortunately, the language of discipleship has, once again, fallen out of favor in western Christianity, and as a result confusion has shrouded the term. Discipleship, to some, connotes a special level or calling of Christian living. For others, discipleship is inherently tethered to spiritual growth programs and curricula. And to others, especially those directly impacted by increased secularism in the West, the term is associated with—well, nothing at all. As Dallas Willard lamented in a 2005 *Christianity Today* interview, *"Discipleship* as a term has lost its content, and this is one reason why it has been moved aside."[4] Willard elaborated on this semantic development in his book *The Great Omission*: "Discipleship on the theological right has come to mean preparation for soul winning, under the direction of parachurch efforts that had discipleship farmed out to them because the local church really wasn't doing it. On the left, discipleship has come to mean some form of social activity or social service, from serving soup lines to political protest to . . . whatever. The term 'discipleship' has currently been ruined so far as any solid psychological and biblical content is concerned."[5]

The same was recently concluded by the Barna Research Group in a massive study on discipleship commissioned by the Navigators.

> We asked a random sample of Christians—including practicing and non-practicing Christians—what words or phrases they use to describe "the process of growing spiritually." The

3 Richard N. Longenecker, "Preface," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. R. N. Longenecker, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), ix–x, at ix.

4 Agnieszka Tennant, "The Making of the Christian: Richard J. Foster and Dallas Willard on the Difference between Discipleship and Spiritual Formation," *Christianity Today*, September 16, 2005, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/october/9.42.html.

5 Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 53.

> most preferred term was "becoming more Christlike" (selected by 43% of respondents), followed by "spiritual growth" (31%), and "spiritual journey" (28%). The term "discipleship" ranked fourth on the list and was only selected by fewer than one in five Christians (18%). . . . Among those who did not select the term "discipleship," we asked if the word still has relevance to their Christian experience. Surprisingly, only one-quarter of these respondents said "discipleship" is very relevant. The implication is that while spiritual growth is very important to tens of millions, the language and terminology surrounding discipleship seems to be undergoing a change, with other phrases coming to be used more frequently than the term "discipleship" itself.[6]

Of course, a number of factors are responsible for these results. They are due, in the first place, to the sporadic usage of explicit discipleship terminology within the Bible itself. As a glance through any ordinary Bible concordance will quickly demonstrate, the term "disciple" is basically absent from the Old Testament as well as from the New Testament epistles. It is hardly a surprise, then, that even careful students of Scripture will be left without a clear sense of the term once they venture outside the Gospels and Acts.

Beyond this, discipleship to many is an antiquated concept that is difficult to contemporize. This challenge has only become more acute in the wake of the recent cultural revolution underway in the Western world. In his 2015 book *Prepare*, Paul Nyquist, then president of Moody Bible Institute, reflected soberly on the rapid societal progress many believers have witnessed firsthand in the United States: "Insulated in our Christian subculture bubble and disconnected from the secular world, many of us have been largely unaware of society's movements. But events this past year awakened us. With our eyes wide open, we realize America's changed. . . . [T]he culture war is over—and we lost."[7]

The continued and speedy movement of western culture away from its Judeo-Christian heritage has had incalculable effects on the lives of

---

6 https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship. For the study's published results, see *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2015). See also the follow-up volume by Preston Sprinkle, *Go: Returning to the Front Lines of Faith* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016).

7 J. Paul Nyquist, *Prepare: Living Your Faith in an Increasingly Hostile Culture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 22.

twenty-first-century believers. There is no denying that the so-called culture war has impacted not only central areas of Christian life and practice but also aspects of Christian identity and purpose as well. Indeed, as the world continues to change, so does the vocabulary of the modern church, as well as its appreciation for the Bible's central topics. The notion of discipleship is one such causality.

All of the above, however, are poor reasons to allow the language of discipleship to slip further into disuse. Not only does the *concept* of discipleship pervade the New Testament (even where the term itself is absent), but we cannot afford, as Willard feared, to lose or misunderstand the *content* of a term so central to the message and mission of the church. If the language of discipleship is forfeited to other terms, then we will undoubtedly lose focus on how believers ought to relate to their Lord—including all that is involved in maintaining and nurturing that relationship. As Bonhoeffer observed long ago, "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."[8] It is high time, then, to reclaim the notion of discipleship for the twenty-first-century church, to recalibrate our awareness of its presence in the Bible, and to remind ourselves of its implications for daily living.[9]

This books aims to serve contemporary believers in just this way, by providing an in-depth examination of the concept of discipleship across the New Testament and by explaining how the concept interfaces with important areas of the Christian life—the mind, the soul, and the local church. Our goal in this volume is neither to offer a new one-size-fits-all definition of discipleship, nor is it to leave the concept so open-ended that just about any meaning will do. Rather, while recognizing the unity and diversity of the New Testament witness to the topic, this book seeks to provide an exposition of discipleship from each book of the New Testament and to explore its relevance for today.

---

8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 59.

