

## Follow Me

S. I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college:

"Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

Over the last few weeks we have studied about being a disciple as we focused on Jesus' challenge to His disciples in Luke 9. Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God. Jesus told His disciples what it meant for Him to be the Messiah (9:22). Then he began to tell them what it meant for them to be His disciples. Jesus said, "***If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.***" (Luke 9:23). So far we have seen that if we would come after Jesus (be His disciples), we must deny self and take up our cross daily. Now Jesus says, **FOLLOW ME.**

### Follow Me Is Jesus' Call to Discipleship.

It's the same instruction that Jesus gave to many of His disciples when He first called them. Less than three years before, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew were fishing, casting their net into the sea. Jesus walked by on the shore of the Sea of Galilee as they were working. Jesus saw them and said to them, "**Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men,**" (Mark 1:17). And Mark tells us, "**They immediately left their nets and followed Him,**" (Mark 1:18). When Jesus gave a similar call to James and John, Mark says, "**they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him,**" (Mark 1:20). When Luke tells the same story of how Jesus called these men he says, "**So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him,**" (Luke 5:11). Later, when Jesus was in the city of Capernaum He saw a man named Matthew (or Levi) sitting at his tax booth. Jesus simply said to this tax collector, "**Follow Me,**" (Luke 5:27). And just like the fishermen, the account says, "**So he left all, rose up, and followed Him,**" (Luke 5:28). John tells us in his gospel that Jesus found Philip and said the same to him, "**Follow Me,**" (John 1:43).

These were not the only people to whom Jesus gave the call, "**Follow me.**" These were the ones who obeyed, who took the challenge, who followed Jesus and became His disciples. Some of those whom Jesus called did not follow, they disobeyed the call and failed to become disciples. Later in this ninth chapter of Luke Jesus give the same call to another man, "**Follow Me.**" But this man gave an excuse to turn away, "**Lord, let me first go and bury my father,**" (Luke 9:59).

When we get to Luke 18 we find the man we have come to know as the rich, young ruler. He came to Jesus wanting to know what he must do to have eternal

life. After talking to this young man about his life and God's commandments, Jesus says to him, "**You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me,**" (Luke 18:22). But when the young man heard Jesus say this, "he ... went away," (Mark 10:22) and "became very sorrowful, for he was very rich," (Luke 18:23).

"**Follow me**" was the call of Jesus to those who would be His disciples. It still is. Jesus is still calling men and women, boys and girls to be disciples. And the call is the same, "**Follow me.**"

### **What does it mean to follow Jesus?**

#### **1. Following Jesus Means to Walk in His Footsteps.**

When Jesus' disciples followed Him it meant they literally *walked where Jesus walked*. I imagine seeing Jesus walking down the dusty roads of Galilee with twelve guys and a few women tagging along behind. Someone has said that you could tell a disciple by the dust on his feet. A disciple followed so close to his master that his feet were covered in the dust kicked up by his master.

**Following Jesus means to walk where He walked.** Think about where Jesus walked. He walked from village to village proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom. He went to those who were sick and hurting and healed them. He went into the homes of publicans and sinners. Ultimately Jesus walked the road to Calvary, the road of suffering and death, of sacrifice and service.

Disciples not only walk where the master walks, but they also *walk the way the master walks*. I remember several years ago when my son was just about five, we went to Florida for a few days of vacation. One day when we were walking on the beach I looked back and Ricky was intentionally stepping in the footprints I left in the sand. So, I started walking in weird ways to see if he would follow. We made a game of it. I took baby steps, then giant steps, straight steps and side steps, I jumped a few and went around in circles. We laughed as he tried to copy my crazy movements. To follow me he had to try to walk the way I walked.

By the way, Dads and Moms, your children are walking in your footprints whether you realize it or not. Same thing for you grandparents. Be careful how you walk. Someone may be following you.

**Following Jesus means to walk the way He walked.** Of course we know from the Bible that the way Jesus lived His life was perfect. He never stumbled, never fell, never got off course. So does this mean that I must live a perfect life to be a disciple? Well, let me tell you, that is the goal even if it is not the reality. In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, "**Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,**" (Matthew 5:48). And Peter writes, "**but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy,'"** (1 Peter 1:15,16). Perfection is the goal of the disciple; to be like Jesus; to walk the way He walked.

Can we do it perfectly? No, not all the time. We all know from the Bible and from experience that for us, that's impossible. But I must make a conscious decision to follow Jesus. It means you look for the footprints of Jesus. It means you choose to obey God with every step. God is able to judge us on the basis of our desire and our direction not just on our actual performance. He sees our heart.

