

FOLLOWING JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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Introduction

Towards the beginning of Luke's Gospel, Jesus calls two men to follow Him. In response, both men "left everything and followed Him" (Luke 5:10-11, 27-28; NASB). This is the introduction to discipleship as Jesus begins to call people to the journey of following Him. In this paper, I will discuss discipleship in the Gospel of Luke as a following of Jesus that includes a response to His call, being with Him along the way, and involvement in His mission.

Following Jesus

Luke's Gospel provides an orderly and accurate account of Jesus' life and ministry, and gives the reader a clear and genuine picture of discipleship.¹ Discipleship in Luke is a journey on a path following Jesus.² A disciple in the ancient world is someone who is a learner of a master, under instruction of a teacher. To be a disciple of Jesus, is to follow Him. It is, not only to listen

¹ Luke 1:1-4; Mark L. Bailey, "Luke," unpublished class notes for BE105 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2020). "Luke provided an orderly account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ for a Gentile readership in order to certify that Jesus was the promised Messiah for Israel and was indeed the Son of God who became the Son of Man in order to provide the way for the Gentiles to enter the Kingdom as well as Israel." Luke gives the reader certainty that what he writes is accurate and true. It gives certainty to the things that have been passed down about Jesus. And it gives an accurate account of the discipleship of Jesus.

² Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102. Luke uses this idea of "the Way" in Acts, but also pictures discipleship as followers on the way.; "Follow," Word Study, Logos Bible Software, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://ref.ly/logos4/Guide?t=My+Bible+Word+Study&hw=follow&lang=en&search>. The word "follow" is used 23 times in the Gospel of Luke, and 20 times it is referring to following Jesus.

to and hear the Master Teacher, but it is to “go after,” accept the teachings of the Master, and obey.³

The people Jesus refers to as “disciples” were a mixed group of people who were with Him at different parts of His journey in proclaiming the Kingdom of God throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Jesus at times refers to one disciple, like Peter; and often He pulls the twelve aside. The twelve disciples (and many others) physically and literally follow Jesus around. At other times, His disciples include the seventy who are sent out or a larger group who follow Him. Luke distinguishes the multitude of disciples from the crowds who come to see Him.⁴ For example, Luke 7:11 says, “Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.” Unlike the religious leaders of the time, Jesus’ disciples comprise a very diverse group of people. They are fishermen, the outcast tax collectors, the sick, the former demon possessed, women and Samaritans. Jesus shows concern for all people; and His call to discipleship is an inclusive call for all types of people.⁵

This diverse group of disciples are “following Him,” not to a destination, but on a new path of life. Some leave everything and follow Him. Others give much from their private means (Luke 8:3). “Becoming Jesus’ disciple was not a vocational change, nor a political attachment, nor even a new stirring of God; it was being faced with the eternal decision of whether one

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan’s Publishing House, 1981), 184-185. The idea (as a Greek word), “disciple,” does imply a learner of a master. To be a disciple of Jesus is not just to hear, but it is to accept and obey.

⁴ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 184. There are crowds following Jesus. Some are “true” disciples, while others are not -- part of the large crowd of people intrigued by Him.

⁵ Walter L. Liefield, “Luke,” in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, et al., vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 798.

would follow Jesus as the Way to eternal life.”⁶ Luke shows uniquely that the followers are on the “Way” with Jesus; for a large portion of the Gospel contains Jesus’ journey on the way to die in Jerusalem. In different places the journey to Jerusalem is noted through traveling words, like “on the way,” “going on to” or “near.”⁷ Much of the observations regarding discipleship, including His teaching and modeling, are along the way to Jerusalem.

Responding to His Call

Following Jesus includes a response to His call. This response is a “yes” of surrender and complete identification with Jesus. To be a disciple is to be like the Master (Luke 6:40). To follow Jesus, is to be like Jesus. In Luke 9, we find Jesus clearly communicating the totality of the commitment for following Him. First, He says to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). This pivotal verse follows Luke 9:22, when Jesus says, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.” To be Jesus’ follower is to suffer and be rejected like Jesus.

To respond to Jesus’ call is a radical decision of surrendering one’s rights and giving complete allegiance to Jesus. This is what makes someone His disciple: to deny one’s self, take up one’s cross and follow Him. The word for “deny” is a very strong word that means to actually say, “no to oneself.” “In essence, Jesus is saying, ‘If any man will come after Me as My true

⁶ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels*, 185.

⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus: A Study of the Life of Christ*, 274. Here is a travel narrative of Jesus heading to Jerusalem and instructing and involving the disciples. Luke 17:11, 18:11, 28, are a few of the places that contain these words. In Luke 9:51-19:40 Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem, so there is a sense that this is a travel log along the way with His disciples.

disciple, let him say no to himself (for thus the word reads literally), set aside his own will, and take up his cross as I took up My cross in obedience to the will of God, and come and follow me.”⁸

This response to Jesus’ call involves, not only a “yes” initially, but an ongoing “yes” each day in continual, humble submission. Though each of the Synoptic Gospels include Jesus’ teaching that to be His disciple one must, “deny himself, take up one’s cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34), only Luke adds the word “daily.” So, in Luke it is “take up your cross *daily*” (Luke 9:23).

Discipleship begins upon entering the Way of salvation; it advances as one travels along the Way. Luke specifies that self-denial, taking up the cross and following Jesus not only characterizes entrance into the Way but life on the Way. With the addition of ‘each day’ to the cross-bearing proclamation, the Lukan Jesus calls for daily self-denial, daily bearing one’s cross and daily following in the footsteps of the Master.⁹

Jesus is saying that taking up the cross is for each day, continually and ongoing.¹⁰ The disciples of Jesus’ day would face even death for being His follower. In following Jesus, the disciple is saying, “yes,” to keep following Him, though it is not comfortable or easy at times. “It is to live each day, not for self, but for Christ.”¹¹ Following Jesus involves a daily identification with Christ and a continual surrender.

⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 37.

⁹ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels*, 185.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “Luke 1:1-9:50,” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. by Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 852-853. This is the idea of rejection and submission. To literally carry a Roman cross is to be despised, rejected and under Roman authority. The criminal has lost all rights and privileges. By adding the word daily, Jesus is stating that it is an ongoing surrender to Him. It is not a one-time assent to following Him, but a new way of life of servanthood. Net Bible, note on Luke 9:23, accessed June 30, 2020, <http://netbible.org>. “Jesus’ disciples must keep following Him daily and bear the consequences of their choice that will involve loss and shame.”

¹¹ Walter L, Liefield, “Luke,” 923-924.

This response to Jesus' call also involves a redirecting of one's purpose in life. It is not just a change of activities, but a complete rearrangement of priorities.¹² In other words, disciples have a new "call" for their life. Peter leaves his boats and nets and follows Jesus. Jesus says, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10). Matthew leaves his booth and tax collecting behind. Right away he holds a large reception for Jesus inviting the other "sinners" into his home with Jesus. Matthew becomes a part of Jesus' ministry to the "sick" and of calling sinners to repentance (Luke 5:27-32).

At the end of chapter 9, the totality of the commitment necessary is tested for three people. Jesus clarifies what discipleship entails, as these three consider following Him along the way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:57-62).¹³ When each of the three people are given the opportunity to follow Him, Jesus recognizes what is standing in the way. It is not easy or even a "natural" choice – to say "no" to oneself; for following Jesus means uncertain comfort, a change of loyalty, and a new set of priorities. To follow Jesus is to be like Jesus.

Being with Jesus

In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus calls people to follow Him, it involves being with Him. Discipleship is being with Jesus. In chapter 6, Jesus chooses the twelve to be with Him and travel with Him along the way as His disciples (Luke 6:12-16). Earlier, it says that Peter,

¹² Darrell L. Bock. *Jesus According to the Scriptures: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 626-637. For these disciples it meant a total change in vocation. Walter L, Liefield, "Luke," 935. "It is not just a lifestyle but a kingdom work."

¹³ Three times in these short six verses the word "follow" is used (follow Jesus or follow Me). With each person Jesus draws out what is standing in the way of following Him. If the desire is to follow Him, then there are things for each person needs to be aware of. Darrell L. Bock. *Jesus According to the Scriptures: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*, 162. Jesus points out with each of the three people that the cost needs to be counted. There will be rejection. This is brought out earlier in the chapter in Luke 9:22-23. Taking care of the burial is a priority. This may be hyperbolic to say that Jesus' way is first and above all else. Allegiances must change. If his father needed to be buried that day then the person probably would not have been present to be in this exchange. He also would have been unclean. The point is that the most important thing is to follow Jesus above all else. Walter L, Liefield, "Luke," 935. There is a complete reordering of life with following Jesus. Even family are forsaken.

