

Follow Me

Lesson 5

FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus calls all of those who wish to be His disciples to follow Him.

FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 4:19

And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 4:18–22

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

Mark 2:13–14

13 And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Luke 9:23

23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

CULTURE CONNECTION

1,046,593

One of the most well-known athletes in our time is Tom Brady. Since 2000 he has played quarterback for the New England Patriots. Before New England drafted him to join their team, 198 other players were chosen ahead of him in the NFL draft. Every one of those teams and their owners are wondering how many Super Bowl wins they would have if they had drafted Tom Brady.

But people are divided on him. Some people love him; some do not even like him. Some love him enough to want to know where he is at all times. They want to be close to him, maybe to get his autograph or to take a selfie with him. One such fan designed a website that can tell you exactly how many yards you are from Tom Brady at any given time—howfaramifronttombrady.com. Right now, according to the website, I am 1,046,593 yards away from him.

I do not know how accurate the website is. I doubt Tom Brady wears a GPS tracker, but if someone wanted to find him, doubtless this website could be used as a starting place. Some people are not content just to follow him on social media; they want to actually follow him around. But for a fan, that is standard operating procedure. If a fan of something as trivial as sports can become so intent on tracking a mortal man, how much more should followers of Jesus be intent on seeking Him? Jesus is calling all of us to follow Him, but following Him is more than just checking in on Sunday and giving online on Wednesday. Followers want to know where He is. They want to see Him. Look like Him. Talk like Him. Act like Him. Be like Him. Followers want to be near Him, so they can be with Him.

Tom Brady may be 1,046,593 yards away, but Jesus is just one prayer away.

OUTLINE

I. JESUS CALLED HIS DISCIPLES

- A. Follow Me
- B. I Will Make You Fishers of Men

II. ALL WHO WISH TO BE DISCIPLES MUST FOLLOW HIM

- A. Follow the Same Path
- B. Mirror His Actions

III. TO FOLLOW IS TO OBEY

- A. Leave Behind
- B. Take Up the Cross

IV. TO FOLLOW IS TO SERVE

- A. Serve God
- B. Serve Others

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Most couples will say “I do” to that momentous question asked by the pastor before God and gathered witnesses. Young men and women spend months agonizing over invitation patterns and reception venues. Eventually they will find the limit to their wedding funds and begin to make choices on what to keep and what to abandon.

The couple will sign one piece of paper and say the simple three letter pledge. Life

changes as they know it. The loving couple has no idea what the future holds, but they make the commitment of a lifetime. Faithful couples will adjust and grow together through the birth of children, career changes, unemployment, and care for each other during the aging process. Two little words served as the pledge to love until “death do us part.”

Disciples experience even greater long-term consequences when they accept Jesus’ call to follow Him. With joy we accept the offer of remission of sins and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. We discover spiritual giftings and the wonder of new life in Christ. Disciples learn the journey is much more than that initial decision to repent. We learn of the many dimensions of spiritual maturity that await us.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. JESUS CALLED HIS DISCIPLES

Jesus’ first sermon called all humanity to repentance and announced the dawning of a new age (Matthew 4:17). The rest of Jesus’ life served to expand, support, and illustrate this foundational thesis statement. That simple sermon will eventually condemn all who chose to find their own way and reject the restoration opportunity provided by the Creator who entered His creation to restore all things to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19).

This new Rabbi possessed greater authority than any other speaker. John the Baptist, the strangely dressed prophet who baptized followers in the Jordan River, proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God (John 1:36).

A. Follow Me

Peter and Andrew knew of Jesus from their time following John the Baptist. (See John 1.) Perhaps they had seen Jesus’ baptism, heard the thundering voice, and experienced the wonder of a dove settling on Jesus’ shoulder. They could feel the electric current of change in the air. They had no idea how much impact the young Rabbi’s simple command, “Follow me,” would make on their lives (Matthew 4:19).

Jesus called the brothers to follow Him. He did not call them to a school of philosophy or a body of authoritative texts. Jesus called them to an ever-deepening relationship with Him. They could not know the path obedience would take. They could not know the unmeasurable awe of witnessing a person brought back to life or the avalanche of pain resulting from denying their teacher in just a few years.

Students can master texts by memorizing, debating, and teaching. But a relationship with the Savior can never be mastered. Paul pointed to this reality with the heart cry, “That I may know him” (Philippians 3:10). That knowledge could only come through pursuing Jesus’ power and suffering. Rather than simply reading a text, the siblings followed the Incarnate Word.

» *What is the difference between being invited to have a relationship with Christ and being called to know the Bible?*

B. I Will Make You Fishers of Men

Jesus found Peter and Andrew while they were casting their nets. Jesus chose these ac-

tive men. The men did not choose Him, as other students chose their teachers. Following Jesus was too uncomfortable and uncertain for some who self-selected to become disciples (Matthew 8:19–20). Jesus did not follow conventions of putting family first (Matthew 8:21–22; 12:46–50). The other brothers, James and John, also left their father and family in the boat as they followed Jesus.

