

Two Vital Lessons We Must Learn

John 1:35-51 • September 25, 2011

If someone were to ask you if you're a follower of Christ, what would you say?

Being a follower of Christ may mean one thing to you and something quite different to someone else. So today I want us to look at the very first followers of Christ and zero in on two vital lessons we MUST learn from them.

We spent most of this past summer looking at "The Next Step," what it means to follow Christ in the 21st century. We emphasized the fact that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, He always has a next step for us – something new.

Perhaps it's a new opportunity to serve/ a new habit to form/ a new attitude to develop. Whatever it is, following Jesus always means change in the lives of His followers. He shows us what to change and then He gives us HIS ability, HIS power to make that change.

That's how Christ works in the lives of His followers today. It's how He worked in the lives of His followers while He was here.

Amazing, isn't it? People have been following Jesus for over 2000 years! Men and women from every nation/ culture/ people group – all following the same person, Jesus Christ.

Today, I want us to take a look at John's account of the very first followers of Jesus. What he tells us teaches us two very important lessons about WHAT a follower of Christ looks like, whether they live in Africa, Asia or America – whether they lived in the first century or the twenty-first century.

Before we go any further, let me give you some background. Our text begins on the third day of Jesus' earthly ministry. Remember how John begins his gospel in the same way the Bible begins? Genesis 1:1, "in the beginning"? Then the chapter continues to tell us what God created on each day. Day 1, day 2, day 3.

Well, John continues to follow the pattern of Genesis 1 by telling us what happened on day 1, day 2, day 3, of the ministry of Jesus.

In verse 35 of chapter 1, we're at day 3. And, according to John's count, by the time the sun had set on day 4 of Jesus' ministry, He had five disciples: Andrew, John, Peter, Phillip, and Nathanael—the very first followers of Jesus Christ.

The number of followers would grow very quickly and soon, out of the large number of those first followers, Jesus would choose twelve to be His apostles. He would pour His life into them because they were the foundation of His church, the new House of God in God's Plan for the Ages.

But, before we go any further, let me ask and answer two questions.

First, why would Jesus choose only TWELVE disciples? Why not twenty or thirty?

Well, I believe He did so for a practical reason. When you read the lists of the apostles' names, you find in each one that Jesus had divided them into three teams of four, with Peter, Philip and James as the team leaders.

This organizational structure made it much easier for Jesus to lead and teach. And since the group was always on the move, along with hundreds of other followers, I believe it also made their ministry much more efficient and effective.

But I also believe He chose twelve for symbolic reasons. Remember, originally there were twelve tribes in Israel, so these twelve apostles were symbolic of Israel's replacement in God's plan.

A week before He died, Jesus would finally reject Israel for repeatedly rejecting Him and He would then replace Israel with His church as God's witness here on earth. And, remember, the twelve apostles were the foundation of His church.

This leads to my second question: Why have followers in the first place?

Well, in Mark 3:14 (turn) Jesus Himself answered this question. This is important to see, because WE are His followers in the 21st century. So what He says about His followers then certainly applies to us NOW.

Mark 3:14 actually records the moment Jesus organized His church by calling out the twelve apostles and having them assemble with Him. (ek – kaleo)

Mark 3:14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach,

First, Jesus said that He did this so that the twelve might "BE WITH HIM."

What's the best way to learn about someone? By BEING WITH THEM. Remember how John started his gospel and the letter of 1 John? "I saw Him/

talked with Him/ spent time with Him – I was WITH Him, so I KNOW Him. I know what He's like: FULL of grace and truth."

Being a follower of Jesus means BEING WITH HIM – spending time with Jesus. How do we do that in the 21st century? By spending time in God's Word and in prayer. By being here on Sunday, at Bible Study on Wednesday.

You can't grow close to someone you don't know. And you can't know them unless you spend time with them. You can know ABOUT them, but you will never KNOW them unless you spend time with them.

The second reason Jesus said He appointed the twelve was so that "He might send them out to preach." That's what the word "apostle" means. "Apo" means "away" and "stolos" means "sent."

