

Helping Others Follow Jesus

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STEWARDSHIP MOMENT: **WHY?** Asbury is not about “Attendance, Buildings and Cash.” While numbers, facility and budget are important – every number is a living soul. But these are NOT our primary focus on what we’re trying to achieve here. We want to “meet your needs” but that’s not what we are ultimately about. We want to be an influence on the City of Tulsa in helping people get education, employment, health care; but that’s not what we are ultimately about. We want to influence our world politically and stand for matters of social justice – but that’s not what we are ultimately about. The measure of the effectiveness of our church must be 2-fold:

#1.) **Am I Following Jesus?** #2.) **Am I Helping Others Follow Jesus?**

If we Follow Jesus and Help Others Follow Him, we’ll deeply care about the things that Jesus cares about.

Following Jesus means we will: ***For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*** Matthew 25:35-36

SBM + Lebanon

In February we are looking at these 4 words: “**HELPING OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS**” This is **why** Asbury exists. Today’s emphasis is on “**FOLLOW.**” WE must be **FOLLOWERS** ourselves. It’s possible to pray, attend worship, give our time and money, serve and even talk about the faith w/o following Jesus. His fiercest critics did all of these things but they weren’t Jesus followers. To Follow Jesus means to put Him 1st in our lives. It means to move out of the **KINGDOM OF SELF** into the **KINGDOM OF GOD**. It also means we help others follow Him, too. We personally follow Jesus AND we help others follow Him is what it means to be a disciple.

Feb. 19 “Helping Others Follow Jesus” **Mark 1:16-20**

*As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once (Greek “**euthus**”), they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

3 things:

#1.) We think of the disciples as **POOR FISHERMEN**; but they were small business owners. They were probably making a good living. James/John were business partners w Peter and Andrew (Luke 4:5-10). Though “Pa Zebedee” was left running the business, he still had some “hired men” to help him. That denotes some financial means.

#2.) The Gospels of Luke and John explain that these men were **PREVIOUSLY** acquainted with Jesus before they “left their nets” (their livelihood) to follow Jesus. (John’s gospel, in fact, seems quite different in the way in which they initially followed). These seeming discrepancies aren’t major issues –like trying to harmonize the stories of witnesses. This seems more logical than thinking that the men saw Jesus for the first time ever that day and out of the clear blue, followed. Some people may believe/commit immediately but some need more time, more evidence of God’s love and grace toward them, more evidence of His power.

#3.) Being a **DISCIPLE** was not unusual in those days. A disciple would leave his family to study and follow the ways of their teacher (rabbi]. They studied not only to learn what their teacher **knows** but to become the type of man their teacher is.

However, there were some **DIFFERENCES/UNIQUENESS** in Jesus’ call of his disciples:

A.) The **NUMBER** of references to “disciple” and “disciples” in the New Testament is stunning. In the Old Testament “disciple” appears once and “disciples” (plural) is found once. In the New Testament “disciple” appears 28x and “disciples” is found 266x. Just on the numbers alone, you see this is a VERY important topic in the New Testament.

B.) **HE** invited them. The other rabbi’s waited for their followers to come to them. Jesus tracked his disciples down. And he didn’t track down “the best” from our standpoint. The only one with potential seemed to have been Judas Iscariot. The others were people with a past or were marginalized (tax collectors; fishermen, etc.)

C.) He invited **WOMEN**. They were especially important and prevalent in His ministry.

D.) **MIRACLES** or “signs” accompanied His teaching. He didn’t just talk or have ideas, all kinds of unbelievable things happened. People were healed, multitudes fed, the sea was calmed and you heard the voice of God. If you had met Jesus, you would have met the most compelling person who has ever lived.

2 additional “Mark” texts about Following Jesus (we begin a “ReMARKable” sermon series in Lent):

Mark 2:14 *As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

Levi is a tax collector. He was colluding with the enemy, the Romans, who were occupying his country. Levi was despised by his fellow Jews. Tax collecting was done by greedy people. You would have hated this man, too. The Pharisees certainly did. When they saw Levi was a disciple they gave Jesus a hard time about having "tax collectors and sinners" for disciples. Levi's name changes, too. He becomes "Matthew" (though probably not the one who wrote the Gospel of Matthew). Following Jesus doesn't happen because we are "good" people. Peter told Jesus to "get away from him because he was a sinner." You are loved – just as you are. You have an invitation to follow Jesus, too. Jesus calls people in different ways. There's some mystery in this - we don't have to have it all figured out ahead of time. We BEGIN WHERE WE ARE. Problems/Pain/loss are often fishing ponds.

