

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY  
PRESENTS

# RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

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



A SEMESTER COURSE WITH RAY VANDER LAAN

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STUDENT GUIDE

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*RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum*  
*Student Guide*

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# INTRODUCTION

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

*1 John 2:6 (RVL)*



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

But God didn’t stop there.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE— FOR STUDENTS

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

The materials provided with this guide include:

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

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

## LESSON WORKFLOW:

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

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

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

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

## GENERAL TIPS:

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### **OPT FOR THE HARD COPY**

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

### **THINK ABOUT APPLICATION**

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

### **REMEMBER THE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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

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## LESSON 5

# THROW YOUR STONE





## LESSON OBJECTIVES:

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

## SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

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

# INTRODUCTION

(Lecture, 3-5 minutes)

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

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

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

# RVL VIDEO LESSON

(30 minutes)

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

## KEY TERMS:

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

## KEY SCRIPTURES:

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

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

**Matthew 18:21-22**



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

**Genesis 4:24**



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

**1 Samuel 17:45-47 (ESV)**



# GUIDING QUESTIONS

(15-20 minutes)

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

## QUESTION 1

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

## QUESTION 2

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

### QUESTION 3

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

### QUESTION 4

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

# CONCLUSION

(5 minutes)

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

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

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

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

# HOMEWORK

(5 minutes)

Follow your instructor’s directions regarding your homework schedule.