9 Curiously, limited academic study has focused on discipleship directly. Especially in recent years, very little has been written on discipleship that is both comprehensive and accessible, and even less has been published that brings together both exegetical rigor and pastoral reflection. See, e.g., Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus's Call to Discipleship,* Understanding Jesus Today Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995; 2nd ed. 2014); Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Andrew Ryder, S.C.J., *Following Christ: Models of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999); Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

Before proceeding, it is important to offer a working definition of what we mean by *discipleship*. For this we will rely on the prior work of Michael J. Wilkins, undoubtedly the most important voice on the academic study of discipleship in the past generation. Wilkins has contributed much to this discussion through several notable publications of varying levels of technicality.[10] In his most comprehensive analysis, he defined discipleship as follows:

> In common parlance, *discipleship* and *discipling* today relate to the ongoing life of the disciple. *Discipleship* is the ongoing process of growth as a disciple. *Discipling* implies the responsibility of disciples helping one another to grow as disciples. Therefore, discipleship and discipling can be narrowly understood as a technical discussion of the historical master-disciple relationship, but these terms can also be understood in a broader way as Christian experience—that is, the self-understanding of the early Christian believers as believers: what such a way of life requires, implies, and entails. Thus, when we speak of Christian discipleship and discipling we are speaking of what it means to grow as a Christian in every area of life. Since *disciple* is a common referent for *Christian*, discipleship and discipling imply the process of becoming like Jesus Christ. Discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image.[11]

Wilkins's excellent definition requires no substantive revision. His words are just as reliable now as when they were first penned. Wilkins's exegetical analysis is also still important, selective though it is. Nonetheless, the present volume seeks to build on Wilkins's distinguished scholarship, by bringing together leading evangelical thinkers to examine afresh the New Testament message of discipleship and its relevance for today.

Part 1, by way of seventeen exegetical essays, surveys the varied presentation of discipleship across multiple New Testament books and

---

10 See especially Michael J. Wilkins, "The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής," NovTSup 59 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), republished as *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids; Baker, 1995); ibid., *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); ibid., *In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997).

11 Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 41–42.

corpora. The authors of these essays are specialists in these various biblical texts. The three chapters in Part 2 approach discipleship from the perspective of other disciplines, exploring how it converges with important areas of contemporary theological and ministerial reflection. Authored by leading evangelical scholars with expertise in philosophy, psychology, and practical theology, these chapters discuss the principal challenges of, as well as propose essential strategies for, making and growing disciples in our contemporary context.

It is our hope that this volume will serve students, pastors, and scholars of the next generation in a way similar to how Bonhoeffer's book has served Christians for the past eighty years and the way Wilkins's work served the last generation of readers—namely, by clarifying what it means to follow Jesus Christ while living in a world that is growing increasingly hostile to those who do.

PART 1

The New Testament Message of Discipleship

CHAPTER 1

Living Out Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty: Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel

Jeannine K. Brown

MATTHEW'S THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE

Matthew communicates that Israel's God is inaugurating the kingdom in Jesus the Messiah. Jesus teaches that the arrival of God's reign involves the restoration of justice, mercy, peace, and wholeness (5:7–10); and Jesus enacts this vision in his compassionate ministry of healing for Israel (in Galilee; chs 8–9, 12, 14–15). Matthew portrays Jesus as Messiah (1:1; 16:16), as God's very presence (1:23), and as Israel's representative (chs. 3–4). As the embodiment of faithful Israel, he stands in for his people; and in his death and resurrection he brings forgiveness and life to them (1:21; 26:28; 27:53) and ushers in these gifts for all the nations (28:19).

Understandably, Matthew's focus is on Jesus and therefore on Christology. In addition to the Christological contours already mentioned, which each have discipleship implications, Jesus is also characterized as Torah embodied and as Isaiah's servant of Yahweh. Jesus not only obeys God's law and is its consummate teacher; he is Torah enfleshed (11:2, 19, 28–30). As his followers pursue relationship with him and loyalty to him, they are on the path to covenant faithfulness through their obedience to Jesus's own commands (see 28:19–20). In this way, they will find that Jesus's yoke is easy to carry. As servant of the Lord, Jesus acts as a ransom for his people, thereby providing the consummate example of service for them (20:28). In these and in many other ways, Matthew's Christology points toward his view of discipleship. "Matthew's Gospel envisions and shapes its readers toward faith and obedience; they are to be true followers of Jesus and his teachings."[1]

---

1 Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew* (Teach the Text New Testament Commentary Series, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 1. I use narrative-critical methodology in this chapter as the basis for my analysis of discipleship themes; see Jeannine K. Brown, "Narrative Criticism," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (2nd ed.; eds. J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, N. Perrin, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 619–24.

THE CONTOURS OF DISCIPLESHIP IN MATTHEW[2]

A. The Relational Basis of Discipleship

Although Matthew's emphasis, in terms of sheer amount of teaching, is upon expectations or obligations for disciples, there is a strong basis of covenantal relationship for these expectations. Early in his Gospel, Matthew affirms that Jesus is "Emmanuel," God's presence with Israel (1:23). He confirms this theme at the very end of the narrative, when Jesus promises to be *with his followers* to the very end of the age (28:20). This inclusio (or bookend) accents the centrality of this theme for his understanding of Jesus's relationship to those who follow him. The theme is echoed in Matthew's Community Discourse (ch. 18), where Jesus's words about his church are the focus. At a key hinge of the chapter, Jesus promises to be "in the midst" (ἐν μέσῳ) of his people as they together live out values of protection of the most vulnerable and lavish forgiveness (18:20).[3] This subtle but crucial motif of "Jesus with us" provides a firm anchor for the relational basis of Matthew's vision of discipleship. The person of Jesus is at the center of the life of discipleship.

We can also see this relational emphasis in the first major teaching block of Matthew's Gospel—the Sermon on the Mount. While the Sermon certainly focuses on covenant obligation in the time of the kingdom's arrival (e.g., 5:20; 6:1; on the use of δικαιοσύνη, see below), there are important indications that in this inaugural sermon Jesus is communicating that *God is the one who initiates restoration and redemption*, placing the focus of covenant faithfulness on relational responsiveness (rather than on only legal obligation). This is clear if we seek to understand the Jewish background to Matthew, especially related to how the Torah was understood as a gift for Israel to know how to live in relationship with their redeeming God (see Exod. 19:1–6; 20:2).[4]

The way the sermon begins also signals that God is initiator of restoration, and that Jesus's followers are to respond in faithfulness. The first four Beatitudes announce blessing upon those most experiencing the underside of life—the (spiritually) impoverished (5:3), those whose deep losses cause them to mourn (5:4), people of lowest status (5:5), and those

---

2 Some of the material in this chapter is based conceptually on my work in Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), chapter 13, "Thinking Theologically with Matthew: Discipleship."

