

First Things First Week #1: Follow

Intro to this series

You don't want to get things out of order. First things first they say. If something is intended to be done first, then it must be necessary for what comes next. The order isn't randomly decided, like **who kicks first** in a game of kickball.

- Directions in putting together furniture.
- "Shoot, ready, aim" doesn't really work.

Church attendance is declining in America. Much like it did in Europe decades ago. **Churches are being closed.** So what do we do about that? We start some new churches.

Disciple comes before church. You make disciples, then you need a church.

We need to establish what a disciple is so that we can start there and then we can look at what to do about churches.

We move into Acts, where the church begins to multiply with the foundations of understanding first things first.

If you were to **boil down what the Bible says** about being a Christian, it is one word. It's disciple. If you don't like that word, try this one; **apprentice.**

A disciple/apprentice is someone who would have **attached him or herself to a teacher or Rabbi**. This disciple would **spend time listening** to the Rabbi, **watching the Rabbi**, and **aligning his life with what the Rabbi teaches and the way the Rabbi lives**.

What Jesus taught can be summarized in this phrase. This is what we use to challenge ourselves here at Eagle Ridge Church of God. **A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and is committed to Jesus' mission.**

We start with understanding what a disciple is and a disciple is someone who follows Jesus.

Let's look at one of the **clearest examples** of the first disciples of Jesus following him. **I mean literally following him.**

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee,^[a] great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. ² He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³ Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon,^[b] its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

⁵ "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets

down again." ⁶ And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! ⁷ A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

⁸ When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." ⁹ For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. ¹⁰ His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" ¹¹ And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus. Luke 5:1-11

We aren't going to dig deep into this story because its power is in how simple it is. It's a story about following Jesus. There are two times in this story when they follow Jesus. Jesus leads or directs, and they follow.

Sometimes we use words or phrases all the time without really defining what they mean. We use words like love that mean almost anything. When a word means almost anything, from how I feel about Buffalo Wild Wings, to a college football team, to my wife, to my kids, to the one who died for me, then it no longer means anything. Love is what I say it is. Love is what is convenient for me in the situation.

It's like that with the phrase "follow Jesus". We hear it and shake our heads yes to that being a good idea, but what it actually means to do it varies greatly. That

phrase has been used often to describe people with little evidence.

Or, it has been substituted for phrases like being saved, a Christian, church goer, or a believer. Those can be pretty vague but when you really look at following Jesus, it's pretty simple. Following means following.

- To go after.
- To head in the same direction as.
- Travel behind.
- Go after in order to observe or monitor.

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Following is not a metaphor for something I feel.

- Much like love, becomes a feeling when it was always intended to be an action, a covenant.

Following is obedience

This is not a word we like as Americans. We think our kids should do it but we don't like to do it. It sounds very primitive and restrictive.

Let's look at the simple exchange between Peter and Jesus on the boat. ⁵ "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." Luke 5:5

It didn't make sense to keep fishing. It wasn't logical. They were fisherman. Jesus was a Rabbi/teacher. His other job was a carpenter.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.
Philippians 2:12-13 NIV

- Information alone cannot transform us.
- Following is something you do.
- **The default Gospel of the American church** teaches that you have to agree to some religious facts and then you are saved.
- Jesus let people walk away, even if they gave the correct answers about who he was. Mark 10:22

Following is continual alignment.

- Christ living his life through me.
- What in my life is not aligned to the way Jesus lived and loved?

Following is a willingness to change direction.

“Now go out a little deeper...”

- Repentance we view as a one-time thing when we make a decision for Jesus. It is an about-face.
- Not just one time.
- From something wrong to something right.
- From something good to something better.

Following is proof of trust.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" ¹¹ And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus. Luke 5:10b-11

"Do you trust me? Then drop those nets."

- Sounds like a pretty big change of direction. It won't be the last one for these former fishermen.
- Sounds like a career change.

Jesus puts this act of dropping their nets in very profound terms. **If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.** Mark 8:35

Hanging onto the nets at that point would have been the same as hanging on to their lives and that would have caused them to lose their lives.

Do you trust me? Then give up your right to self-determination. But that's the cornerstone of what we think it means to be human. It's the cornerstone of our culture as Americans. **We are the captains of our own ships.** The problem is, our ships are sinking and we don't even know it.

Sterling Gatlin..."Mary do you trust me? I'm retiring. That step led him around the world with the Gideons.

Following is not optional for a disciple.

- You cannot separate conversion from discipleship.
- False gospels always have discipleship as an option.
- **It is one of 3 imperatives of the gospel, our responses to who Jesus is, and why he came.**

²⁷ And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Luke 14:27-28

Here's Jesus again **letting people walk away** if they want to.

There were two times in this story where the disciples followed. It didn't have anything to do with their thinking being right, their theology being right. Actually, they didn't really know who Jesus was yet, but they followed.

The first was when they let their nets down one more time after much futility. **This wasn't a huge life changing decision.** He didn't ask them to go to Africa.

What would it mean for me to let down my nets again?

Is there something in God's word that is simple that you need to obey? You've convinced yourself that you don't have to.

The second time was when they left their nets. This one is bigger.

What would it mean for me to leave my nets?

Is there something you need to walk away from in order to go where Jesus is going?

Use these two questions as your response to Jesus asking you to follow him. Take a step, just one, and see what happens. And it really doesn't matter if you have all or any of the right answers first. Just follow.

Let's sit in silence for a moment so that we can hear when Jesus calls us to follow him.