



Slide #1

The relational connection between Christ and His disciples is usually understood by the term *discipleship* (disciple-ship).¹ The equivalent found in the Gospels—between Christ and His followers—can be identified by the term *fellowship* (follower-ship).

Remembering that a disciple is anyone who is a follower or student of another, the master-learner relationship between Jesus and the Twelve takes priority in the Gospels. Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Scriptures make distinctions in disciples: associations, intimacy, and commitment (see article: *Distinctions in Disciples*). This article addresses Jesus’ appeal for those who are already believers in Christ to “follow Him” in discipleship.

Fellowship in the Gospels (Relational Connection between Jesus and His Followers)

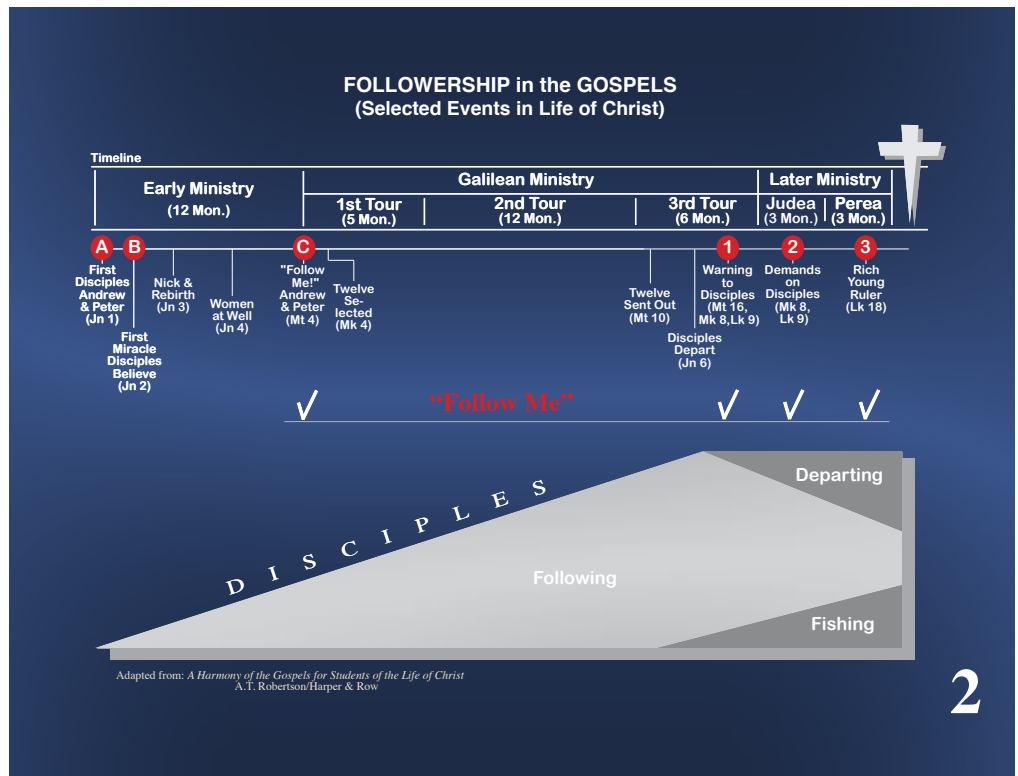
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Slide #2

A visual look at the texts typically understood to address discipleship are shown on the timeline of Jesus’ three-and-a-half-year ministry (slide 2). As indicated in the lower portion of the slide, the numbers that followed Christ increased dramatically over time, with the Twelve being sent out at the end of the Galilean ministry to begin fishing for men (Matt 10). Nevertheless, some followers began departing in response to Christ’s bread-of-life teaching (John 6).

Notice that Andrew and Peter became the first to follow Jesus as *curious* followers in John 1 [red A] and believed in Christ at the first miracle in John 2 [red B], becoming *convinced* followers.² In Matthew 4 [red C], Christ asks these same men to “follow Him,” to become *committed* followers so that they could eventually be fishers of men. Then at the final stages of



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His ministry in light of His near departure [red 1–3], Jesus called for believers to “follow Him” so that they could effectively take part in the coming church. Consequently, the emphasis of His messages changed from the promise of eternal life through faith in Christ (e.g., Nicodemus in John 3 and the Woman at the Well in John 4) to the promise of abundant living through obedience to Christ is discipleship in the later stages of His ministry.