Mark 8:34-35 *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

On the one hand, you are invited just as you are. On the other hand, be aware, there is a **condition** of following – it costs. Following Jesus will cost you time and money. We all follow something or someone. When you find Jesus, you want to follow Him. Following Jesus is very different from following ourselves. We are trying to align with the Kingdom of God, not our own Kingdoms. When we follow, it's a gigantic reversal. We want to exalt ourselves – Jesus said to humble ourselves. We want to be 1st but Jesus said, "Be last." We want to find ourselves: Jesus said: Lose yourself." We want to be Greatest. Jesus said, "Be least." But salvation comes in following Jesus rather than following yourself: our sins are forgiven, eternal life, and purpose in this life.

The great astronaut, John Glenn, had some great quotes. "**As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind – every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder.**" "**If there's one thing I've learned in my years on this planet, it's that the happiest and most fulfilled people I've known are those who've devoted themselves to something bigger and more profound than merely their own self-interest.**"

The Pearl of Great Price **Matthew 13:45-46** *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."*

My primary calling in life is not to be a LEADER – but to be a FOLLOWER. Being a follower is my core identity. Everything does not rise or fall on me or any other human being. It is all about Jesus.

Let me state it simply: #1.) Jesus is our Leader #2.) We are His Followers

The goal of the Christian life is to Follow our Leader.

To "Follow" is a verb – an action word. It's not passive. It's something we do. It's to get on the road. It's traveling – it's a trip, journey or pilgrimage. You've got to love Mark's gospel because he's always talking about people getting on with things "Immediately" (the Greek word is "**euthus**" - his favorite word). "At once, instantly."

The truth of the matter is, my following hasn't always been as it should have been. There have been periods in my life when I did really well; like I've been running, or at least speed-walking with the Lord. At other times I've been more of a spiritual slug. "Dawdle, linger, loiter, meander, stroll and wander" might describe my walk. Because I am a Jesus follower does not mean that I am Jesus. Nor does it mean that I always have it all together. I've grown in some ways and I've been stuck in some ways. While I have leadership responsibilities, I am not the Good Shepherd – I am no different than any other Christian – I am a follower. As we travel together with Him, like those original disciples, over the course of a lifetime, we'll gain, grow and improve.

How can we be involved in "Helping Others Follow Jesus"

Our responsibility = to follow. Jesus' responsibility = "to make us fishers of men." Learn about Jesus. Study your Bible (with others, too). Pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Be with other Christians. Talk to people. Share your story. We aren't Jesus so we don't have to have all the answers. Invite. Andrew told his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah." Forgive. Jesus met people where they are. Help them on a path to discipleship, or providing them with helpful resources. Most of the time the way we HOFJ won't be done in this building.

The lame man couldn't go home until he GOT UP, picked up his mat and walked. The disciples couldn't follow Jesus until they GOT OUT of their fishing boat to be disciples. Levi couldn't follow until he GOT UP from his tax collecting table to pursue a new life. Zacchaeus, another tax collector, couldn't follow until he GOT DOWN from the tree he'd climbed to see Jesus. Jairus' daughter couldn't return from the dead until she GOT UP from her death bed. Lazarus couldn't be unwrapped from his grave clothes until he came walking out of the tomb. Saul on the Road to Damascus couldn't lie on the ground forever after being blinded by the light – he had to GET UP and go meet Ananias before he could be healed so he could become Paul. You've got to GET OUT of the Boat. You've got to GET UP off your mat! You've got to walk out of your cave. If we want to follow Jesus we've got to do something. We've got to respond. We can't just carry on with business as usual. Jesus of Nazareth is passing your way.

There's a cost of following – leave your nets. But there's also a greater benefit. There's a positive invitation – “I'll make you more than you are now. I'll give you a greater future.” It's not a sense of guilt/loss rather than gain.

We can't help others until we are followers ourselves. Are you? Have you transitioned from living in your own kingdom to living in the Kingdom of God. It begins with the awareness that “You Are Loved” right here and right now. God knows everything about us – and still loves us anyway. We must recognize our need. We all have limitations. We must recognize that God has done something about it. The most compelling person who has ever lived has walked the face of the earth to bring us Good News. He didn't just talk about it – He went to the cross and died – our sins were transferred to Him upon that cross. He was dead and buried. But on the 3rd day, He came walking out of the tomb. He ascended into heaven and has given us the Holy Spirit and the church. And we can follow Him today. We all begin in different places, but this is the Pearl of Great Price. This is what we need to find forgiveness, eternal life and purpose on earth. This kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is what Jesus brought to us. We must open our heart to Him and receive Him by faith. Believe in Him – trust in Him – and He will save us from our sin.