

The Jesus Way / **JESUS CHRIST DISCIPLEMAKER**
Follow Me: The Way of Growth
Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11

One day Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It is still very early in his ministry, soon after he preached in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth and turned the water into wine in Cana. About four months earlier he had invited those first wanna-be disciples – Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael – to “come and see.” “Spend a little time with me,” Jesus urged, “and see if I am not truly the ‘lamb of God,’ the promised Messiah as John the Baptist announced.”

Now, as he walks by the Sea of Galilee, he sees two of those same disciples – Andrew and his brother, Simon (called Peter) – fishing in the shallow waters along the shore. You see, after these two disciples “came and saw” (as recorded in John 1), they went back to their fishing. Apparently, the “Simon and Andrew” commercial fishing fleet was no small business. It had grown into a lucrative enterprise that fully supported these two men and their families.

Now Jesus sees them again and calls out “Come, follow me! And I will turn you into fishers of men.” Amazingly, and seemingly without hesitation, these two – Andrew and Peter – leave their nets behind and follow Jesus.

Then Jesus goes a little further up the beach. There he sees the two sons of Zebedee, James and John. Actually, the “Zebedee and Sons Fishing Company” was in partnership with Andrew and Peter. Working together they were quite successful. Their nets are worn from the large catches and several other hired men have now been brought into the enterprise. James and John are mending those well-worn nets when Jesus comes along and gives a similar call, “Come and follow me!” Amazingly, they too – just like Andrew and Peter – leave their profitable business behind and follow Jesus.

I wonder how their Dad, Zebedee, felt about losing his two sons? Off they go, following this Jesus who walks by. One day his sons are with him, the next day they’re gone, following this radical prophet and miracle-worker named Jesus.

From what we know of Zebedee and his wife, Salome, they were very supportive of this decision. In fact, Salome is mentioned later as accompanying Jesus herself during his ministry in Galilee (Mark 15:40). And it seems that the profitable family business venture provided on-going financial support for Jesus and his band of followers for the next couple of years.

Fast forward several days, or maybe even several weeks. We’re not quite sure how long, but we do know that sometime later Jesus is once again walking along the same shore of the Sea of Galilee. His popularity continues to grow and people are pressing in on him from every side. They are anxious to hear the Word of God.

Jesus notices two empty boats along the water’s edge. And near the boats are some fishermen washing their nets. Why, it’s Peter! Apparently, Peter had followed, but not for long. Or maybe for Peter, fishing was no mere job. It was an addiction! He just couldn’t pull himself away from

those fish! We're not sure of the motivation, but it's clear that Peter was back fishing again and now washing his nets by his empty boat.

Suddenly, Jesus steps into the boat and asks Simon Peter to push the boat out a little into the water. After all, there needed to be some crowd control. So, letting the crowds stand on the shore, Jesus sits in typical rabbinical fashion and preaches to the people from the boat.

After speaking to the crowds, however, Jesus turns directly to Simon and says, "OK, Simon, here's what I want you to do. Let's go out where the water is deeper. There you let down the nets and you're going to catch a lot of fish."

I can only imagine what is going through Simon's mind at this point. After all, what's a carpenter-turned-itinerant preacher doing telling a fisherman how to fish? "But Jesus this is just too much. Your counsel shows that you know very little about fishing. This is day time. Fish are caught at night. You're telling me to go to the deep water. The fish we're after are caught in more shallow water. And to top it off, the fish just aren't biting right now. We worked hard all night long and didn't catch a thing. And then there are all these people watching. I'll be the laughing stock of the crowd. They're going to think I've gone loony! But Jesus, if you say so, we'll try again."

Simon had seen Jesus' miracles. And his better judgment told him that Jesus just might be about to work another miraculous sign in this situation. So Simon and his colleagues take Jesus at his word. They move out into the deeper waters, let down their nets and ...it's unbelievable. They catch so many fish that their nets begin to tear! They shout to their partners for help...most certainly James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They bring their boat alongside and soon both boats have so many fish in them that they are about to sink. No room to sit, no room to stand, just fish, fish, fish everywhere.

Simon Peter suddenly realizes the significance of what has just happened. "The One who called me a week or so ago, saying 'follow me,' is not just a carpenter's-son-turned-prophet. No, this is the master of nature, even of the universe. Even the fish obey him!"

At that, Simon Peter falls at Jesus' feet...yes, right there in that boat. Right on top of all those fish! "Oh sir, please leave us," he cries out. "I'm too much of a sinner for you to have around."