3 All translations are my own and are from Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*.

4 Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 81.

who are "starved for justice" (5:6).[5] Jesus is able to announce blessing upon the most unlikely candidates because God's kingdom is arriving with its anticipated reversals and God is bringing mercy and justice to the earth (6:10). It is from this place of restoration that Jesus offers the second set of blessings on those who commit to joining God's work of restoration by showing mercy (5:7), pursuing wholeness and integrity (5:8), working for peace (5:9), and being willing to experience persecution for bringing justice to those who need it (5:10).[6] Besides the opening blessings, we could also note that the theology proper of the sermon points to a God who is indiscriminate in love and so "complete and whole" (5:45–48). This is a God who is quick to hear and answer prayer and lavishes good things on those who ask (6:7–8; 7:9–11). All of this provides a significant covenantal (i.e., relational) basis for discipleship in Matthew.

B. *How* Matthew Communicates Discipleship

Before considering our central question of what discipleship looks like in Matthew, it will be helpful first to explore briefly *how* Matthew communicates discipleship, or, if you will, *how Matthew shapes disciples.* Matthew, as he tells the Jesus story, draws on several narrative devices to shape his ideal or implied reader, or the reader who "fulfills the goals of the text."[7] And "the implied reader represents (or stands in for) a community who lives out the call to follow Jesus faithfully, empowered by the presence of Jesus in their midst."[8] In particular, the narrative devices of *characterization*—of Jesus, of the disciples, and of others who respond to Jesus in various ways—and *dialogue*, most often in Jesus's teachings, prove foundational to Matthew's vision for discipleship.

One of the most obvious ways Matthew inculcates discipleship is through his focus on *Jesus's teachings*. For the evangelist, the words of Jesus are to shape the reader and hearer toward authentic discipleship. And the teachings of Jesus in Matthew are gathered together primarily in the five great discourses of chapters 5–7, 10, 13, 18, and 24–25. These five discourses shape the reader to live out Matthean discipleship. In the Sermon on the Mount, the reader is shaped to pursue covenant faithfulness in light of the

---

5 For this reading of the Beatitudes, see Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," *CBQ* 58 (1996): 460–79; and Brown, *Matthew*, 52–55.

6 Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes."

7 Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples,* SBLAB 9 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2002), 123.

8 Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 336.

arriving kingdom (5:1–7:29). In the second discourse, the reader is guided to emulate Jesus's mission which has focused on enacting God's reign (cf. 4:23; 9:35), even if persecution ensues (10:1–11:1). Matthew's reader is encouraged to respond in faith to the kingdom as an "already" reality, as well as something that is "not yet" (13:1–53). In the fourth discourse, the reader is directed away from status preoccupation and toward care for the marginalized ("little ones"), protection of the purity of the community, and lavish forgiveness (18:1–35). Finally, the fifth discourse focuses the attention of the reader on the importance of living in ways that are prepared, faithful, merciful, and just in the face of the future realities of the temple's destruction and the reappearing of the Son of Man (24:1–25:46).[9] When, after his resurrection, Jesus directs his followers to "disciple the nations" (28:19) by "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (28:20), it is these five great discourses that come most quickly to the reader's mind.

Another important way Matthew highlights discipleship is by pointing to *what Jesus does*, since Jesus is the exemplar for disciples to follow. When Jesus, after arriving in Jerusalem, teaches about the qualities of justice, mercy, and covenant loyalty (23:23), the reader already knows what these virtues look like since Jesus himself has lived them out. In the earlier narrative, Jesus has shown mercy to the many from Israel who have come seeking healing (8:1–4, 9:1–8, 18–34; 12:22–23; 14:34–36; 15:29–30; 17:14–20; 19:1–2). And his Galilean ministry has been described as characterized by justice (12:18, 20). In all this, Jesus acts as the Servant of the Lord from Isaiah, who brings justice and mercy to the nations through his embodiment of Israel's vocation (12:18–21).[10] And while Jesus is certainly unique in certain facets of his ministry—as in his representative death that brings about restoration and life, the shape of his life is to be a template for the lives of those who would follow him. As Howell puts it, as Jesus does, so "disciples must do."[11] Kierkegaard speaks eloquently of the importance of Jesus's example for discipleship:

> Christ came to the world with the purpose of saving the world, also with the purpose—this in turn is implicit in the first purpose—of being the *prototype,* of leaving footprints, for the

---

9 For my reading of the shape of these five discourses, see Brown, *Matthew*.

10 Jeannine K. Brown, "Matthew's Christology and Isaiah's Servant: A Fresh Look at a Perennial Issue," in *Treasures New and Old: Essays in Honor of Donald A. Hagner* (eds. C. S. and C. B. Kvidahl, Wilmore, KY: Glossa House, 2017), 93–106.

11 David B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*, JSNTSup 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 259.

> person who wants to join him, who then might become an *imitator*; this indeed corresponds to "footprints."[12]

Besides Jesus, other characters in the narrative become foils or examples for those who follow Jesus, showing positive or negative aspects of discipleship. The Jewish leaders, and particularly the Pharisees, provide a significance contrast to Matthean discipleship, as they are portrayed as hypocritical rather than people of integrity (15:1–9; 23:13–36; cf. 6:1–18). They and others are "examples of what not to do" in discipleship.[13] On the positive side, various seekers who come to Jesus for healing are characterized by *faith* (e.g., 8:10; 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28), including some Gentiles who exhibit *great faith* (8:5–13; 15:21–28). Other positive discipleship qualities that are highlighted in various characters and that the reader is to emulate include *faithfulness to Jesus* (the women at the cross and tomb; 27:55–56; 28:1) and *worship of Jesus* (the Magi; 2:1–12).