There will be times when you do it better than others. There will be times when you stumble and get off track. But Jesus does not give up on us in those cases. Think about Peter. He stumbled, fell, and got track when he denied three times that he even knew Jesus. But when Jesus appears to Peter after the resurrection He gives Peter the same call He gave at the beginning. In John 21 we find Peter again at the Sea of Galilee, fishing. Jesus meets him there and renews Peter's call. Twice Jesus says to him, "**Follow Me**," (John 21:19, 22).

When we stumble into temptation, fall into sin, and stray away from Jesus' footprints, Jesus calls us again; forgives us again; restores us again; and we get up to follow Him again.

## **2. Following Jesus Means Leaving Some Things Behind.**

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John they were fishermen. He challenged them, "**Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.**" (Mark 1:17). The gospel says they immediately *left their nets* and followed Him (Mark 1:18). Same thing for James and John; *they left their father and the hired hands with the boat* (Mark 1:20). Same thing for Matthew; he left his tax office, "**he left all, rose up, and followed Him,**" (Luke 5:28). These disciples had to leave their homes; leave their jobs and businesses; leave their families; and leave their old life behind.

In I Kings 19 there is a great illustration of discipleship. Elijah, the national prophet, was coming to the end of his ministry. God told him to choose a man named Elisha to be his disciple and his replacement as the prophet. Elijah goes and finds Elisha hard at work on the family farm, plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. Now, Elisha probably came from a wealthy family with a large farm because we see him supervising eleven other men as he plowed with the last pair of oxen (for you farmers, it's like having a tractor that with a 12 bottom plow—that's no small tractor!).

The prophet Elijah walked up to this farmer and threw his prophet's mantle over him (I'm not sure what exactly a mantle looked like, probably some kind of outer garment, but if the prophet threw his mantle on you it meant you were being called to be a prophet too). We can see that Elisha knew this because he ran after the prophet and said, "**I will follow you,**" (1 Kings 19:20).

But before he left his father's farm to be Elijah's disciple he first did something very important. He had a barbeque for his family. Now, why would that be so very important? Elisha slaughtered his oxen and used the wooden yoke and plow as fuel to cook the beef.

Do you see what Elisha was doing? When you burn your plow and eat your ox you don't ever intend to go back to farming. He was cutting ties with his past so

he wouldn't be tempted to go back to that life. It was his way of showing he was totally committed to following his new master.

That's what Jesus' disciples did. They left all to follow Jesus. That's discipleship—forsaking all to follow Jesus.

Do you have some things in your life that are keeping you from following Jesus? Keeping you from walking the way Jesus walked? Some of you guys may need to burn your pornography; you may need to delete the phone number or email address of that person who could take your love away from your mate; you may need to leave behind whatever it is that is keeping you from following Jesus.

### **3. Following Jesus Means I Don't Blaze My Own Trail.**

Back to Luke 9, in verse 24 Jesus says, "**For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.**" This is a very important statement of Jesus. All four gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark (8:34-35), Luke, and John (12:25) record Jesus saying this. In Matthew (10:39-39; 16:24-25) Jesus says it twice; and in Luke (9:24; 14:26-27; 17:33) He says it three times. No other saying of Jesus is given such emphasis in the gospels. It must be important if He repeated it so often.

Let's read how Jesus says it in John 12:25, "**He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**" And right after Jesus says this He again ties it to following Him, just like He did here in Luke. In John 12:26 Jesus says, "**If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.**"

Jesus says that the one who follows Him will *serve Him* and will *be where He is*. Following Jesus means I must be where He is, I must be a servant. I cannot follow Jesus and just do my own thing, go my own way or live my own life. I must serve Him. I can't follow Jesus and blaze my own trail at the same time.

You have probably heard of Florence Nightingale. Although she was raised in great wealth and privilege in England, at age 17 she experienced the call of God to help suffering people. She became known as the founder of modern nursing. While serving during the bloody Crimean War, she treated the wounded even after she contracted a deadly illness herself. She was the first female to be awarded the British Order of Merit. What made her life so exceptional?

Although not all her beliefs were orthodox, she was a serious disciple of Jesus Christ. She wrote in her diary, "*I am 30 years of age, the age at which Christ began His mission. Now no more childish things, no more vain things.*" Late in her life she was asked to explain how she had accomplished so much, she said, "*I can give only one explanation and that is this: I have kept nothing back from God.*"

A disciple will walk the way of the Master; He forsake all and follow Jesus; she will not blaze her own trail. A disciple will follow the steps of Jesus as He served and gave His life as a ransom for many.