Maybe Simon is convicted over the fact that, having been called once, he had gone back to fishing again. We don't know. But we do know that he is brought to a point of recognizing that, apart from Jesus' help, he could never be a true "fisher of men." And so Jesus consoles Peter: "Don't be afraid!" And then also confirms the previous call: "From now on, you will be fishing for the souls of men!"

With this added confirmation, Andrew and his brother Peter, James and John left all and followed Jesus.

"Follow me," is Jesus' call to these men. The previous call was "come and see." That is, explore my claims. Discover who I am. See for yourselves. This was the call of John 1. And it took place nearly four months prior to this time.

In the meantime, however, Jesus' disciples had moved from mere spiritual curiosity to conviction. Oh, they were yet far from all-out commitment. But they were relatively convinced – or were becoming convinced – that this Jesus was truly the Lamb of God, the Messiah, that John the Baptist had said he was. They had seen Jesus turn the water into wine, heal the royal servant's son, cleanse the temple in Jerusalem and share the water of life with the Samaritan woman. They had also seen Jesus invade the very gates of hell by healing the demoniac.

They were now ready for the next step. They were now ready to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus says to you and me, "Follow me, and I will make *you* a fisher of men...i.e. of people."

"Follow me." This is the way of growth as a disciple.

To follow, however, demands *humility*. After all, a disciple is a "learner." And you cannot be a learner until you realize that there is much to learn. Humility.

This seems to be the point that Jesus is getting across to Peter. "Peter, let's go out into deeper water and let down your nets for a catch!" The whole scene is quite humorous. An expert fisherman taking lessons from a carpenter! And what is worse, the crowds are watching!

But Jesus wasn't yet finished teaching Peter the importance of humility. As Peter saw this miraculous catch unfold before his very eyes, he falls on his knees crying out, "Go away from me. I am a sinful man!" But with compassion Jesus looks on him and says, "Peter, don't be afraid."

Peter seemed to feel that as a sinner he had no chance with God. But Jesus shows him that this humble recognition is the first requirement for effective service. This is the kind of person that God can use. You see, the first step in following Jesus is humbly admitting one's inability and sinfulness.

To follow, however, demands not only humility, but also *obedience*.

We are such calculated people. We so want all the facts, figures, and information before stepping out in obedient faith. If Peter had demanded that, he would never have seen the miraculous catch of fish that he saw. Our trust must be in Jesus, not in our own expertise or past experience. A true disciple must not rely on his natural talents or professional experience. God calls us to take radical steps of faith. If Peter had relied solely on his professional training, *he would not have obeyed*. Jesus is not looking for people who will tell him what to do, but will do what he tells them to do.

Jesus said, "Follow *me*." This is the way of growth as a disciple.

It's all about following a person. It's not about a program, an organization, a trend, a philosophy, a rule for life. No, it's one hundred percent about a *person* – Jesus.

Never confuse “going to church” with growing in Christ. The first does not necessarily lead to the second. Never confuse Christian activity with growth in Christ. Never confuse mere Bible knowledge with knowing Christ. Never confuse following a respected Christian leader with following Christ. To be a disciple is to follow *Jesus Christ* and no one and nothing else.

Jesus said, “Follow me, *and I will make you...*” This is the way of growth as a disciple.

Jesus’ call to follow him is not based on our inherent fitness for the task. As was already made clear to Peter, the first requirement is to recognize our *lack* of qualification. This flew in the face of how the Rabbis of the day chose their disciples. They wanted those who were “qualified” and could attain the highest degree of academic achievement. Jesus, on the other hand, wants people whom *He* could fashion. “Follow me,” Jesus said, “*and I will make you* fishers of men.”

The marvel is not that fisherman of Galilee conquered the world, but that Jesus of Nazareth made them its conquerors. The wonder lies in the making of the men, not in their doings.¹

Over the last couple of years, I’ve gotten to know one of our members who has experienced this fashioning work of God in his life. He came to Christ just two years ago, but since then Jesus has been “making him” what He wants him to be. I’ll like him to tell you about it.

TESTIMONY: Tim Perkins

How God has been working in my life these past two years.

I have come to understand spirituality by realizing that it is really God who is in control. My essence in this life is by his grace alone.

I know that God has a plan for me. Although my sins have been forgiven through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. My test lies ahead.

I know I must finish well, first, by living my life as best I can by using Jesus as example and second by bringing others to Christ.

The Bible clearly tells me the type of man God wants me to be. He wants me to be his humble servant, the person who cares for orphans and widows. The one who will not succumb to the ways of the world, the man that holds paramount the word of God.