So, after spending time with Him, Jesus was going to send them away to preach His message. This is the beginning of what we call the "Great Commission" that Jesus later gave these same men after His resurrection. Remember? Just before He returned to heaven, He gathered them as His church and gave His authority to preach the gospel, baptize and teach.

Well, God originally gave this commission to Israel. As Isaiah 49:6 says, God had called Israel to "...be a light to the Gentiles...to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth."

But Israel didn't obey God. Instead of taking God's salvation to the world, they kept it to themselves. Now, after centuries of repeatedly giving the Jews opportunities to repent and obey, God is preparing to replace them with the church Jesus will start while He's here.

So, to begin teaching them this important truth, Jesus chose TWELVE, the same number as the original tribes of Israel. He then organized them into His church to fulfill the original function of the original 12 tribes of Israel.

So, with all this in mind, let's read John 1:35-51.

John 1:35 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

38 Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"

39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

40 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

42 And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

49 Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

So, what lessons can we learn about following Jesus from these very first followers of Christ? And why are they so vitally important? Let's take a look.

1. First, a follower of Christ spends time with Jesus.

John 1:35 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Verse 37 says that when John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" two of HIS disciples left and followed Jesus. As I told you last week, this made John really happy, because that meant he was doing his job.

God had prepared him and called him to point people to Jesus. So when two of HIS disciples left him to follow Jesus, John the Baptist knew he was succeeding in what God had called him to do.

40 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

Verse 40 tells us that one of these two disciples who left John the Baptist to follow Jesus was Andrew. The second of the two was John, the writer of this gospel.

By the way, this is the first of many indirect references to John that we'll see in his gospel. He never identifies himself by name and usually refers to himself as "the disciple Jesus loved."

In any case, Andrew and John asked Jesus where He was staying and Jesus invited them to come and see, and they did. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and John and Andrew spent the day with Him. I imagine they talked late into the night.

Well, those hours spent with Jesus was all it took for them to believe. From then on they followed Jesus. I mean, that first day led to three years—and then their entire lives. And here's the vital lesson they teach us: Following Christ is built on TIME—TIME spent with Jesus.

Later in chapter 8, Jesus would say this about being an authentic follower.

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Notice there are two groups identified here. Believers and disciples. And the two are VERY different. You can be a believer and NOT be a disciple.

You're a believer because you believe. But you're a disciple, a follower, because you STAY in God's Word.

You're not a disciple of Christ because you SAY you are. You're a follower of Christ by spending TIME with Him. Being a disciple isn't just spending an hour with Jesus on Sunday. It's 24/7.

Being a believer doesn't mean you're a disciple. Too many Christians only START a relationship with Jesus, but they don't stay with Him. They trust Christ as Savior, but over time, the new wears off and they don't STAY in His Word.

TRUE followers abide. And look at one of the rewards! We discover the truth and it sets us free!

You ever wonder why some Christians live just like people who don't believe? They talk like them, live like them, never do anything in their church, they just gripe and complain about what's NOT being done when they're the very ones who should do it.

You see, they haven't discovered the truth. They haven't been set free. They're still bound by old, selfish attitudes and habits because they don't spend TIME with Jesus. They may be believers, but they're NOT disciples.

And let me say this. If someone comes up to you and gripes about something in your church, don't just stand there and listen. That's being a coward. Be bold in the Lord and tell them in love to stop griping and start serving.

Understand that their griping is an indication that their relationship with Jesus is stagnant. They're NOT following Jesus. They're NOT growing in grace and knowledge. And let that be a clue to you to begin to PRAY for that person, because we ARE commanded to pray for each other. Aren't we?

Let me say it again. You can't be a follower of Jesus unless you know Him. And you can't know Him unless you consistently spend TIME with Him.

Jesus invited people to follow Him in order to BE WITH HIM.

That's why authentic followers of Christ spend TIME with Jesus. We let His Spirit guide us as we read and study His Word. We spend time with Him in prayer. We spend time in His presence in worship.

These are spiritual disciplines God has given us to help us deepen our relationship with Jesus and that's how we learn to be more like Him.