The twelve disciples fall somewhere in between these foils and models; they are portrayed as those who leave all to follow Jesus (4:18–22; 9:9), yet still struggle to understand (e.g., 16:8) and fully trust Jesus (8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). Given that the Twelve are those who follow Jesus most closely in his public ministry, they are the most likely candidates for an exploration of discipleship. Yet they exhibit a mixed portrayal in Matthew, and so they function as exemplars at some points and foils at others.[14] Or as Kingsbury has framed it, they provide for the reader both a point of identification and a place for distancing.

> Because the disciples possess conflicting traits, the reader is invited, depending on the attitude Matthew as narrator or Jesus takes toward them on any given occasion, to identify with them or to distance himself or herself from them. It is through such granting or withholding of approval on cue, therefore, that the

---

12 Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 238. While Kierkegaard is not expressly focused on Matthew, his words capture the both/and of Matthew's Christology for discipleship: Jesus is both redeemer and example.

13 Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers—Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. R. N. Longenecker, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 30–49, at 43. We could also observe how Herod the tetrarch (14:5) and the chief priests and elders (21:26) fear of responses of the crowds. Matthew contrasts this kind of fear of others with the discipleship qualities of trust in God and willingness to brook opposition (e.g., 10:16–20, 26–31).

14 Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 243.

reader becomes schooled in the values that govern the life of discipleship in Matthew's story.[15]

C. *What* Matthew Communicates about Discipleship

Given the story Matthew tells about Jesus, who gathers twelve apostles to him (10:1), we can highlight *following* as the central discipleship metaphor or activity. This image of journeying with Jesus has a strong relational cast to it, especially as we consider language used in the passion narrative to suggest the relational reality of Jesus "with" his disciples (e.g., 26:18, 29, 36) and the expectation that they are "with" him (26:38).[16] In fact, Peter's denials that he has been "with Jesus" (μετὰ Ἰησοῦ; 26:69, 71) appear to be a fundamental negation of the essence of his call to follow Jesus (4:18–22; cf. 10:1).

Since Matthew's basis for discipleship is thoroughly relational, it is important to lay accent on the call to "follow *Jesus*." In other words, the emphasis is more so on the person than the action of following, although I would suggest that for Matthew these fit together hand in glove. This relational kind of following—or the following of the person of Jesus—comes through clearly in chapter 11, where Jesus takes on the persona of Wisdom and invites people to take on his comfortable and sustainable yoke. Much like Wisdom in various Jewish texts (e.g., Prov. 8:22–31; Sir 24:19; 51:26–27), Jesus gives an invitation to come to him and put on his "yoke." The yoke image was used in Judaism for living within the Torah's covenantal obligations. In 11:29, Jesus describes his "yoke"—his teaching—as "easy" and "light." And Matthew portrays Jesus as the embodiment of Wisdom (see 11:2, 19); as Jesus speaks with the voice of Wisdom (11:28), the relational nature of discipleship derived from the personification of Wisdom in these various Jewish texts is retained and heightened. For Matthew, Torah and Wisdom are now a person—they find their climactic expression in the Messiah.[17]

1. Discipleship as Allegiance to Jesus and the Kingdom

Under the aegis of following Jesus, Matthew draws on a variety of images, terms, and concepts to communicate the contours of discipleship. A key concept is that following Jesus is an act of allegiance (4:19; 10:24–25).

---

15 Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd ed., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 14.

16 For the theme of Jesus being with his disciples and the expectation that they are to be with him in Matthew's passion narrative, see David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 255.

17 For this Christological motif, see Brown, *Matthew*, 126–27.

> Disciples in the Jewish world of the first century approached a rabbi to become a follower. As a disciple, they would learn from the rabbi and imitate him. The most important relationship a disciple would have was with their teacher (e.g., 10:24–25). Disciples of Jesus, the Messiah–Teacher (see 23:8–10), were expected to attach their loyalty to him; as such, the heart of Christian discipleship is allegiance.[18]

Following Jesus is an act of covenantal loyalty, sustained by trust in Jesus's compassion and authority and by faithfulness to him and his ways (23:23). Exemplary faith, ironically, is not the purview of the Twelve, who struggle to trust that Jesus can do what he has promised to do and are characterized as those of "little faith" (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8: 17:20).[19] Instead, a number of minor characters demonstrate commendable and even, at times, exemplary faith (e.g., 8:2, 10; 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28). For Matthew, pursuing faithfulness (or allegiance) to Jesus is lived out through a distinctive set of values. Being loyal to Jesus means cutting ties of allegiance with one's possessions (6:19–24; 19:21–24) and differentiating oneself from the opinions of others (21:25–26, 46) and even from one's family (10:34–37) and home. Following Jesus is a journey of displacement in the service of mission, as Matthew highlights Jesus beginning his life as refugee (2:13–15) and committing to an itinerant (homeless) existence, which his disciples are to emulate (8:18–20).[20]

Allegiance to Jesus in Matthew correlates with allegiance to God and God's reign—or the "kingdom of heaven" (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), as the evangelist most often refers to it (e.g., 4:17). This focus is captured well in Jesus's words from the Sermon on the Mount: "pursue above all else [God's] kingdom and promised redemption [δικαιοσύνη]" (6:33).[21] In Matthew, out of this allegiance to God as king practices of piety organically emerge—practices like prayer, longing, fasting, and a posture of readiness. The Lord's Prayer provides a model of praying for the kingdom's arrival. Each of its first three petitions accent the desire for God's kingdom to arrive fully in this world:

---

18 Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 338. See Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

19 Donald J. Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader and the Narrative of Matthew 13:53–16:20," *JSNT* 46 (1992): 3–24; Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 101–07.