Slides #3 & #4

Supporting this contention, slide 3 sets forth significant words and phrases associated with Jesus and followers found in ten selected events in the ministry of Christ. In each of these thirty-eight texts (slide 4), discipleship requirements reveal a pattern in which Jesus made a request and then a response “to follow Him” was expected. In events 2–4, the Jesus’ appeals were “come after Me” (event 2), “called” (event 3), and “follow Me” (event 4), indicating that these were equivalent expressions. In each case, the response of Andrew, Peter, James, John, and Matthew were the same—they “followed Him.” The first four of these men had already been followers of Jesus who became believers in Christ at the first miracle in John 2. Now a year later Jesus tells these same men that if they would leave their nets for catching fish and follow Him they would become fishers of men. While they couldn’t have fully perceived the future for them, they certainly understood they were giving up one thing to experience something entirely different.

Within a few days, they were included in the group chosen by Christ to be His “sent out ones,” the Apostles. Mark 3:14 tells us “He appointed twelve [selection], so that they would be with Him [preparation] and that He could send them out [servant leaders].” These chosen men needed an in-depth, on-the-job-training program to prepare them for their ministry. Consequently, the primarily focus of Christ for the next year-and-a-half was on the Apostles’ preparation. But the “with Him” time wasn’t merely about ministry procedures; it was undergirded by intimacy and fellowship with Jesus. As a result, being fully trained these men would become like their teacher (Luke 6:40).

It was in the last year of Christ’s ministry that His emphasis on discipleship became prevalent (events 5–10). Jesus appealed to believers to “follow Him” in discipleship in order that they could effectively participate in the establishment of the church. Notice the equivalent expressions: “follow Me,” “follow after Me,”

FOLLOWERSHIP in the GOSPELS (Selected Events & Words/Phrases in Life of Christ)

Word/Phrase	Early Ministry (12 Mon.)			Galilean Ministry			Later Ministry	
	1st Tour (5 Mon.)	2nd Tour (12 Mon.)	3rd Tour (6 Mon.)	Judea (3 Mon.)	Perea (3 Mon.)			
Follow Me ακολουθει μοι			Mt 9:9* Mk 2:14* Lk 5:27*					
Follow after Me ακολουθει οπισθο μου						Mt 10:38		
Come after Me ελθει οπισθο μου						Mt 16:24 Mk 8:34 Lk 9:23		
Called εκολλεσεν			Mt 4:21 Mk 1:20					
Come δευτε								Mt 19:21 Mk 10:21 Lk 18:22
Come after Me δευτε οπισθο μου			Mt 4:19 Mk 1:17					
Followed Him ηκολουθησαν αυτω	Jn 1:37	Mt 4:20 Mk 1:18	Mt 4:22 Lk 5:11	Mt 9:9 Mk 2:14 Lk 5:28			Mt 8:19 Lk 9:57 Lk 9:61	Mt 19:27 Mk 10:28 Lk 18:28

Adapted from: *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*
A.T. Robertson/Harper & Row * = Command

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FOLLOWERSHIP in the GOSPELS (Selected Events & Words/Phrases in Life of Christ)

