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FOLLOW ME AS I FOLLOW CHRIST

Nicholas Jackson

The Call is to follow

Jesus is the perfect example of how discipleship works in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus began His ministry, He called others to ***“Follow Me”*** **Matthew 4:19**. He did not call them into a system, an institute, a seminary, nor a school of Theological thought. He called them into a new lifestyle. He called them to follow His example. The word ***“follow”*** in **Matthew 4:19** means to walk behind or *come to the back of* someone or something. We are called to get right behind the King and ***“make His footsteps our pathway”*** **Psalm 85:13**. His promise is that if we follow in this way, ***“I will make you fishers of men”***. Discipleship will change us! We will be made into something different than what we are right now.

They followed

When Jesus called the brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, ***“they immediately left their nets and followed Jesus”*** **Matthew 4:20**. The word ***“followed”*** here is different to the word in **Matt.4:19**. This word means: *to accompany, go along with, go the same way with...being on the same roadway with someone*. [read the Word Wealth in New Spirit Filled Life Bible at **John 13:36**]. We are welcomed by Jesus to join Him on the path that He is going. We are invited to walk the same Way. Discipleship has got to do with being in union on the path together with Jesus and learning the Way to walk, the Way to go, the Way to the Father (**John 14:6**). It is an invitation into the lifestyle of the Messiah.

The People of the “Way”

The early disciples were known as the people of ***“the Way”***. Before Saul became known as the apostle Paul he was looking for ***“any who were of the Way...that he might bring them bound to Jerusalem”*** **Acts 9:2**. Though Saul ***“persecuted this Way to the death”*** (**Acts 22:4**), he ended up confessing, ***“that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers”*** **Acts 24:14**.

Being on this Way causes us to be able to worship God in truth. Discipleship, Jesus’ way, causes us to know God and be able to worship Him! The knowledge of God is found in a **Way!** Jesus, who He is and His lifestyle, is the **Way** to know the Father. There is no other Way.

Getting on the Highway

A disciple of Jesus one day said to Him, ***“Lord, let me first go and bury my father”*** **Matthew 8:21**. Jesus responded to him in a seemingly harsh way, ***“Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead”*** v.22. This disciple was caught between loyalties. To leave Jesus under his own terms was to leave the pathway with Jesus. Jesus told him to ***Follow Me***. In other words, Jesus told him to stay in union on the same Way as Jesus. Many opt out for all sorts of reasons. They get off the road for all sorts of important distractions.

There is a wonderful promise in **Isaiah 35:8**, ***A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness...Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray”***. We are to stay on this Highway with Jesus. If we simply make a decision to stay and keep walking on that way, no matter how difficult it may seem, we will ***not go astray*** and we will not suffer shipwreck concerning the faith (**1 Tim.1:19**).

Finding the true riches

A young rich ruler found Jesus and wanted some assurance of eternal life. Jesus' answer to "*keep the commandments*" (Matt.19:17) finally did not satisfy him. He had been keeping those commandments, so he thought, and there was obviously still something wrong. So Jesus said, "*If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*" Matthew 19:21. Jesus invited this man to leave everything that was hindering him from entering into true life.

Joining Jesus on the road He is on is an invitation out of bondage to the comforts and riches of the world into the true "*riches of the glory of this mystery...Christ in you; the hope of glory*" Colossians 1:27. Discipleship is the Way to have Christ formed in you. It is the Way to having true eternal riches, *treasure in heaven*. Let us go on the journey with Jesus to discover the riches of Messiah together, "*the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*" Philippians 3:8.

THE CALL OF DISCIPLESHIP

A call to learn

When Jesus calls us to follow Him we must take the attitude of a learner if we are to become fruitful and effective in being a disciple, a follower. Jesus said, "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" Matthew 11:29. We are called to *learn* from Jesus. Taking His yoke upon ourselves in learning to walk the same Way as Him while He carries the weight and even does the heavy work. If we have this attitude, discipleship will lead us into *rest for our souls*.