20 See Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, *Our God Is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012); and Robert J. Myles, *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew,* SWBA, Second Series 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).

21 For this understanding of δικαιοσύνη at 6:33, see Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 72–75.

May your name be recognized as holy,
May your kingdom come,
May your will be done, as in heaven so also on earth (6:9b–10).

Disciples are oriented toward the coming reign of God, and they long for the consummation of God's restoration of all things. Disciples also are encouraged to pray for their daily needs, knowing that God is good and is attentive to their prayers (6:8; 7:11). A sign of authentic and whole discipleship is prayer for one's enemies; by doing so, Jesus's followers show themselves to be imitators of their God (5:48).

Matthew also highlights fasting as a practice that fits the discipleship pattern of longing and praying for the coming of God's kingdom.[22] Just as Jesus's teachings presume that his followers will pray ("when you pray;" 6:5), so he assumes they will fast ("when you fast"; 6:16), although Jesus also teaches that his followers will not fast until he goes away (9:14–17). While it might seem from a contemporary perspective that giving to the poor (the other act of piety included in 6:1–18) fits better under discipleship carried out toward our neighbor (below), these three obligations are often connected together in Judaism (e.g., Tobit 12:8). Anderson highlights the petitionary focus of all three: "fasting was frequently joined to intercessory prayer because it functioned as a means of persuading God to attend to one's cause. . . . Almsgiving has a similar role to play in quickening God's affection and mercy toward a supplicant."[23]

Being prepared or ready is another discipleship motif that connects with allegiance to Jesus and the coming kingdom. This motif comes to the fore later in Matthew, especially in the Eschatological Discourse (Matt. 24–25; see 24:36–41, 42–44; 25:13, 19). Jesus calls his followers to be prepared for his "reappearing" (παρουσία)—an expectation, like prayer and fasting, that is tied to Jesus and to the kingdom, since Jesus's reappearing coincides with the consummation of God's reign at the "end of the age" (24:3). Instead of trying to determine the precise timing of that final day, disciples are to always be prepared by living faithfully and expectantly (25:1–30).

True worship is also a part of a disciple's allegiance to Jesus and to the kingdom. And, while Jesus points his followers to authentic worship

---

22 Each of these practices are to be done for God alone and not to gain praise from people (6:1–6, 16–18).

23 Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 144.

of Israel's God (e.g., 4:10), Matthew indicates that this will involve worship of Jesus himself.[24] The term προσκυνέω can connote either showing great reverence or an act of worship (in either case often accompanied by bowing low before someone), and on Matthew's *plot level* the former connotation often makes a great deal of sense (e.g., 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 20:20). Yet Matthew in his communication with his audience (the narrative's *discourse level*)[25] lays accent on προσκυνέω, by using it in reference to Jesus eight times (more than the combined total for Mark, Luke, and John) and by using it to begin and conclude his Gospel: the magi worship Jesus (2:2, 11) and the followers of Jesus—both women and men—worship him (28:9, 17, respectively). Another important moment of worship tied to discipleship occurs when the twelve see Jesus's mastery over the water and the wind (14:22–33): "Then those in the boat worshipped him and said, 'Truly, you are God's son" (14:33).

A presupposition for each of these orientations or practices of allegiance is an adequate understanding of Jesus, his mission, and what he expects of his followers. The portrayal of the twelve disciples contributes to the Matthean theme of understanding, albeit more often than not as a foil to ideal discipleship.[26] The disciples are at their best when they leave everything to follow Jesus early in the Gospel narrative (4:18–22; 9:9) and rightly identify and respond to Jesus as Messiah (e.g., worshipping him at 14:33; confessing his identity as Messiah at 16:16). They are less able to trust and understand Jesus and the wide scope of his authority (e.g., 8:26; 16:8; 17:20). As Verseput suggests, the "little faith" of the Matthean disciples involves "the unjustified incapacity of the disciple[s] to grasp and rely upon Jesus's inexhaustible power."[27] And the twelve engage in an ongoing struggle to understand Jesus's mission to "give his life a ransom for many" (20:28) and his call to them to "take up their cross and follow [Jesus]" (16:24). That is, they do not comprehend adequately how their own mission and

---

24 On the potential tension of this dual worship focus, see Joshua E. Leim, "Worshiping the Father, Worshiping the Son: Cultic Language and the Identity of God in the Gospel of Matthew," *JTI* 9 (2015): 65–84.

25 The discourse level of a narrative is a heuristic for understanding the (implied) author's interaction with the (implied) reader or *how* the story is told. "On the discourse level, rhetorical devices of various sorts, thematic presentation, and point of view are used to communicate" with the reader; Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 157.

26 For an extended exploration of the portrayal of the disciples in Matthew and its function, see Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*.