Event	Book	Ch.	Vs.	Content
1	John	1	37	Andrew & [Peter]—The two disciples [of John] heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ηκολουθησαν του Ιησου (190)
2	Matt	4	19	Peter & Andrew—“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” δευτε οπισθο μου (1205)
	Mark	1	17	Peter & Andrew—“Come after me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” δευτε οπισθο μου (1205)
3	Matt	4	20	Peter & Andrew—Immediately they left the nets and followed Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
	Mark	1	18	Peter & Andrew—Immediately they left the nets and followed Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
4	Matt	4	21	James & John—He called them. εκολλεσεν αυτους (2564)
	Mark	1	20	James & John—He called them. εκολλεσεν αυτους (2564)
5	Matt	4	22	James & John—Immediately they left the boat... and followed Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
	Mark	1	20	James & John—they left... the boat... and went after Him. απηλθον οπισθο αυτου (565)
6	Luke	5	11	Peter, [Andrew], James & John—they left everything, and followed Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
	Matt	9	9	Matthew—He said to him, “Follow Me.” ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
7	Mark	2	14	Matthew—He said to him, “Follow Me.” ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
	Luke	5	27	Matthew—He said to him, “Follow Me.” ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
8	Matt	9	9	Matthew—And he got up and followed Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
	Mark	2	14	Matthew—And he got up and followed Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
9	Luke	5	28	Matthew—And he... got up and began to follow Him. ηκολουθησαν αυτω (190)
	Matt	10	38	“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
10	Matt	16	24	“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself...” θειλει οπισθο μου ελθειν (2064)
	Mark	8	34	“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself...” θειλει οπισθο μου ελθειν (2064)
6	Luke	9	23	“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself...” θειλει οπισθο μου ελθειν (2064)
	Matt	16	24	“...and take up his cross daily and follow me.” ακολουθητω μοι (190)
8	Mark	8	34	“...and take up his cross daily and follow me.” ακολουθητω μοι (190)
	Luke	9	23	“...and take up his cross daily and follow me.” ακολουθητω μοι (190)
7	Matt	8	19f	“I will follow you” (v19); “Follow Me” (v22) ακολουθησω σοι, ακολουθησθε μοι (190 x2)
	Luke	9	57f	“I will follow you” (v57); “Follow Me” (v59); “I will follow you” (v61) ακολουθησω σοι, ακολουθησθε μοι, ακολουθησθε σοι (190 x3)
8	Luke	14	27	“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” εργετω οπισθο μου (2064)
9	Matt	19	21	Rich Young Ruler—“...go and sell your possessions and give... and come, follow Me.” δοτω (1204), ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
	Mark	10	21	Rich Young Ruler—“...go and sell your possessions and give... and come, follow Me.” δοτω (1204), ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
10	Luke	18	22	Rich Young Ruler—“...go and sell your possessions and give... and come, follow Me.” δοτω (1204), ακολουθησθε μοι (190)
	Matt	19	27	Peter—“...we have left everything and followed You.” ηκολουθησαμεν σοι (190)
10	Mark	10	28	Peter—“...we have left everything and followed You.” ηκολουθησαμεν σοι (190)
	Luke	18	28	Peter—“...we have left our own things and followed You.” ηκολουθησαμεν σοι (190)
	Matt	19	28f	Jesus’ Response—“...you who have followed Me... shall sit upon twelve thrones... And everyone who has left houses or brothers... will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.” ακολουθησατε μοι (190)

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“come after Me,” and “come.” As before, these expressions sought a positive response of commitment by those who were already believers.

Slide #5

Be aware that some expressions associated with Jesus and His followers do not concern committed followers (see slide 5). For example, the phrase *followed Him* is used thirteen times to indicate that Jesus was merely accompanied by an individual or by a crowd (e.g., “Large crowds followed Him” in Matt 4:25). The phrase *come to Me*, used six times by John, refers exclusively to coming to Christ for salvation (e.g., “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me” in John 6:37).

However, notice that six times John’s used the phrase *follow Me* in reference to Jesus and His followers (top right-hand side of slide 5). In four instances (John 1:43; 12:26; 21:19, 22), *follow me* is a command. On the first occasion (1:43), the appeal was for Philip to begin to follow Jesus as a curious disciple, who later became a convinced believer after the water-to-wine miracle (2:11). The remaining three instances suggest the need for a closer association to Jesus by those who were already followers. After Peter had previously denied Christ three times, notice Jesus encouraged Peter to continue to “follow Him” just prior to His return to the Father (21:19, 22). Finally, John 8:12 and 10:27 confirmed the central principle: to follow Jesus requires being in connection with Him.

Rather than a “call to discipleship” as in the other gospels, John’s interest centered on a developing association with Christ. Properly understanding John’s use of the phrase *follow Me* is tied to the stated evangelistic purpose of John’s gospel found in John 20:30-31 (see *Supplement* below).

Slide #6

The expressions associating Jesus with His followers, as shown in this article, indicate two major conclusions:

First
Christ’s command to “Follow Me” refers to
Discipleship, not Salvation

Second
Follower-ship is equivalent to
Disciple-ship

FOLLOWERSHIP in the GOSPELS
(Additional Phrases Considered in Life of Christ)

