

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
PRESENTS

RVL

DISCIPLESHIP™

THE CURRICULUM

"Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."
1 John 2:6



UNIT 1

A SEMESTER COURSE WITH RAY VANDER LAAN

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INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum
Instructor Guide

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ISBN 978-1-68428-622-5

INTRODUCTION

“Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

1 John 2:6



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 Holy Land experience 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 students 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 Unit 1, 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.

This guide contains everything you need to facilitate the class. Whether you plan to offer the course in-person, online, or as an independent study/homeschool experience, *The Curriculum* is designed to help you bring RVL's teachings to your audience.

If anyone claims to belong to Jesus, they must learn to walk as Jesus walked. Join RVL and his students as you discover what that looks like for followers of Jesus today.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE— FOR INSTRUCTORS

RVL Discipleship: The Curriculum can be facilitated in multiple formats. Whether you plan to offer this course as an in-person class, exclusively online, or in an independent/homeschool context, you'll find tips and advice for running the class model that best suits your situation.

The materials provided with this guide include:

- **Course syllabus**
- The first nine of forty **video lessons** (Unit 1) from Bible teacher Ray Vander Laan
- Nine **instructor 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**
- **Midterm/Final exams**
- **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 by your students from the store on the Focus on the Family website.

INDEPENDENT STUDY / HOMESCHOOL

RVL Discipleship is also conveniently designed to offer as a homeschool course or independent study. Instructors may choose how much or how little prep work they wish to put into setting up the course for their students. Here are some tips for offering this class to independent or homeschool learners.

- **Set up a schedule.** Use the syllabus to outline a schedule for your students to complete each of the forty video lessons.
TIP: You might choose to assign a certain number of lessons per week. You could also set goals by unit, giving your students a deadline for each of the four and letting them choose how to manage their time.
- **Make use of the instructor guides.** If you plan to actively facilitate this course, use the introductions and conclusions in each instructor lesson guide to set up and wrap up each video lesson for your students. Alternatively, you might choose to simply let your students read these on their own. Within the full document, your learners will also find the course syllabus, Hebrew glossary, and map.
- **Decide how to incorporate the guiding questions.** As with the online-only version of this course, you may choose whether to use the guiding questions that are provided in each instructor guide. You might discuss them aloud with your students; have your students answer them independently in journal format; or discard them altogether.
TIP: You might choose to create a set of forms for your students to use for the entirety of the course. You can create forms ahead of time for guiding questions and homework assignments, allowing your students to work their way through the course independently.
- **Schedule homework assignments.** Using the information outlined in the homework section, create a schedule for your students to complete each assignment. You may choose to assign homework on a weekly basis or all at once, letting your students complete assignments at their own pace.
- **Plan for exams.** Your students should complete the midterm exam roughly halfway through the course, after finishing Unit 2. The final exam will presumably be given at the end of the course, after completing the last video lesson. RVL's exams are generally offered on an open-Bible/open-note basis.

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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 students to consider what *their* stone might be.

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

- Have students read the first chapter of *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* 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 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)

Encourage your students to take notes. Make sure the lights are dimmed during the video, but not too dark for students to see what they are writing. If you or your students need a break during the video viewing, consider pausing at the 15:36 time mark (after "Okay, now let's move to our next . . .").

KEY TERMS:

Yadah | to know intimately, through deep experience

KEY SCRIPTURES:

"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)

Instructors may use the following guiding questions to drive class discussion about the video lesson. For online courses/independent study, these questions may be used in the online discussion board of your choice. Instructors may also choose to discard these questions altogether in favor of focusing on the provided homework assignments.

TIP: Review the questions ahead of time, prioritizing the ones you think will be most important for your context and to make sure you have enough time for a good discussion.

QUESTION 1

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

TIP: Remind your students of the "burning coals" lesson. Consider having them take turns reading Romans 12 aloud, focusing in particular on verse 20. What happens when we love those who have wronged us? How do burning coals enter a situation?

QUESTION 2

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?

TIP: If your class is a shy bunch, try to encourage discussion by directing the question to an individual student: "What do you think, ____?" Without judging his or her answer, you can follow up by asking the class, "What do the rest of you think?" If you know beforehand where you want the discussion to end up, this approach can help you steer the conversation in that direction.

QUESTION 3

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?

TIP: Try looking up the phrase “burning coals” in a Bible app, such as BibleGateway. Notice that burning coals are mentioned several times in reference to the tabernacle and throughout the Psalms, as well as other places. How do you see this metaphor for God’s presence being used in these passages?

QUESTION 4

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?

TIP: Think of how you might answer this question. Consider beginning the discussion with your own answer to get your students thinking. If you know some of their interests or passions, ask specific students to imagine how they might throw their stones in their specific situation.

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?

ASSIGN HOMEWORK

(5 minutes)

IF YOU STILL HAVE TIME IN CLASS

Have your students work on their synoptic Gospel or *SFRJ* reading and responses.

