

**The Core of Discipleship**  
**Philippians 3:17**

I was trying to think of an introduction to this morning's sermon, and I just kept thinking about how I could use my dad as an example. Now, I love my dad, but I am entering another phase of life—Lord willing becoming a dad.

Why this morning is “The Core” of discipleship is because I believe that making disciples essentially boils down to two important words: “follow me.” Christ used them. Paul used them. And they are the words that are reverberating (resounding, echoing, resonating) in the church throughout the earth.

This morning—to conclude our series—I'd like to examine 3 discipleship relationships, which portray this “follow me” lifestyle. I'd like to do this not only to stress the importance of following good examples, but becoming good examples. Why three relationships? Because I've found that discipleship is really all about relationships (to Christ, to one another, to the lost).

My deepest concern for Valley (the reason why we're in this series) is that we'd somehow drop the ball and not recognize how important it is that we find our role and responsibility in “making disciples” in fulfilling the Great Commission. If we are the broken or weak link in the chain, then we are missing the immense blessing and supernatural privilege to be a part of something great: spreading Christ's name and fame to the nations. It's for the glory of Christ that we get this today. There is a lot at stake here.

Relationship #1: Christ to the 12 Disciples (First Generation)

Read **Matthew 4:18-22**. Jesus said, “**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**” (v. 19). Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John followed Jesus immediately. They “**left their nets**” (v. 20) and “**left the boat and their father**” (v. 22).

In **Matthew 8:18-22**, the “**scribe**” and “**another of the disciples**” each underestimated the cost of following Jesus and were unable to follow Him.

In **Matthew 9:9**, Jesus calls Matthew, who was once a tax collector named Levi. **“And he rose and followed him,”** just like that.

In **Matthew 10:37-38** Jesus says, **“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”**

Again in **Matthew 16:24** He says, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”**

Over in **Luke 14:33**, Jesus says, **“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”**

Back in **Matthew 19:21**, Jesus says, **“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”**

Jesus is speaking with the Rich Young Ruler in **Luke 18:28** about the cost of following Him, and Peter says, **“See, we have left our homes and followed you.”**

Ok, so we see that to become a follower of Christ, you must:

- be willing to give up everything
- be willing to renounce all possessions that you have
- give up old sinful practices
- put your old life behind you
- love no one more than Him
- deny yourself
- carry your cross

In order to count the cost and follow Him, it takes a work of God. Anything short of a work of God is only going to end in frustration, sorrow, and a turning away. You saw it in many of those who desired to follow Christ. Visualize the Rich Ruler’s response: **“Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22).**

Where do you stand today? Who do you stand with? Are you following closely and carrying your cross or are you falling away and dropping your head? How would you characterize your following after Christ?

David Watson in *Called and Committed* talks about how Christ trained the 12 disciples. He says, “The doing came before even the teaching! Jesus had no formal curriculum, no planned course of instruction, no classroom syllabus. Instead, he called his disciples to be *with him*.”

This is an extraordinary thought! This is life-on-life discipleship. This isn't just classroom instruction. This is a day-in, day-out watching, listening to, and following Jesus Christ in His ministry. As Allen Hadidian said, “He was always out in front, leading the way, demonstrating by example, and living the life He taught.”

One of the clearer examples is when Jesus prepares and sends out His disciples into the world in **Matthew 10**. He doesn't just sit back and wait to hear from them. No, in **Matthew 11:1** it says, “**When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.**”

My point is the words, “follow me,” rightly encapsulate the essence of true discipleship. There is the presence of Christ. There is the example always before you of moral perfection and holy living. There is the very heart and will of God lived out right before your eyes; in living color, real-time, words and actions, divinely fleshed out.

John MacArthur says, “The repeated command of the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘Follow Me,’ has not been replaced or improved upon. It is the most basic obligation of a believer.” How do those words fit into your daily life? Well, if snapshots from the 12 disciples weren't deep enough, let's look to Paul.

Relationship #2: Paul to the Early Church (Second Generation)

Read **Philippians 3:3-17**.