Andrew, James, John and Matthew “left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:10-11; 27-28).

To be Jesus’ disciple was to physically be with Him.¹⁴ They left their vocations to follow Jesus.

Later Luke recounts,

Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means (Luke 8:1-3).

All kinds of people were following Jesus and were with Him.

Following Jesus includes being with Him in all sorts of situations, like when He taught the crowds in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-20), or on the boats when He stilled the sea (Luke 8:22). Luke records the disciples “going along with Him” and being eyewitnesses to the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and to many other miracles. The twelve, after preaching throughout the villages, gather with Jesus to report all God had done through them (Luke 9:10). The twelve are constantly with Jesus and learning from Him.

In being with Jesus the disciples have a front row seat to hearing His teaching and observing His ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God. Chapter five of Luke is a good example of the kinds of things Jesus models for them from the beginning of their discipleship. First, when Matthew leaves everything to follow Jesus, He immediately holds a dinner for Jesus with a “great crowd of tax collectors and sinners.” When questioned by the Pharisees Jesus says, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:29-32). Jesus calls the disciples and then

¹⁴ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 105. The Gospel shows the disciples continually with Jesus. There are about twenty places that says they are “with” Him. So, it is assumed that they were with Him through most of His travels, teachings and miracles. For the twelve, their ministry was following Him physically around. It was “togetherness with Him.”

gives them a model to follow.¹⁵ Through this they can observe His compassion, mercy and the dignity He gives to all people. In modeling, Jesus is displaying mercy for all to see.

Second, right before this, Jesus displays compassion and heals a leper. The text says, “And He stretched out His hand and touched Him” (Luke 5:12-14). According to the Law, to touch a leper would make a person unclean, yet Jesus chooses instead to touch Him.¹⁶ Jesus demonstrates the kind of way to show compassion in His interaction with the sick.

Third, Jesus observes the faith of a group of friends who bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Here Jesus forgives the person’s sin and heals him. And Jesus says, “So you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Luke 5:17-26). Continually, Jesus demonstrates His authority over sin, sickness, demons and the religious leadership. Jesus identifies the deepest needs of a person and His authority to forgive sin.

Later in the Gospel, after the disciples observe Jesus praying, His disciples ask Him to teach them to pray. Luke states, “He said to them, ‘When you pray say...’” (Luke 11:1-4). He then follows with a parable that teaches them to ask their Heavenly Father for all their needs. He is a good Father who gives good gifts (Luke 11:5-13). Jesus’ life of prayer models for them the need for prayer and the way to approach God as a Father.¹⁷

Throughout His teaching and parables, Jesus teaches the disciples about God the Father, prayer, faith, trust, worry, stewardship, faithfulness, responding to the Word, joyfulness,

¹⁵ Mark L. Bailey, “Luke,” Summer 2020. He called them, was with them, modeled and prepared them.

¹⁶ Leviticus 13:1-7. In Leviticus there are specific instructions for leprosy and how to determine when a person is clean or unclean. When they are unclean, they are to be in isolation.

¹⁷ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 102-121. His prayer life was on display. Much of His prayer life showed them what the Father was like. Because God is Father, they can trust Him. In prayer He taught them how to approach God and trust Him for their needs. Jesus “would often slip away to the wilderness to pray” (Luke 5:16).

forgiveness, humility and loving God and loving one's neighbor.¹⁸ Besides instruction, the disciples are able to observe Jesus and His interactions with others on a daily basis. To be a follower of Jesus is to be with Him and learn from Him. The disciples have the opportunity to observe closely what a follower of Jesus is to look like -- like Jesus.

