

## INTRODUCTION

We enjoy an incredible privilege as sons and daughters of God; not only are we known personally and forgiven completely, but the Lord invites us on a remarkable journey—following Him. Jesus often told His disciples that two hallmarks distinguished them from everyone else: His sheep HEAR His voice and FOLLOW Him. Jesus beckoned to people at the lakeside, in tax offices and throughout the countryside, and His invitation was always the same: “Follow Me.”

What does that mean for us today? Recognizing that such an invitation must certainly be hope-filled, merciful and gracious (like everything about Jesus), can we find a fresh understanding that will help us in our walk with Him? To do that, we want to study the Bible—especially episodes when Jesus used those words, “Follow Me.”

### “FOLLOW ME”

*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they **follow Me**...” (John 10:27)*

*And He said to them, “**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19)*

*Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea. Then a scribe came and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go. Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Matthew 8:19-20)*

*Another of the disciples said to Him, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “**Follow Me**, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:21-22)*

*When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing!” He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. The men were amazed, and said, “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” (Matthew 8:23-27)*

*Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, **follow Me**.” But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. (Mark 10:21-22)*

*Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:28-30)*

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “**Follow Me!**” (John 21:18-19)*

*Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You **follow Me!**"*  
John 21:20-22

*And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."*  
Mark 8:31-33

*And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and **follow Me**. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."*  
Mark 8:34-35

## BEING CHANGED

If you follow Jesus you'll end up being changed: He takes you places you wouldn't think to go so that you can behold the miraculous. You don't get that experience if you only want to connect with Him now and then.

Jesus is always gathering people because His primary intent is to draw all of us to Himself. If it seems like he's pushing us away, it's to challenge us to press in so that we'll still stick with Him through the uncertainties of the future. In Mark 10:17-31, Jesus engages a wealthy young man in conversation to challenge his thinking on several points.

Contrary to what many people mistakenly believe, God is not trying to take away from His followers as much as He can. He does not celebrate our loss; neither does He urge us to give away what we have so that we end up with less. Rather, all of His ways—every pattern, every command for living—are meant to bring us to places of bounty and blessing. That's what Jesus meant when He said that He has come that we might "*have life and have **abundance***" (John 10:10).

Because we have unknowingly accepted a half-truth, only a partial understanding of God's plans for people, we struggle more than we need to with the idea of following the Lord in unquestioning obedience. We've heard about **sacrifice**, **surrender** and **servanthood**—but very often not in their proper context of what they lead us to: **abundance**, **victory** and **authority**. His ways usually seem exactly the opposite of what our own thinking tells us to do. We're like hikers lost in the woods; we ought to trust the Ranger more than our own sense of direction (that got us lost in the first place) even though the Ranger tells us to start walking in a direction that strikes us as wrong.

Jesus told the rich young man to get rid of His possessions because they were preventing Him from following the Lord like his heart wanted to do. Jesus explained the principle to His disciples: If we disengage ourselves from the things that prevent us from following Him, we will receive back many times more than what we gave up. He wants us to abound and prosper—not on the basis of what we had before following Him, but of what we end up with, miraculously, after following Him.

Today we'll be examining another commonly misunderstood passage when Jesus tries to explain the "backward ways" of the kingdom to His disciples. If we lose sight of Jesus' ultimate goal—to lead His followers to abundant living—we will miss why He says what He says to them.

### "GET BEHIND ME!" (MARK 8:27-9:1)

*Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." And He warned them to tell no one about Him. Mark 8:27-30*

*And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. (8:31-32)*

*But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (8:33)*

*And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save [deliver, protect, preserve] his life will lose [destroy, ruin, have perish] it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." (8:34-35)*

*"For what does it profit [benefit, advantage] a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit [damage, injure] his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (8:36-37)*

*"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." (8:38-9:1).*

### SINGULAR PURSUIT

In some religious circles you will hear people talking about a *call* on their life—a sense of mission and purpose, an assignment for how to devote their energies. A typical *call* might be into medical missions work, pastoral ministry, etc. We understand what is meant by such language, yet it is actually a mistaken notion. According to the Bible, all believers are called; in fact, the very meaning of *church* (in the original language of the New Testament) is "*called out*." As believers in Jesus, we have been called out of darkness, and called out from our former way of life.

Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, He called out to people, inviting them to follow Him out of their existing circumstances: Peter and John left their nets; Matthew left his tax office. The invitation stands for everyone,

“Follow Me.” Those of us who follow Him inevitably end up being *called* out of the crowd—separated from who and what we left behind in order to pursue Jesus.

Thus, while I would never argue with anyone who spoke about a *call* on their life, I do believe that language creates two terrible misunderstandings in the minds of most followers of Jesus: first of all, it implies two classes of spiritual citizens—the few believers with a special *call*, and the many other believers who, without such a *call*, relegate themselves to spiritual insignificance and inactivity. The truth is, rather, that each of us has an equal part to play in God’s Kingdom; some are eyes, others are ears, but all of us are parts of His body on earth.

Secondly, it places too much emphasis on broad factors like our occupation or our geographic location, and not enough emphasis on daily devotion and moment-by-moment actions—as though God is primarily interested in our ultimate destination/vocation. Let me put it this way: if I am *called* to be a pastor in Santa Cruz, was I fulfilling God’s plan when I was simply a student bible-study leader at UCLA working as a gardener in Bel Air?

It’s the journey, not the destination (other than Heaven), that matters. Our calling is to follow Jesus, day by day, realizing that He will lead us differently than we would have known to go on our own, and differently than He leads others.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”*  
Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”  
(John 21:18-19)

*Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, “Lord, and what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!”*  
(John 21:20-22)

## GOD LOVES TO LEAD US

God loves to lead us, not to prove who's boss, but to mercifully guide us through life to assure us of the maximum good and blessing. Nothing can change the fact that the world is broken, and it no longer functions according to God's original plan to benefit people; instead, life as we know it on this planet is filled with disappointment, pain, and loss. The earthquake of sin has created a mess out of creation.

But the Lord has a way--a way of redemption and recovery in the midst of this marred and flawed life. The path is narrow, the way is not easily discerned by the natural eye or human reasoning. The landmarks are few, and even one wrong turn slips you into the tangled wilderness from where it is difficult to find your way back.

*For Thou art my rock and my fortress; For Thy name's sake  
Thou wilt lead me and guide me. Psalm 31:3*

*And I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, in paths they do not know I will guide them. I  
will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains.  
These are the things I will do, and I will not leave them undone." Isaiah 42:16*

## GOD LEADS US...

1. In Truth and Justice (Judgment) Psalm 25:5 and 9
2. In Righteousness Psalm 5:8
3. To the Higher Rock (Jesus) Psalm 61:2
4. To Repentance Romans 2:4

## OTHER FORCES WANT TO LEAD US, TOO...

### OTHER GODS

*"You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, Deut. 6:14*

### OTHER CUSTOMS

*'Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I shall drive out before you, for  
they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. Leviticus 20:23*

### OUR OWN THOUGHTS

*"I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not  
good, following their own thoughts, Isaiah 65:2*

### OUR PERSPECTIVES

*"And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, so as  
to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes..." Numbers 15:39*

## OUR OWN PLANS

*"But they will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.' Jeremiah 18:12*

## SENSUALITY

*And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 2 Peter 2:2*

*These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage. Jude 1:16*

## OTHER GOOD THINGS CAN BE FOLLOWED

### GOD'S WORD

*Indeed, while following the way of Thy judgments, Lord, we have waited for Thee eagerly; Thy name, even Thy memory, is the desire of our souls. Isaiah 26:8*

*In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 1 Tim. 4:6*

### OTHERS' EXAMPLE

*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example... 2 Thess. 3:7*

*We ... offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. 2 Thess. 3:9*

### JESUS' VOICE

*"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; John 10:27*

### JESUS HIMSELF

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Matthew 16:24*

## JOHN 21:17-23:

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do

not wish to *go*." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following *them*; the one who also had leaned back on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" Peter therefore seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!" This saying therefore went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but *only*, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you?"