



# THE SELFLESS WAY OF CHRIST

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*Reading Guide*

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DiscipleshipPath.com provides an outcome-based pathway for one on one discipleship. This guided journey through the basics of the Christian faith is a mix of original and curated content created by the church for the church.

DiscipleshipPath.com was created by pastors Phil Wiseman and Megan Koch at Table Church in Des Moines, IA. You can contact them directly at [hello@tablechurchdsm.org](mailto:hello@tablechurchdsm.org).

Table Church exists to invite people to the way of Jesus. We pursue God, create belonging, do justice, and make disciples. Find more discipleship tools at [tablechurchdsm.org/resources](http://tablechurchdsm.org/resources).

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# GETTING STARTED

Many people want to read Nouwen's classic on downward mobility, but quickly get lost in the text. Perhaps the concepts seem too complex, or the writing seems "above" them. We think more people would engage deeply with this book if they could get some help over the first few hurdles.

Most importantly, Nouwen's message leads us into the heart of the way of Jesus, the way of true love, belonging, and self-denial. If we want to thrive as Jesus followers and disciple makers, we must embrace that same way of life. This message matters.

This companion guide is useful for personal reflection as well as 1 on 1 or group discussion. Adapt the following discussion questions for your own needs, and take part in the suggested practices to bring the concepts to life.

# PART ONE

**READ** *The Selfless Way of Christ*, Introduction and Part 1.

**PROCESS** the text using the following discussion questions as a guide.

1. Spend time discussing any part of the reading that impacted you. What phrases, sentences, or ideas challenged or inspired you?
2. Page 14 says, "The basis of the mission of the twelve apostles was not their knowledge, training, or character, but their having lived with Jesus." What does this mean for how we do discipleship?
3. Page 20 says, "No, the spiritual life presents us with a far more radical demand: to be living Christs here and now, in time and history." What does it mean to be a "living Christ?" To what extent do you see yourself as one?
4. What does Nouwen mean by "upward mobility?" How widespread do you think this is in our culture? How about in your own heart?
5. Page 29 says, "The great paradox which Scripture reveals to us is that real and total freedom is only found through downward mobility." What does this mean? Do you really think this is true?
6. "Somewhere deep in our hearts we already know that success, fame, influence, power, and money do not give us the inner joy and peace we crave." How have you seen this to be true in your life?

**THE PRACTICE:** One excellent way to learn self-denial is to serve someone anonymously. Pray for God to give you significant opportunities in the next few days, and then practice downward mobility by serving someone *in secret* in the next week.

# PART TWO

**READ** *The Selfless Way of Christ, Part 2.*

**PROCESS** the text using the following discussion questions as a guide.

1. Talk about any part of the reading that impacted you. What phrases, sentences, or ideas challenged or inspired you?
2. On p. 47 we read, "The gospels depict Jesus on the eve of his death making clear to his disciples that their ministry is possible only because they no longer belong to the world and its ways." What does it mean to "no longer belong to the world and its ways?" What things might we have to give up today in order for this to be true of us?
3. The temptation to be relevant tells us "that we are what we produce" (p. 50). Have you ever measured yourself by what you can produce? How is this at odds with "clinging to Jesus" (p. 53)?
4. "The more insecure, doubtful, and lonely we are, the greater our need for popularity and praise" (p. 57). Ouch! What are some ways that you've been driven by popularity and praise? How might this indicate that there is something deeper that you lack?
5. "Indeed, the search for spectacular glitter is an expression of doubt in God's complete and unconditional acceptance of us" (p. 57). Is God's complete acceptance of you hard for you to believe? If so, why might that be?
6. Page 63 says, "The mystery of our ministry is that we are called to serve not with our power but with our powerlessness." How does serving from a position of powerlessness reveal God to the world?

**THE PRACTICE:** Complete a fast. Not sure how to begin? Check out Table Church's resource, *Introduction to Fasting* from the Ancient Practices Series.

# PART THREE

**READ** Complete Part 3 and the Conclusion of *The Selfless Way of Christ*.

**PROCESS** the text using the following discussion questions as a guide.

1. Talk about any part of the reading that impacted you. What phrases, sentences, or ideas challenged or inspired you?
2. "The discipline of the Christian disciple is not to master anything, but rather to be mastered by the Spirit" (p. 70). If this is true, how does that change the way you view discipleship?
3. Read the paragraph starting at the bottom of p. 74 and continuing onto p. 75. How does orienting our lives by the events in Christ's life (his birth, death, resurrection, sending of the Spirit, etc.) add meaning to the other events in our lives?
4. "Reading the Scriptures is essential for anyone who wants to follow Christ on the road of downward mobility" (p. 76). What do you find are some of the biggest hurdles that keep you from a deeper engagement with the Scriptures?
5. What is the difference between meditating on scripture and simply treating it as a "book among other books" (p. 77)?
6. "If we indeed desire to see God in and through the humiliated Christ...we need a pure heart, a heart free from the 'oughts' and 'musts' of our world" (pp. 83-85). How does prayer free us from the "oughts" and "musts" of the world?

**THE PRACTICE:** Gain deeper awareness of yourself and God by practicing examen prayer nightly for one week. If you've never experimented with the examen, check out Table Church's resource, *Prayer of Examen* from the Ancient Practices Series.