Involvement in the Mission

Following Jesus includes involvement in His mission. From the first, there is an expectation that the disciples are representatives of Jesus' ministry.¹⁹ He sends them out, gives them authority, and calls the twelve, "apostles" (meaning "sent ones").²⁰ The call on their life coincides with Jesus' mission. Jesus clarifies His mission succinctly after the conversion of Zacchaeus when he says, "The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Therefore, when Jesus calls Peter, He proclaims, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10).²¹ The fishermen have a new vocation and they will be catching people. This sets the trajectory for their life, for now Jesus' mission is their mission. And after the call of Matthew, Jesus is with Matthew and all his friends – other tax collectors. Matthew's friends are

¹⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to the Scriptures: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*, 626. The parables of Jesus that are included in Luke are the teachings that the disciples heard by being with Him. They probably heard them many times.

¹⁹ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 102-112. "Luke understands the disciples primarily as the recipients of Jesus' training until they are commissioned to continue his work." From His Jesus call of Peter in Luke 5 until Jesus' last words before His ascension there is an expectation that His disciples are involved in His mission.

²⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus: A Study of the Life of Christ*, 254. Apostle means "sent ones." This adds authority to their role. They are disciples, but the title of apostle gave them authority. Christ made them His representatives on earth.

²¹ Mark L. Bailey, "Luke," Summer Semester 2020. It actually means, "You will be catching people alive." Darrell L. Bock, "Luke 1:1-9:50," in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 460-461. They have a new vocation. Peter will catch people. His purpose is "to let them live ... a gather and rescue." "God is in the business of saving humanity and some will help him in the catch."

those who need a “physician.”²² So, from the beginning Jesus involves His disciples in seeking and saving the lost. Following Jesus is involvement in the mission.

By involving the disciples, they begin to share in the responsibility of the mission. For example, Jesus includes them in the feeding of the 5,000. When they come to Jesus with the problem of the lack of available food nearby, Jesus says, “You give them something to eat!” (Luke 9:12-17). He involves them in the solution to the problem and gives them a part to play.²³ They organize the people, distribute the food and witness the provision and miracle of the Son of God.

Jesus also involves them in the mission by sending the twelve disciples and the seventy out into the villages and cities. They have been following Jesus, listening to Him teach, and observing Him; now it is their turn to go out. He sends out the twelve with authority over demons, and to preach the gospel and to heal diseases (Luke 9:1-6). Later, He sends the seventy out and says to them, ““The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me”” (Luke 10:1-16). As Jesus represents the Father, so they represent Jesus. Just as the Son is sent by the Father, so they are also sent.²⁴

²² Luke 5:31-32. When Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees, He tells them He is there for these tax collectors and sinners. Jesus will associate with them, unlike the Pharisees. Jesus and Matthew are together with the sick.

²³ Darrell L. Bock, “Luke 1:1-9:50,” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 829-836. The disciples clearly see the amount of people and the need for food. On their own there is no way they can provide. Yet, they see Jesus provide and they get to be part of the solution. As they minister to the needs of others, they can trust Jesus to provide in the future.

²⁴ Darrell L. Bock, “Luke 9:51-24:53,” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. by Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 1005. Jesus makes this connection between Himself, the Father and the disciples. Jesus is an extension of the Father, and they are an extension of the Son. They are doing His work when they are sent out by Him.

As followers of Jesus the disciples are to continue the work after His ascension. Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that there is much work to be done. In the beginning of His instruction to the seventy, He tells them that the harvest (the people ready to hear) is plentiful, but there is a great need for more laborers. Also, He tells them to beg the Father to thrust out laborers into the His harvest.²⁵ The mission field (or harvest) needs more laborers. A disciple's mission is to work in the harvest and pray for more laborers (disciples) to be raised up. The disciples are the ones who are involved in raising up more laborers. His followers are His means for continuing His mission.

At the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus commissions the disciples to be His witnesses. Their involvement in the mission continues. After Jesus' resurrection and before His is ascension, Luke records His last words to the disciples,

Then He opened up their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are my witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:45-49).

His mission is now the follower's mission. To follow Jesus is to share His mission.

Conclusion

From the beginning until the end of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus simply calls people to the journey of following Him. This is discipleship. Though it is a simple call, it is not easy. To be Jesus' disciple is to follow Him, which includes a response to His call, being with Him along the way and involvement in the mission. Discipleship in Luke is following Jesus and continuing His mission in the harvest.

²⁵ Net Bible, note on Luke 10:1-2, accessed June 30, 2020, <http://netbible.org>. “

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