

Downward Mobility

The way of selfless ambition

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BIG IDEA	In a world that climbs ladders, Jesus climbs down. Greatness in His kingdom isn't measured by how high you rise but by how many people you lift.
MEMORY VERSE	"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45
ACTION STEP	Do one significant act of hidden service that no one will applaud, and tell only God.
OUTCOME	I've made one "lower-place" choice that lifted someone else.

The Way of Jesus Read before you meet • about 5 minutes

The only direction Jesus went was down

Everything around us pushes up: more followers, a bigger title, a better house, a higher seat. Jesus went the other way. Though He existed in the form of God, He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant... He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7–8). From heaven to a manger. From a manger to a towel. From a towel to a cross.

Greatness, redefined

When James and John asked for the best seats in Jesus' kingdom, the other disciples were furious, probably because they wanted those seats too. Jesus gathered them and turned the ladder upside down: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43). Later, He knelt and washed their feet (John 13).

Henri Nouwen called this the way of *downward mobility*. It isn't self-loathing or thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. Because Jesus has already given you your identity (loved, chosen, secure), you don't need to climb to prove anything. You're free to aim your ambition at other people's good.

Use your place to lift others

Downward mobility doesn't mean quitting your job or turning down a promotion. It means using whatever position you have to raise others up: sharing credit, mentoring someone, covering the unseen task, choosing the lowest seat (Luke 14:7–11), and giving your best to people who can't repay you.

This is where **Investing in Others** gets practical. Self-denial deals with my desires. Downward mobility deals with my *status*, and turns it into a gift for someone else.

When You Meet about 60 minutes

Who leads: The disciple opens in prayer and leads Connect. The discipler leads the rest.

Connect • 10 min

- Where do you feel the most pressure to climb: work, social media, family, church, even your kids' success?
- How did your forgiveness prayer and daily blessing go?

Read • 20–25 min

Read aloud: Philippians 2:1–11 and Mark 10:35–45

1. List the “downward steps” Jesus takes in Philippians 2:6–8. Which one surprises you most?
2. What were James and John really asking for? What did Jesus offer instead?
3. Paul writes, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). What would that look like in your closest relationships?
4. Where do you instinctively reach for the best seat?

Practice • 15 min

- **Name a ladder. Turn it upside down.** Each person answers three questions:
 - What “ladder” am I tempted to climb? (Recognition, being right, success, image...)
 - Who is one person I could lift up this week?
 - How, specifically? (Share credit, praise them to others, mentor, cover an unseen duty, give my time.)

Pray & Plan • 10 min

- Pray together: “*Jesus, yoke my ambition to Your love.*”
- Confirm the person you’ll lift up this week.

For disciplers: Look for a way to serve alongside your disciple this week: bring a meal, help someone move, set up chairs. Doing it together teaches more than talking about it.

For groups: Don’t share your hidden act of service. That would defeat the purpose! Share instead what the practice revealed in you.

Live It This week's action step

Do one significant act of service that no one will applaud. Don't mention it. Tell only God.

My hidden act of service _____

When _____

Go deeper (optional): Pray every morning this week: "Jesus, yoke my ambition to Your love."

Pass It On within 48 hours

Lift someone up by name this week. Praise them publicly, share the credit, or tell their boss, parent, or friend what they did well.

Five Days with Jesus 10–15 minutes a day

Use **R³** each day: Read, Reflect, Respond.

☐ **Day 1 • Philippians 2:1–11**

Where am I clinging to my rights instead of emptying myself?

☐ **Day 2 • Mark 10:42–45**

How can I serve rather than be served today?

☐ **Day 3 • Luke 14:7–11**

What is the "lowest seat" in front of me?

☐ **Day 4 • John 13:3–17**

Whose feet will I wash, in a practical way, this week?

☐ **Day 5 • 2 Corinthians 8:9**

How has Jesus' poverty made me rich? How can His riches flow through me?

Awareness: Spotlights vs. Lamps

Notice when you reach for a spotlight: credit, attention, the last word, the platform. Ask the Spirit to make you a lamp instead, quietly giving light so others can see Jesus.

Ready to Move On?

- ☐ I did one hidden act of service.
- ☐ I intentionally lifted up someone else.
- ☐ I can name one “ladder” I’m learning to step down from.

When you and your discipler agree these are true, move on to the next session. If not, take another week. That’s growth too.

Sources & Acknowledgment

The original pathway

This booklet adapts and substantially rewrites material from *Discipleship Pathway* (2024) by Rev. Megan Koch and Rev. Phil Wiseman of Table Church in Des Moines, Iowa, used with the authors' blessing. The original identifies its license as Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

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The Colonial adaptation

Prepared for Colonial Presbyterian Church by Pastor Jeff Sparks for the Be the L.I.G.H.T. Discipleship Pathway. This adaptation keeps the original ten lesson themes; adds a Launch session with a gospel foundation and a Commissioning session with a multiplication plan; restructures each lesson around a weekly meeting, one action step, and a five-day reading plan; and draws on Colonial's *Be the LIGHT Abide Guide* (P.R.A.Y., R³, BLESS, and the Abide Plan), earlier micro-course drafts, and Kent Mathews' evangelism training at Colonial (listening, validating, clarifying, and "know, tell, do, and be the story").

Also informed by

Zúme Training (the Model, Assist, Watch, Leave pattern and the emphasis on obeying and sharing between sessions); *Rooted* by Mariners Church (short daily readings and shared experiences); and *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer (one practice at a time, and a rule of life).

Quotations

John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies* (2021). Dallas Willard, on "pitching its message too low." Henri Nouwen, on downward mobility. Robert Louis Stevenson (attributed), on seeds and harvest. The *Didache* (early Christian teaching, 1st–2nd century), on weekly fasting.

Scripture

Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), which is in the public domain. Read the full passages in any trustworthy translation or audio Bible.

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