Jesus always chose people from where they were and transitioned them toward full living. He promised only one reward to the brothers; they would become fishers of men. They understood fishing. They knew men. Now they would learn the wisdom, heart, and actions needed to collect people for the Kingdom. Jesus would change the metaphor for farming folks. Rather than fish for men, they could respond to the Master's commission to go into the harvest. Both farmers and fishermen would draw freely from their places of labor and let the Master do the sorting later (Matthew 13:24–30, 46–50). They could love and care for the field in such a powerful way because they were free from separating good from bad—they made all welcome.

II. ALL WHO WISH TO BE DISCIPLES MUST FOLLOW HIM

Some people find peace by knowing their steps are ordered by the Lord. They trust the Lord will stoop down and move their shoe in the right direction if they start to make the wrong step. This pre-Christ perspective celebrates the gifts of following God's laws. For those who follow Jesus, the principle goes much deeper. Rather than trusting the given law, disciples rely on walking with the Lord.

A. Follow the Same Path

By definition, disciples follow Jesus. They cannot do otherwise. Disciples trust the one who allocates talents and responsibilities (Matthew 25:14–30). They trust the one who distributes spiritual gifts to the body in accordance with His divine will (I Corinthians 12:11–12).

Following Jesus sets the direction. Nothing describes this daily choice better than the call to repentance. New converts make a 180-degree turn from following their own will to surrendering to Christ. This decision will set the course for subsequent repentance moments. As we die daily, our repentances will become course corrections. Disciples repent of all thoughts, actions, and emotions that are out of sync with the Teacher. Living as a disciple helps identify those areas of misalignment, confess them to fellow travelers, and receive the impact of fervent prayer (James 5:16–20).

Following Jesus sets the pace. The Master calls for constant, daily walking. The race requires patient runners rather than sprinters (Hebrews 12:1). Keeping pace with the Master enables disciples to engage in highly demanding moments of spiritual work as well as seasons of rest. Trusting Him to be the pacesetter helps us to ask the right questions (Acts 1:6–8), pray the right prayers, and use our spiritual gifts at the right time. We do not rush to the finish line; we let Jesus set the pace.

Finally, following Jesus sets the purpose. The early disciples had to learn why they were called. They thought they were in on the ground floor of a new kingdom and should be rewarded as such (Mark 10:35–40). That thinking came from the world around them rather than from following Jesus. They learned their purpose was to make disciples wherever the Lord led them. The purpose was clear. All the disciples had to do was follow.

» *Why do we sometimes need correction in our direction, pace, or purpose?*

B. Mirror His Actions

Mirroring Jesus' actions represents a daunting task for disciples. Nothing should inspire disciples more than Jesus' declaration of those who believe on Him, "Greater works than these shall he do" (John 14:12). Jesus' ministry caused disciples to marvel and understand Jesus had come from the Father (John 5:36). These greater works would come through prayer, following Jesus' commandments, responding to the Spirit, and living by Jesus' love principle (John 14:13–21).

Mirroring Jesus' actions begins with accepting a new identity in Jesus. Like Nathaniel, we may ask, "What good comes from our people?" Nathaniel had no evil or guile in his spirit, but he could not see the capacity of being spiritually productive (John 1:45–51). His city had not produced a great prophet or leader. Why would that change now? Following Jesus reveals the potential He places in us (John 15:16).

Following Jesus develops new thought and action patterns. For example, accomplished musicians will study a new piece of music, learn how the masters have played it, and practice. Practice will begin with a much slower tempo than will be performed in the concert halls. The actions must become engrained in the mind and fingers.

Some disciples struggle with inactivity while others struggle with hyperactivity. Disciples correct their behavior by following the Teacher.

» *What is something specific the Spirit is calling you to do to bring you closer in line with His actions?*

III. TO FOLLOW IS TO OBEY

King Saul is not the only one who thought sacrifice would make up for a lack of obedience. Paul had to inform the Roman church, as well as the church today, that willful disobedience to God's will was incompatible with the life of grace. (See Romans 6.) Grace has broken sin's control and provided forgiveness for occasional sin. But disciples do not follow the Teacher just to experience forgiveness. Grace also empowers us to live as agents of reconciliation in the world. Such a call requires obedience.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

A. Leave Behind

Obedience begins with self-denial. This foundational work of grace sets the trajectory for following Jesus like nothing else. The disciples' call required them to leave their nets, boats, parents, and tax table. Jesus taught His followers that they could not have dual citizenship. They must choose which master they will serve (Matthew 6:24).