When I first started attending Central Bible in May of 2007 my values were much different than they are today. My attitudes about life were pretty much to just put my head down work as hard as you can and struggle through it. As a young person I was very involved with athletics. Coaches pretty much engrained in my mind that you are either a winner or a loser, “What are you gonna be Tim”? I think we all know that in life we can’t always be successful all the time.

As a sales person of medical equipment for the past 20 years, there have been many times that I have felt very depressed, alone and even broken and unworthy. To compound these feelings I

would go home turn on the TV, have a drink or a smoke and totally isolate myself from the world and the people I love. I would get back up and do it all over again.

And then: Central Bible and God and his son, fellowship and love. And then: The Holy Spirit starts working on me. I realize that I am not alone. And then I realize that I never was alone.

On June 10, 2007, I accepted Jesus as my Lord as Savior. I was baptized by Pastor David before this congregation. I remember thinking, “there is no turning back now”. That day was the single most important event in my life. That was a miracle.

As I stand here today. I can tell you that God has the same plan for me that he has always had. It was just up to me to let him do his work. To do the best I can to ask god what he wants before I act and to recognize opportunities to bring others to him.

There will be many challenges and difficult times ahead. Through Christ I know my heart has been equipped to face difficult times and situations and that I am no longer alone in facing them.

He has never let me down.

Resume message:

Just *how* does Jesus “make us” what he want us to be? As we look at how Jesus fashioned his own followers early on in their discipleship, we see that several things were so vital to their growth.

First, there was the *influence of God’s Word*. God’s word was spoken then Jesus authoritatively said to them “Follow me.” And just before Jesus told Peter to push out into the deeper waters, he was preaching God’s Word to the crowds. The tools for carrying out their ministry were now no longer boats and nets, but the Word of God. Throughout this ten-month “follow me” phase of their discipleship, these men were constantly exposed to the power of God’s Word.

This is the way of growth as a disciple...the constant, daily intake of God’s Word. Apparently Peter learned this lesson well. About thirty years later he wrote to young believers, “Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...” (1 Peter 2:2, NAS).

Second, there was the *experience of prayer*. Soon after that first call to “follow me” found in Mark 1, Jesus got up very early in the morning, while it was dark, left the house and went off to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35). Jesus’ followers saw this same practice time and time again. Then finally they ask him, “Lord, teach us to pray!” (Luke 11:1).

In this phase of being established in their faith, the disciples were learning not only that God speaks to them through his word, but also that they can speak to God through prayer. Jesus was teaching them – and he wants to teach us – to bring everything to God in prayer.

Third, there was the *accountability of team*. These men were called, not only individually, but collectively. The “you” of “I will make *you*...” is plural. Peter was not alone. When Jesus calls us, he calls us to be part of a team. He calls us into intimate fellowship, not only with himself,

but with other believers. In the ancient world, fisherman worked with large nets. They couldn't manage those nets by themselves; they had to work *together*.

It is no less true today. Along with God's Word and prayer, one of the basic disciplines of being a Christ-follower is connectedness with other Christ-followers. Jesus' disciples were always together. Isn't it interesting that later Peter's faith begins to falter when he is alone (Matthew 26:69ff)? And your faith will also. Never, never, never separate yourself from God's family, from fellow Christ-followers. When you do you become, like Peter, easy prey for Satan.

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you *fishers of men*." This, too, is the way of growth as a disciple.

Jesus does not call us to be spiritual bulimics. Discipleship is not about the monastic way of life. Spiritual growth is not growth for growth's sake. Already in this early "follow me" phase of discipleship Jesus wants to transform these fishers of fish into fishers of people. And what a contrast between the two! Fish are caught to be flayed and eaten; people are "caught" to be saved and nurtured.

Take this little inventory. Are you in this phase of discipleship? Which of these apply to you in your journey with Christ?

- I am a new believer and want to grow in my relationship with Christ.
- I have been a believer for a while, yet I need to learn the basics of following Jesus.
- I want to learn and practice the basic spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study/meditation, stewardship of my resources, sharing my faith, and using my spiritual gifts in service.
- I need to learn how to deal with temptation in my life.
- I need to learn how to study and meditate on God's Word for myself.
- I need to learn the basic teachings of the Christian faith.
- I am not yet part of a small group, but sense my need for encouragement.
- I have ongoing emotional/personal issues that presently hinder my growth in Christ.

If any of these apply to you, would you simply check on your communication card the box "I want to grow in my relationship with Christ." We want to encourage you in that process.

ⁱ A.M. Fairbairn, *Studies in the Life of Christ* (1907), p. 133 cited by Everett F. Harrison, *A Short Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 137.