



# COURSE SYLLABUS

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

*1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

**ONSCREEN TEACHER:** Ray Vander Laan

**COURSE INSTRUCTOR:**

**OFFICE:**

**HOURS:**

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# COURSE GOALS

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

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

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

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

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

## CLASS TIME:

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

## HOMEWORK:

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

## MIDTERM / FINAL EXAMS:

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

## VIDEO LESSON BREAKDOWN:

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

### UNIT 1: JOIN THE MISSION

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

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

## UNIT 2: A REDEEMED PARTNER

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

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

## UNIT 3: JESUS AS RABBI

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

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

## UNIT 4: TAKE HIS YOKE

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

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

# ABOUT RVL

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

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





# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BOOKS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## RESOURCES/WEBSITES

**Our Rabbi Jesus:** [www.OurRabbijesus.com](http://www.OurRabbijesus.com)

**The Bible Project:** [www.BibleProject.com](http://www.BibleProject.com)

**En Gedi:** [www.EnGediResourceCenter.com](http://www.EnGediResourceCenter.com)

# ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

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

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

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