27 Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader," 23.

destiny is to be patterned from his (e.g., 18:1; 19:30; 20:20–23). From the view across the whole of Matthew, "the disciples are consistently portrayed as prone to misunderstand and as wavering in their faith."[28]

Yet this portrait of the Twelve does not, on its own, define discipleship in Matthew. Instead, readers are drawn to emulate the disciples when they respond appropriately to Jesus and to distance themselves from the disciples when they misconstrue Jesus and his expectations for them. In this way, Matthew's reader is schooled in discipleship *to understand what the Twelve do not*—that Jesus is the Messiah who comes not to use his authority for his own gain but in his mission of service and restoration, and that all who follow this Messiah must follow this same pattern of service (see below). Matthew's characterization of the disciples then functions as "*an incentive to the implied reader toward ideal discipleship.*"[29]

2. Discipleship as Covenantal Loyalty and Service to Others

Turning from what we might think of as "vertical" discipleship to covenantal loyalty expressed toward others, a number of central metaphors and terms invigorate Matthew's portrait of "horizontal discipleship." I will explore this horizontal area of discipleship under the rubrics of sibling relationships, the servant motif drawn from Isaiah, and the three Torah values highlighted at Matthew 23:23: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Disciples as Siblings. A primary discipleship metaphor in Matthew, as well as in the New Testament more generally, is that of siblings, as brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί). The evangelist in 12:45–50 accents this theme after narrating that Jesus's (physical) mother and siblings come to see him (12:46):[30] "whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, this person is my brother and sister and mother" (12:50). This familial emphasis creates a vision of the disciple as a child of God (e.g., 5:9). And as Pattarumadathil suggests, "in the gospel of Matthew discipleship is viewed as a process of becoming children of God."[31]

---

28 Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 120.

29 Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 130 (italics in original).

30 Much of Matthew's use of ἀδελφός fits in the category of physical siblings; see 1:2, 11; 4:18, 21; 10:2, 21; 13:55; 14:3; 17:1; 19:29; 20:24: 22:24. See 5:47 for a debatable instance.

31 Henry Pattarumadathil, *Your Father in Heaven: Discipleship in Matthew as a Process of Becoming Children of God* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2008), 203. See Jeannine K. Brown, "Disciple, Discipleship, N.T.," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 6:887–89, at 888.

The language of ἀδελφός to reference fellow members of the faith community has already been used earlier in Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount. The focus there is to avoid anger and hypocritical judgment of a brother or sister (5:22–24; 7:3–5). The metaphorical use of ἀδελφός provides a centerpiece for the Community Discourse, where restoration of an erring brother or sister is a high priority (18:15) and forgiveness from the heart is to be lavished on them (18:21, 35). Earlier in the Community Discourse, believers are commended to eschew pursuit of status (18:1–5) and instead to care for those who are most vulnerable and who exist on the margins of the community (18:6–14). These "little ones" (μικρός) may be low in status from a human perspective, but they are of great worth to God (18:10, 14) and so to God's people. As Matthew moves from "little ones" to its superlative "least of these," the importance of believers caring for their faith siblings who are on the margins only increases (25:40).

The image of disciples as brothers and sisters emerges most fully into a familial constellation in 23:8–12. Jesus turns from a critique of status-preoccupied scribes and Pharisees (23:5–7)—Israel's teachers—to a vision of the believing community as a spiritual family with a single father—Yahweh—and a single "master teacher" (καθηγητής)—the Messiah.[32] As for the rest, they "are all sisters and brothers" (23:8); i.e., "they are all equal."[33] This vision for community, in which status distinctions like "rabbi" and "father" are withheld from community members, is strikingly egalitarian within Matthew's context in which the *paterfamilias* held absolute household authority.[34] As Bauckham notes, "Among the new relationships Jesus establishes in the community of his disciples, the renewed Israel, fatherhood is pointedly excluded . . . because it represents hierarchical authority in the family."[35]

---

32 For a discussion of Matthew's use of this *hapax*, in part, to highlight status themes, see Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 207; and Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 288–89. Matthew's final use of ἀδελφός at 28:10 highlights how Jesus himself can be understood as a "brother" to his disciples: "go and report to *my brothers* that they should go to Galilee" (referring to the Eleven at this point in the story).

33 Pattarumadathil, *Your Father in Heaven*, 207.

34 See Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1988) 105–08.

35 Richard Bauckham, "Egalitarianism and Hierarchy in the Bible," in *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 116–27, at 123.

Matthew 20:1–28 also highlights the counter-cultural egalitarian values of the faith community. The parable of the first and last workers in a vineyard (20:1–15) turns on the response of the first-hour workers to the equal payment for disparate amounts of work: "These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, we who have borne the burden of a full day and the sun's burning heat" (20:12). In the aphorism that brackets the parable, Jesus forbids status presumption among his followers (19:30; 20:16; cf. 23:12). Then in 20:20–28, Matthew identifies discipleship with service instead of status, and provides Jesus's own example as the Isaianic servant (see below) as the basis for this kind of discipleship.

> Jesus overturns expectations of what the Messiah would be—from a conquering, imperialist political ruler to a servant of humanity and humble harbinger of the *peaceful* kingdom of God (20:28). Those who follow him into the peaceful kingdom he announces and brings are called to renounce status ambitions to become least and last (20:25–27; 23:8–12).[36]

Discipleship as Servanthood. Another Matthean metaphor for discipleship is service. Given that in the first-century world, servants and slaves were part of the household, this metaphor, like the sibling analogy, fits within the constellation of family or household.[37] A central passage for this metaphor comes in Jesus's teaching in Matt. 20:25–28, arising from the request for highest ranking positions in the kingdom from among Jesus's disciples (20:20–23). Jesus presses against such status preoccupation:

> You know that the Gentile rulers lord it over people and those in high positions exercise their authority over them. It should not be this way for you. Instead, whichever one of you wants to become great must be a servant [διάκονος] to the others, and whichever one of you wants to be first must be a slave [δοῦλος]—just as the son of man did not come to be served but to serve [διακονέω] and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Two important considerations emerge from this passage. First, the theme of service is directly tied to the metaphor of being a servant or a

---

36 Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 335.