Leaving is not always easy. Some who considered following Jesus left the journey before they even got started. They were not willing to leave family, property, or dreams that had just come true. Leaving our old lifestyles forces us to continually reject the common sense or collective wisdom of our culture. Even good rules must be put aside for the lifestyle

Jesus desires (Matthew 5:38–48). We must indeed put away the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:16–21) and even our childish understandings of faith (I Corinthians 13:11; Hebrews 5:12–14).

Fortunately, grace does not give up. Jesus went out of His way to invite Peter for a reconciliation conversation (Mark 16:7). He also called Peter to dinner—a place where the disciple could truly discover that his love for Jesus was deep enough to let go of some things, so he could feed Jesus’ sheep (John 21:12–17).

B. Take Up the Cross

Following and obeying Jesus requires taking up a cross. This startling image came on the heels of great revelation. The cross call did not come with the invitation to drop the nets. Personal crosses had to be connected to a deeper revelation of Jesus’ identity. He is both the Christ and the suffering one. He would gracefully lay down His own life. He would inform His followers that they must do the same.

Jesus handled His cross by seeing what was ahead and despising the cross’s shame. Obedience requires disciples to take similar steps. We must “press toward the mark” as a people who have not yet attained our goal. Counting all things as loss enables disciples to look forward without shame or fear (Philippians 3:13–15).

Jesus trusted the Father’s will. He knew the Spirit would quicken Him from the grave after three days. Since He knew He would live again, momentary death held no shameful loss or lasting stench of decay.

IV. TO FOLLOW IS TO SERVE

To follow Jesus is to serve like Jesus. God’s redemptive plan unfolded by sending a suffering servant rather than a messianic warrior. By serving, Jesus fulfilled the human mandate to tend to God’s creation. Jesus served those around Him, whether it was a child in need or disciples with dirty feet. Following Jesus always requires the posture of a servant to God and to others.

A. Serve God

God created people with needs for secure living, belonging, and purpose. The Garden of Eden provided the perfect place for humanity to flourish. Then sin broke everything. No longer could people joyfully live in service of the Creator without fear. Following Jesus opened the door to freely serve and flourish again. Going through the door of serving God and others requires faith and ongoing spiritual maturity.

Salvation represents so much more than a ticket to eternal life. Jesus told His followers that new power would come with the Holy Spirit. Followers receive spiritual giftings as individual members of the body and as the body as a whole. (See I Corinthians 12; Romans 12.) Serving God starts by recognizing spiritual giftings.

Stewards freely serve by holding their master’s goods in trust. They seek to live worthy of the master’s trust. Stewards have only one evaluation standard: faithfulness (I Corinthians 4:2). Living in the shadow of the Cross removes competition and the pressure to succeed or prove self-worth. Stewards know they are lavishly loved by God and seek His pleasure alone. Other goals fall short of a follower’s potential. Loving and serving God becomes visible as we live out the second of the great commandments—loving others as we love ourselves.

» *How can we live out the second of the great commandments?*

B. Serve Others

Scripture boldly recounts the lives of men and women of faith. Hebrews 11 reveals the catalog of faithful people as well as chief failures. All manner of vices spring from biographical sketches of those listed. The New Testament tells a similar story. Paul called himself chief among sinners. Peter denied his Master and could have easily lost the Kingdom keys. By being restored to God through Christ, disciples reorient their lives from self-centeredness to living on behalf of others.

Peter's life provides wonderful snapshots to grasp the magnitude of disciple transformation. Peter went fishing in self-pity. When the Lord did not live up to Peter's expectations, Peter shamefully denied his friend. Yet Jesus called Peter again. This recall centered on loving Jesus by serving the Shepherd's sheep. Peter did not get sheep of his own; he would only find purpose and value by using his gifts to bless other people.

Peter wanted to know if John would have to pay the same stewardship price (John 21:21). He had not yet learned the pleasure that comes from giving up personal prerogatives to follow Christ (I Peter 2:16–25). By the end of Peter's life, he had a more mature perspective. He encouraged fellow elders to fulfill their stewardship responsibilities for the right reasons. If they would reject all forms of pride and serve others with the humble mind of Christ, they would gain the opportunity to cast all anxiety on their Lord (I Peter 5:1–7).

» *How does serving others impact our anxiety?*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Disciples serve in many ways. Jesus included caring for children, visiting the sick and those in prison, giving water to the thirsty, and casting out demons. James called the church to go beyond well wishes of "be warmed and filled" and actually do something about the need. James and Paul both believed the servant role included hearing each other's confession and praying (James 5:16–18) as part of bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1–2). Tabitha shared the love of God by making garments (Acts 9:35–36).

All followers have gifts to share. They love the one who called them so much that they follow His example. Following Jesus prepares disciples to serve others.