In vv. 4-11, we see the *Great Exchange* in Paul's life. Look at **verse 7**. This is the power of the gospel in a sinful man. Point one overlaps here.

In vv. 12-16, we see the *Great Exertion*. It's found in phrases like: **“but I press on”** (v. 12); **“forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead”** (v. 13); and **“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”** (v. 14).

In v. 17, we see the *Great Example*. Here is where we see the “follow me” come in. **“Join in imitating me,”** or “follow my example” essentially mean the same thing here. Paul uses this language in other passages in Scripture.

**1 Corinthians 4:16** says, **“I urge you, then, be imitators of me.”**

**1 Corinthians 11:1** says, **“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”**

**2 Timothy 3:10** says, **“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, (11) my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me.”**

The same Greek word (MIMETAI) from the 1 Corinthians passages “imitators” is used in **Ephesians 5:1** too. **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”**

As believers, our goal and aim is to be conformed to the image of His Son, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, and to be imitators of God. To be a Christian is to be a model of Christ. To be a godly man or woman is to be like God our Father.

But let me ask you a question: How is it that Paul can say, “Follow me,” in Philippians 3:17 if we are supposed to be following Christ and mimicking God? Is it his right as a super-apostle to say something like this? And how can one say this humbly? Well, I believe the answer is quite simple and there is no contradiction here: it is because he glories in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 3:3**).

In a sense, Paul is saying, “Here! I have found Glory!” Better yet, he is saying, “the Glorious Christ has found me! Run with me towards Him, and it will lead us to Glory!” His confidence is no longer in his flesh, but his confidence is in Christ. And in **verse 12**, Paul claims that he is not **“already perfect,”** but he knows who is and presses on towards that goal.

**Philippians 3:17, “Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”** Fix your gaze on, and pattern your life after those godly men and Godly women, those exemplary believers who demonstrate Christ-likeness. They are the ones who will lead you heavenward. They are the ones worshipping by the Spirit of God, glorying in Christ Jesus, and putting no confidence in the flesh.

How are you leading by example? If I had homework for all of you this morning and it was that a younger guy or gal followed you around all day hoping to find out how to follow Christ better as if their life depended on it, what would you be ashamed of? What would you change? What would you hope that younger guy or gal would never notice or worse, become.

Relationship #3: The Early Church to All The World (Third Generation)

### **1 Thessalonians 1:2-8.**

This relationship is the effect or result of Paul’s glorying in Christ (**Philippians 3**). They have done what Paul said in **Philippians 3:17**, and look at the effect that it is having on the believers around them (**1 Thessalonians 1:6-7**). They were emulating Christ in Thessalonica and **“the word of the Lord sounded forth”** and their **“faith in God has gone forth everywhere.”**

Because the believers followed the Lord and Christ-like examples (v. 6), and **“became an example”** (v. 7), **the result is “the word of the Lord has gone forth everywhere”** (v. 8).

This is the reverberating, the resonating, the echo I was talking about. This is now the third generation from Christ. Christ being the first, Paul being the second, and now the church in Thessalonica being the third. And what is happening? Christ’s life is spreading like wildfire because of their example. Do you see what Jesus has started? Do you see what role or responsibility you have in fulfilling the Great Commission? What are you doing to that flame that was started? Are you fanning it or squelching it?

Christ is the core of discipleship. He must be at the core of our church. He must be at the core of your heart. And He must be in the core of your

relationships. Do you love Christ this morning? Or are you following Him from a distance?

Remember, in the final moments of Jesus' life, all 12 of the disciples scattered when Christ was captured (**Matthew 26:31**). Peter, who told Christ that he would be the last to fall away, was found **“following Him from a distance,”** (**Matthew 26:58**) and moments later, denying that he even knew Jesus. That thought should haunt us...to be someone who follows Him from a distance.

Should the Lord bless me with a son or daughter, I will pour my life into him or her. Not just because it is something that my dad or mom has done for me, but because it is something my Lord and Savior has done for me.