37 Warren Carter, *Households and Discipleship: A Study of Matthew 19–20*, JSNTSup 103 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994).

slave (20:24–25; reiterated at 23:11), and this metaphor operates within the sphere of status categories in the first-century world. Much like Jesus calls his disciples to emulate the low status of a child (18:1–5), so here Jesus evokes the role of servants and slaves to indicate that authentic discipleship requires disavowing status preoccupation to pursue caring for and serving others in the believing community (and beyond).[38] Within Matthew's storyline, discipleship as service is exemplified by a number of the story's characters. At 8:15, when Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, she begins "serving" (διακονέω) Jesus. Similarly, Matthew highlights "many women" who watch Jesus being crucified and then notes that "these women had followed [ἀκολουθέω] Jesus from Galilee and had served [διακονέω] him" (27:55). The pairing of discipleship language ("followed") with service at 27:55 suggests that Matthew is using διακονέω language thoughtfully to evoke discipleship themes, both here and at 8:15. The importance of serving for discipleship is confirmed in the parable of the sheep and the goats, where those who had ignored "the least of these" wonder when they had seen Jesus in need and not "served" (διακονέω) him (25:44).

Second, servanthood matters for discipleship because servanthood is crucial for Matthew's Christology. According to 20:28, Jesus's service of giving his life "as a ransom for many" is the basis or comparison for the call to disciples to take on the position of a servant or slave (20:26–27). The motif of Jesus as servant arises from Matthew's deliberate use of Isaiah's servant of the Lord figure across his Gospel (4:17; 8:17; 12:18–21; 17:5; 20:28; 26:28 and various echoes in the passion narrative).[39] The longest citation from Isaiah's servant passages comes in the citation of Isaiah 42:1–4 in Matthew 12:18–21, where Jesus's ministry of justice and compassion for Israel and, by extension, for the nations is identified with the mission of Isaiah's "servant" (παῖς; Matt. 12:18 from Isa. 42:1). Just as Jesus has not come to be served but to serve (20:28), so those who follow him are to become servants of one another and agents of justice and mercy. As Cooper concludes, "following Jesus ultimately has to be following Jesus *in the pattern of the Servant*."[40]

Discipleship Centered on Justice, Mercy, and Loyalty (23:23). In addition to these familial/household metaphors for discipleship of siblings and

38 See Brown, *Matthew*, 209.

39 For a fuller discussion, see Brown, "Matthew's Christology and Isaiah's Servant."

40 Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew,* LNTS 490 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 255.

servants, Matthew draws on a number of central values for his portrait of the ideal disciple. To frame this final set of reflections on Matthean discipleship, we will focus on the cluster of values or virtues addressed in Matthew 23:23, which Jesus refers to as the "weightier matters of the law" and delineates as "justice and mercy and loyalty" (κρίσις, ἔλεος, and πίστις, respectively).[41] We will explore each in turn from across Matthew's narrative.

The importance of justice for discipleship begins with its centrality for Christology: pursuit of justice characterizes Jesus's ministry across the Gospel. Jesus expresses his deep concern for those on the underside of justice from his earliest teachings in Matthew; the fourth beatitude pronounces (unexpected) blessing on those who are hungry and thirsty for justice (5:6; δικαιοσύνη).[42] And in his summary of Jesus's ministry of teaching and healing (chs 5–9), Matthew portrays Jesus as burdened by the crowds who are "distressed and discarded, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). Throughout Jesus's ministry in Galilee, Jesus proves to be an able shepherd, enacting justice by healing and feeding these crowds (8:1–9:38; 14:13–15:39). Matthew's perspective of Jesus as the bringer of justice is clarified further in 12:18–21, in his application of Isaiah 42:1–4 to Jesus's Galilean ministry. Justice is highlighted in this passage and contributes to the portrait of Jesus as a Messiah whose ministry will result in "justice [κρίσις] [being made] victorious" at the end (12:20).

Following this christological pattern, Matthew commends the pursuit of justice as a key discipleship trait, which is not at all surprising given the centrality of justice in the Old Testament law and prophets (e.g., Exod. 23:1–9; Mic. 6:8 [see above]; Matt. 23:23). Justice as a discipleship motif emerges in Jesus's teachings, beginning with the blessing he announces to those are "persecuted because of justice" (δικαιοσύνη; 5:10a), presumably persecuted because they have committed themselves to participate in the establishment of God's justice in this world.[43] Although persecuted, they are blessed because "the kingdom of heaven belongs to them" (5:10b). At Jesus's final teaching moment in Matthew,

---

41 There is an allusion here to Micah 6:8 LXX, where Yahweh's expectations for Israel involve "doing justice [κρίμα] and loving mercy [ἔλεος] and being ready to walk with the Lord your God" (i.e., being loyal to God; my translation).

42 For the sense of "justice" for δικαιοσύνη in the Beatitudes, see Jeannine K. Brown, "Justice, Righteousness," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* 2nd ed., eds. J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, N. Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 463–67, at 465.

43 Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes," 474.

the theme of justice recurs in combination with the practice of mercy (Matt. 25:31–46). Mercy and justice combine in actions of solidarity done by the "just" (δίκαιος; 25:37, 45) on behalf of "the least of these" (ἐλάχιστος; 25:40, 46), including feeding the hungry, welcoming the outsider, and visiting those in prison (25:37–39). This passage "picks up and develops the stress in chap. 23 [v. 23] on the weightier matters of the law"—justice, mercy, and loyalty.[44]

Mercy, like justice, is both a virtue that is to mark a disciple (23:23) and a central trait of Jesus himself: Jesus is a compassionate Messiah. He expresses his willingness to heal a leper (8:3); and Matthew indicates that Jesus is moved to compassion at the cries for mercy (ἐλεέω) from two men who are blind (9:27) and a Canaanite woman who pleads for the welfare of her demon-possessed daughter (15:22). Matthew employs language that accents Jesus as full of mercy across his public ministry (σπλαγχνίζομαι at 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34).