Sadly, too many Christians look at prayer and reading the Bible as simple activities. "Church" is a place they go on Sundays instead of God's place for them to learn and serve. They believe if they just DO these things they're pleasing God. That's just not true.

The only one they're pleasing is themselves. And, sadly, they deceive themselves into thinking that DOING these things makes them a Christian that God's proud of. And that's just not true.

God didn't give us these as activities to DO. They are DISCIPLINES. That means we have to work at making them a regular part of our life. They are disciplines that help us spend time with Jesus so we can know Him better.

And as we do, Jesus teaches us how to respond to life's trials and tribulations. His truth sets us free!

He empowers us to resist temptation. His truth sets us free!

We learn to pray more effectively and we find ourselves talking to Jesus all the time. In those conversations—in this deepening RELATIONSHIP—Jesus tells us what to SAY and what to DO. His truth sets us free!

And, little by little, we become more and more like Him. No wonder spending time with Jesus is such a vital lesson we MUST learn.

// So, what else can we learn from these very FIRST followers of Christ?

2. A follower of Christ has a desire to tell others about Jesus.

How do we know that? Well, the first thing Andrew did after he met Jesus was to find his brother and tell Him all about Jesus.

40 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus.

Philip did the very same thing. After meeting Jesus he immediately went to his friend Nathanael and invited him to come and see Jesus.

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

These first followers of Christ show us that a genuine encounter with Christ will give us a desire to tell others. And the better we know Him, the deeper that desire will be.

In John 4 we meet a Samaritan woman who'd spent years AVOIDING people. Now, suddenly, she's running into town telling everyone, "Come, see a man Who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?!" (John 4:29) Why such a dramatic change? Because she met Jesus and now she had to let everyone else know, too.

// So, on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate YOUR desire?

Thousands of surveys taken around the world indicate that approximately 98% of Christians do not regularly tell others about their Savior.

And thousands of surveys also indicate that 70% to 90% of persons who join any church in America come through the influence of a friend, relative or acquaintance.

In his book "Unchurched Harry and Mary", Lee Strobel makes the following observations about the 55-78 million adults in our nation who don't go to church. His comments are based on work by the Barna Research group and the Gallup poll.

Observation #1 - Harry and Mary have rejected church, but that doesn't necessarily mean they have rejected God. 91% of American women and 85% of men say they pray.

Observation #2 - People are morally adrift, but secretly they want an anchor. They are looking for something to believe in that will give their lives a real center.

Observation #3 - They don't just ask, "Is Christianity true?" Often they ask, "Does Christianity work?"

Observation #4 - Harry and Mary don't want to be somebody's project, but they would like to be somebody's friend. Mechanical witnessing will usually not reach them, but a one-on-one relationship will.

I share these observations so that you will see that people in your circle of influence: co-workers, neighbors, family members—they really DO want to hear the good news Jesus has told you to share.

They want to know God. They don't realize that; they just want something solid to build their lives on. And we know WHO that is.

They want to hear your testimony about how Christianity WORKS – the difference Christ has made in your life. So, they're open to what you have to say.

YOUR friends, YOUR coworkers, YOUR family need to hear about your RELATIONSHIP with Jesus. They need to SEE your relationship with Jesus.

// So. How is your relationship with Jesus? How close are the two of you? How much time do you spend together every day? When was the last time you talked? How familiar are you with His Book? How well do you recognize His voice?

It's important to honestly answer those questions, because time with Jesus—or the lack of time with Jesus—shows. The people around you know. And the closer they are to you, the better they know.

All Andrew and Philip did was go to someone they loved and say, "Come and see!" And it's only as you begin a relationship with Jesus and continue in that relationship that YOU will have that same desire in your heart.

// So. If someone were to ask you if you're a follower of Christ, what would you say?

Are you a follower of Christ? Or just a believer? Whichever you are, remember this: You are as close to Jesus as you want to be. But you don't have to stay where you are. You don't have to stay as you are.

Perhaps we need to close our time together by praying the prayer David prayed:

Psalms 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.