



**FOLLOW ME
(Sermon)**

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Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20

When we talk about the nurture and retention of church members, we often focus on the negative instead of the positive. How to *prevent* people from leaving. How to *close the back door* of the church.

But is this really the answer? Jesus once said that if you focus on saving your life you'll lose it, but if you lose your life you'll save it (see Matthew 16:25). Instead of focusing on how to keep people, we should focus on making disciples. Disciples have a living, practical faith in Jesus. Disciples are active in the mission and message of the church. No need to close the door to keep disciples in the building because they don't want to leave anyway. In the words of the apostle Peter, "To whom shall we go?" (John 6:68).

This is why the key to nurture and retention in the church is to focus on the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:19... "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . ."

[The King James Version translates Matthew 28:19 as "teach all nations." From *matheteuo* – math-ayt-yoo-o – form of the greek word (*mathetes*) that means disciple. So, to "make disciples" of all the nations.]

You will be hard-pressed to find anything as critical for Christians to clearly understand as the concept of discipleship. Our understanding of discipleship will determine the answer to two vital questions:

- 1) What am I to be?
- 2) What am I to do?

What am I to be? A disciple. And what am I to do? Make disciples. So my understanding of a disciple will determine what I will be and what I will do! And not only does it provide an identity and purpose for me, but it defines the identity and purpose of the church – because the church is nothing but a collection of disciples and its mission and purpose is to make disciples! So I want us to take a little time to think about discipleship today.

Now the first thing I'd like us to consider, that I believe is vital about the concept of discipleship, is that to be a biblical disciple is more than just being a student or a learner as we commonly think of it. First of all, you can be a learner all by yourself. I could study the stars or any other aspect of nature all around me and be a learner. I can learn by observation of just about anything. But that wouldn't make me a disciple. To be a disciple requires that you have a teacher. It suggests that you need someone else. But even this is not enough of a distinction between a learner and a disciple. To be a learner is to absorb and understand what someone else *knows*, but to be a disciple is to become what someone else *is*. I learned a lot from my algebra teacher in High School, but I certainly didn't want to be like him. He was kind of strange! But the biblical concept of discipleship is that you have such respect for your teacher that you not only want to know what he knows but you want to become like him in every way.

Luke 6:40... The goal of a disciple is to become like his teacher.

There are lots of self-learned people in the world who have independent goals that serve as their motivation for learning. But a disciple is not independent. In fact, a disciple only has one goal – to be like his teacher. As for what that is or how he will get there – he recognizes that only his teacher knows that. And that may sound weak to the proud and independent spirit of this world, but it is a fundamental requirement for being a genuine Christian. To be a biblical disciple starts with an admission that I am weak and all the determination and intellect I can muster won't help me. I have to surrender my ego and pride and give up. I have to acknowledge that I am a sheep – and I need a Shepherd to lead me home. This self-*distrust* is at the heart of genuine discipleship.

And unlike any old learner, who may learn his intellectual knowledge from nature or observation or books, the disciple must at some point learn from his teacher, because his goal is not just knowledge but to become like his teacher in character. So the disciple/teacher relationship is the heart of what it means to be a disciple. You can learn something without a teacher, but you can't be a biblical disciple.

And this is why, as you read about the life of Christ, you find something very obvious and yet very important.

Do a search on the word “disciple” and when you see its use in the gospels you discover something very interesting. It's in almost every chapter! Why do you think that is? The answer is actually quite obvious. The disciples were simply always hanging around Jesus! A student goes home after class and if he is a good one may study on his own... but a disciple follows his master wherever he goes. He wants to see how he prays... how he studies... how he talks... how he looks... how he relates to people... how he reacts to this situation or that one.

Mark 1:16-20... “Follow Me.” Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't just say, “Follow my teachings?”

[Examples of following someone around that can become uncomfortable after a while: (1) Older and younger siblings; (2) Interns or training someone at work]

At some point, following someone around can have an obsessive feel to it... and it can be invasive to the privacy of both teacher and student.

Rich Young Ruler – Mark 10 and Luke 18 – Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and come follow Me. It isn't always easy to make yourself accountable to Christ like this rich young ruler was being asked to do.

Luke 14:33... Forsake all or you “cannot” be My disciple.

Here is what I believe is missing in the concept that many have of what it means to be a disciple of Christ today. It isn't something that you can pick up and leave off as seems convenient. Jesus doesn't say to you, “Follow My teachings” but “Follow Me.” This means more than going to class and then going home – in other words, it means more than going to church and then taking off our religious hat until next week.

2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6... “Lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ... should shine on them.” What? Why wouldn't anyone want the light of Christ to shine on them? Sometimes walking close to Christ—as He calls His disciples to do—shines an unwanted light on the secrets of our lives.

John 3:16-21... Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light... lest his deeds should be exposed.

Becoming and making genuine disciples is the best way to improve our membership retention rates. But being a disciple doesn't come without a cost. We must be willing to let go of our secret lives and to be honest and transparent with Jesus. There is no hiding from the Savior when you make the commitment to follow Him wherever He goes... when your life is devoted to becoming like Jesus. You can't be a Christian in public and live a different life at home. Because in order to become like Jesus, which is the goal of every disciple, you need to keep Jesus before you wherever you go.

Will you commit today to living an undivided life of following Christ? Will you fully submit your heart and life to Jesus today? Will you respond to the call of Jesus to come, “Follow Me”?

Prayer