Jesus commends practices of mercy for his followers as well (as at 23:23). He pronounces blessing to those who are merciful (5:7), and twice draws on Hosea 6:6 to emphasize that God's priority is mercy above sacrifice (i.e., purity or Sabbath regulations; 9:13; 12:7), without negating the importance of the Torah's stipulations on either. And in 25:31–46, care for the "least of these" involves acts of mercy and solidarity toward those who are on the lowest rungs of society (25:31–46; see also the motif of Jesus's concern for "little ones" at 10:40–42; 18:6–14). Merciful practices for Matthew include the prioritization of forgiveness. Forgiveness as a communal quality is a divine imperative (6:12–14), and lavish forgiveness is a signal of authentic, merciful community (18:21–35; see 18:27).

Loyalty (and love) is the third Torah value of prominence for Matthean discipleship (23:23). As with justice and mercy, this virtue is christological as well as important for Matthew's pattern of discipleship. The loyalty and faithfulness of Jesus is intimated in God's words of commendation at Jesus's baptism (3:17) and transfiguration (17:5): "This is my son, the one I love; with *him I am well pleased*." This expression of divine pleasure with Jesus is immediately followed by the temptation narrative, in which Matthew highlights Jesus as faithful son in his time of testing in the wilderness (4:1–11). This portrait directly contrasts with Israel in their wilderness wanderings, as the trio of citations from Deuteronomy make clear. The comparison of

44 Dan O. Via, Jr., "Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness in Matthew 25:31–46," *HTR* 80 (1987): 79–100, at 84.

unfaithful son to faithful son has already begun at 2:15 (cf. with Hos. 11:1–2). As Donaldson summarizes, "Like Israel of old, Jesus has been called by God out of Egypt to a life of humble obedience; like Israel, this calling was put to the test in the wilderness. The hope of the story is that, unlike Israel, Jesus will remain faithful where Israel was disobedient."[45] That hope is realized most especially in the passion narrative, where Matthew recapitulates Jesus as faithful to his mission to "give his life" (20:28) in the face of significant temptation to turn back from his God-given vocation (see 16:22–23; 26:36–46, 53; 27:40, 42).

In line with this christological pattern, disciples are to pursue the virtue of loyalty (πίστις; 23:23): loyalty to Jesus and the kingdom (discussed above) and loyalty toward others. Jesus draws from the requirements of the Torah to express how his disciples are to pursue covenant loyalty toward others (e.g., 5:17–48; 19:17–21). And in their relationships, Jesus's followers are to live in such a way that their inner and outer lives are consonant—they are to live with integrity (5:8; 5:43–48). They are to "be complete and whole as [their] Father in heaven is complete and whole" (τέλειος; 5:48).[46] As they do this, they will pursue the greatest virtue—love.

In reality, love provides the culmination of the discipleship values of justice, mercy, and loyalty. Love in Matthew includes love for God (22:36–38; see also 6:24), love for neighbor (22:39–40), and love of enemy (5:43–48). The latter finds its basis in God's own commitments and actions toward all peoples (5:44–45):

> But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, in order that you might be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

While enemy love has its antecedents in the Torah (e.g., Exod. 23:4–5), Matthew presses this ethic further and farther. "By commanding love of even enemy, Matthew presses boundary categories, since love of enemy and neighbor exhausts all human categories; with enemy added to neighbor, there is no one left *not* to love."[47]

---

45 Terence L. Donaldson, "The Vindicated Son: A Narrative Approach to Matthean Christology," in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament,* ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 100–21, at 116.

46 Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 346: "The contrasting picture in Matthew is well represented by the 'hypocrite,' whose inner and outer lives are at odds with one another (e.g., 6:1–18; 15:7; 23:13–33)."

47 Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 346–47.

Discipleship as Mission. A final discipleship category to address is Matthew's focus on mission. As Jesus has been living out the mission of God to announce the "gospel of the kingdom" and begin to enact its arrival in his Galilean ministry (4:23–25). His death and resurrection have accomplished redemption and life for his people. Now, his disciples are called to live missionally as their Messiah has. Living missionally involves pursuing people with this good news of the kingdom ("fish for people," 4:19; see 10:1–8). Disciples of Jesus are to "disciple [μαθητεύω] all the nations" (28:19); in other words, they are to do what Jesus has done as he has called, been with, and ministered with the Twelve. The final words of Matthew's Gospel form the famous commissioning of those who have followed Jesus and are to continue his mission in this world (28:18–20); and these words are deeply connected to all that has gone before in Matthew. Jesus's mission as servant for Israel and the nations now is shared with his disciples who are to serve all peoples by "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit [and by] teaching them to obey everything that [Jesus has] commanded" (28:19–20a). Disciples of Jesus never pursue mission on their own, because it is Jesus's mission that they join and because Jesus goes with them: "And remember I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:20b). "Across Matthew, Jesus's mission is a holistic one that attends to physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of people. Mercy and justice, gospel proclamation and enactment—these are all woven into a holistic mission to disciple the nations into the ways of Jesus (28:19–20)."[48]

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Matthew attends to discipleship narratively—by drawing on what Jesus says and does, by using the story's other characters as either foils or exemplars for his readers, and by highlighting key metaphors, images, and values that are to captivate and come to characterized Jesus's disciples. Those who follow Jesus enter a family, led by Israel's God and the Messiah, in which they are equals—sisters and brothers, children of God. Disciples of Jesus are also emulators of Jesus as servant; they too serve others rather than pursuing status and honor for themselves. Jesus's followers are those who live missionally—they disciple others as they themselves have learned from Jesus. And

48 Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 264.

the values that characterize their life together—that they disciple others into—are justice, mercy, and covenantal loyalty. All this is possible because God has already covenanted with them in the Messiah and because Jesus promises his presence with his people "even to the end of the age."