A call to serve

The call into discipleship is a call into service. It is a call into humility and learning to serve the one teaching you. Jesus said, "*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher, and a servant like his master*" Matthew 10:24-25a. Through serving, disciples become like their teachers.

Elisha "*poured water on the hands of Elijah*" 2Kings 3:11. Elisha served Elijah and ultimately became like Elijah receiving "*a double portion*" of the Spirit that was upon Elijah. Timothy, "*as a son with his father served with me (Paul) in the gospel*" Philippians 2:22. Timothy, through his service to the one discipling him, grew into the apostolic ministry himself. Disciples are called to serve.

A call to be trained

The process by which disciples grow to become like their teachers is called "training". In Luke 6:40 Jesus says, "*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher*". The word *perfectly* means: *to arrange, set in order, equip, adjust, complete what is lacking, make fully ready, repair and prepare* [Word Wealth in New Spirit Filled Life Bible Hebrews 11:3].

This word is linked to the word used in Ephesians 4:11-12 which speaks of the five ministries Jesus gave in His ascension "*equipping/perfecting the saints*". Discipleship is a call to be set in order to function in the Body of Christ. It is a call to be adjusted, repaired, prepared and completed. It takes humility to be trained *perfectly*. We need to admit we need some adjustment. We need to receive the ministries that Jesus gave and allow Him to fully adjust us into His Body. Discipleship is a call to be trained!

Jesus told those fisherman, ***“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men”***
Matt.4:19. It is only in following Jesus that we become what He wants. When we follow Jesus, rightly submitted in the Body, then He is able to shape and mould us into ***fishers of men***. He makes us into people that attract others to be disciples.

A call to be fathered

When Jesus was speaking to His disciples on the night He was betrayed He said, ***“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love”*** **John 15:9.** Jesus loved His disciples as a father, even as the Father. To be truly effective in discipleship the ones discipling are to carry the Father’s heart for the disciples and the disciples are to receive those discipling them as fathers.

This is what **Malachi** prophesied would need to happen before the coming of the Lord, ***“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the hearts of the sons to the fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse”*** **4:6.** It is this restoration, through discipleship, that will cause creation, the earth itself, to be delivered from the curse (**Rom.8:19-21**). Discipleship is a call to be fathered.

A call to be friends

The call to discipleship is ultimately to be ***friends***. Jesus finally was able to say to His disciples, ***“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you”*** **John 15:14-15.** Friends are those who no longer need to be told what to do. They simply do what they are commanded out of intimate knowledge of the Master and Father. Servants need to be instructed and commanded. Friends have the commands and instruction written in their hearts and know what the Master and Father are thinking, and they do it. Friends are trusted. Friends are faithful. Friends will not leave when things are difficult. Discipleship is finally a call into friendship with Jesus!

IMITATE ME AS I ALSO IMITATE CHRIST

The goal

Jesus did not call people to go and study in a Bible College as such. He was able to say ***Follow Me***. The apostle Paul also did not invite people into a formal academic Bible Seminary. He was able to say, ***“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”*** **1 Corinthians 11:1.** This is the goal. To have a lifestyle in Christ that you can invite others into. We are to have a way of life in Christ that others can follow and imitate.

Paul was able to say to the saints in **Philippi**, ***“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you”*** **4:9.** That is radical! Paul is saying that ***“If you live the way you saw and observed I live, you will experience the God of peace”***. How was he so confident of this? Because His lifestyle attracted the God of peace. Because of this he could confidently call the Philippians to imitate him and experience the same God as he.

Imitate the apostle

The apostle Paul wrote to the **Corinthians**, ***“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me”*** **1 Cor.4:15-16.** The word ***imitate*** is also translated ***follow*** and comes from a word in Greek ***mimetes*** where we get

the English word *mimic*. This has the sense of copying, imitating or mimicking. Paul, as an apostle, *urged* the Corinthians to mimic and imitate him.

How were the Corinthians meant to do this? The answer comes in the next verse, **“For this reason I have sent Timothy...” v.17a**. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him by receiving Timothy. How does this work? Because Timothy was **“a beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church” v.17b**. Paul had raised a faithful son who *imitated* Paul. If you received Timothy and learnt from him, you would be following or imitating Paul! This is discipleship the Kingdom of God way. It is a lifestyle imparted to the proceeding generations. It is learning the apostles’ *ways in Christ*. God is raising apostles in this time who have a life in Christ that can be followed.

Imitate the apostolic company

Paul writes in **Philippians 3:17**, **“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern”**. The KJV puts it this way, **“be followers together with me”**. We are invited to join in the apostles’ lifestyle of following Jesus and note those walking the same way with him. This is the “apostolic company”. The apostle and those walking the same way in discipleship together. This is to be a *pattern* for the rest of the saints.

As the apostolic company develops, the rest of the congregation of Jesus is also invited to join and be *followers (imitators) together with them*. We have had many brethren testify of seeing this reality when they visit among us. They see a committed company of disciples fleshing out the gospel together. We are to imitate the way of life of the apostolic company.

Imitate the apostolic team

The first letter to the **Thessalonians** was written by **“Paul, Silvanus and Timothy” 1 Thess.1:1**. It is then written, **“And you became followers (imitators) of us and of the Lord” 1 Thess.1:6**. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were an apostolic team, functioning together, that could be imitated. Their conduct together, their lifestyle, their unity in Christ, their zeal for the gospel were all to be followed by the Thessalonians. Many speak to us also of seeing this reality when we send teams to nations and places around Australia. They note the way the team functions together and they see a pattern, an example to follow.

The result of following the apostolic team and the Lord was, **“so that you (Thessalonians) became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” v.7**. As they imitated the apostolic team, they became a congregation that could be imitated by other believers. This is the goal. This is discipleship in the Kingdom of God. A lifestyle imparted, **“we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” 1 Thess.1:8**. We are to imitate the apostolic team so we can be examples to others also!

Imitate the elders

We are exhorted in the book of **Hebrews**, **“Remember those who rule [a better translation would be “lead”] over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow (imitate), considering the outcome of their conduct” Heb.13:7**. We are to imitate the faith of those who lead us. We are to receive those whom God has set in our lives as leaders in His congregation and imitate their faith.

If you are concerned that this is talking too much about following men then remember it is written that we should do this ***“considering the outcome of their conduct”***. In other words, see the fruit that is coming forth in their lives. If it is obviously good fruit then imitate their faith. The ones who lead us should not draw people to themselves but should be the ones who have ***spoken the word of God to you***. The way of discipleship is to the Word and involves imitating the faith of those who have fleshed out the Word in their lives. Jesus’ way of discipleship does not change, as the next verse records, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” v.8***. We are to imitate the elders!

Imitate the churches of God

The **Thessalonians** were also commended by the apostles, ***“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus” 1 Thess.2:14a***. In this context they imitated those churches having ***“suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans” v.14b***. We are to learn from and imitate how congregations have developed and grown in Christ so we can draw strength from each other and grow in the same manner. We are to imitate the apostolic congregations in Christ Jesus!

Finally, Imitate God

Imitating the apostle, the apostolic company, the apostolic team, the elders and the apostolic congregations is all ultimately leading somewhere. Finally this way of discipleship in the kingdom of God leads us to, ***“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children” Ephesians 5:1***. In the context of **Ephesians**, Paul has just been writing about putting on, ***“the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness” Eph.4:24***. The goal of discipleship is finally to make us like God, to bear His image and likeness (**Rom.8:29**).

As we give ourselves to being disciplined, learning to follow Jesus, receiving the ones He sends us, imitating their lifestyle and ways in Christ, we will finally be found revealing God to the world! Be exhorted to develop a lifestyle in Christ that others can follow.

Discipleship in the kingdom of God looks like this:

Follow me as I follow Christ!