Event	Book	Ch.	Vs.	Content	Event	Book	Ch.	Vs.	Content
FOLLOWED HIM [Reference to a Multitude Accompanying Jesus] ακολούθησεν αὐτῷ (190)					FOLLOW ME [Reference to Individuals Close Association with Jesus] ακολούθετε μοι (190)				
Matt	4	25		Large crowds followed Him from Galilee	* John	1	43		Jesus said to him [Philip] “Follow Me.”
Matt	8	1		When Jesus came down...large crowds followed Him.	John	8	12		I am the Light of the world...follow Me will not walk in the darkness
Matt	12	15		Many followed Him, and He healed them all	John	10	27		My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me
Mark	2	15		for there were many of them, and they were following Him.	* John	12	26		If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me.
Luke	7	9		Jesus...turned and said to the crowd that was following Him	* John	21	19		And when He had spoken this, He said to him [Peter]: “Follow Me!”
John	6	2		A large crowd followed Him	* John	21	22		“If I want him to remain...what is that to you? You [Peter] follow Me!”
FOLLOWED HIM [Reference to Individuals Accompanying Jesus] ακολούθησεν αὐτῷ (190)					COME TO ME [Reference to Salvation, except in Luke 14:26 for Discipleship] εἰρχομαι προς με (2064)				
Matt	9	19		Jesus got up and began to follow him [synagogue official]	Luke	6	45		Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.
Mark	6	1		Jesus went out from there...and His disciples followed Him.	8 [] Luke	14	26		If anyone comes to Me...not hate his own father...cannot be My disciple.
Luke	22	39		He...proceeded...to the Mount of Olives...disciples...followed Him.	Luke	18	16		Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them
1 [] John	1	38		Jesus turned and saw them [Andrew & Peter] following	John	5	40		You are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.
John	1	40		One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew	John	6	37		All that the Father gives Me will come to Me...
John	18	15		Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple.	John	6	37		and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.
John	21	20		Peter...saw the disciple [John] following them [Jesus & Peter]	John	6	44		No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him
FOLLOW ME [Reference to Individual Accompanying Jesus] ακολούθετε μοι (190)					COME TO ME [Reference to Salvation] εἰρχετο προς με (1205)				
John	13	36		Jesus answered, “Where I go, you [Peter] cannot follow me now”	Matt	11	28		Come to Me...weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
WENT AFTER HIM [Reference to Discipleship] εσπράβον οπισθεν αυτου (565)					* = Command				
3 [] Mark	1	20		they [James & John] left...the boat...and went after Him.					

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FOLLOWERSHIP in the GOSPELS
MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

FIRST

Christ's command to "Follow Me" refers to
Discipleship, not Salvation

SECOND

Follower-ship is equivalent to Disciple-ship

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SUPPLEMENT
Two Issues to Consider

Properly understanding two issues is critical.

Rich Young Ruler

Some may think the inclusion of the Rich Young Ruler is inappropriate in reference to discipleship, understanding the issue with the ruler exclusively concerns salvation. I argued in the book *Choose to Live* and in the article *Rightly Understanding the Rich Young Ruler* that Jesus' instructions to the ruler were two-directional: first, Jesus told the ruler to "go and sell your possession and give" them away, signifying a trust transfer from his possessions to Christ.³ Then second, "come, follow Me" in commitment and discipleship. Only this approach aligns with Christ's conversation with the ruler (event 9, slide 3) and then Peter's immediate questioning of Jesus about "following Him" (event 10, slide 3).

"Follow Me" in John 1:43

In John 1:43, Jesus commands Philip to "Follow Me" prior to the water-to-wine miracle when the curious disciples who were following Jesus (event 1, slide 3) believed in Him (John 2:11), becoming convinced followers. Philip would naturally be considered to have become a believer at that same occasion along with Andrew and Peter. Notice, however, we argued above that Christ's command to "Follow Me" was always an appeal directed toward believing followers to commitment and discipleship subsequent to their conversion. However, Christ's appeal to Philip to "Follow Me" in John 1:43 prior to salvation (2:11) seems to contradict that assumption. How can this seeming contradiction be reconciled?

I suggest the solution is found in John's unique purpose for his gospel, which differs from the other three gospels. John's stated purpose is found in 20:30-31:

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

With this stated evangelistic purpose, John selected seven miracles/signs⁴ in chapters 1–12 that took place during Christ's three-and-a-half-year ministry, right up to the last supper, to authenticate Jesus' claim to give eternal life to anyone who believed in Him. The focus of the remainder of the book (chapters 13–21) is on the final instructions to the Eleven (chapters 13-17) and the trials, crucifixion and appearances following Christ's resurrection (chapters 18–21). Consequently, the content of the book of John is significantly different from the other Gospels.

Notice that while the other Gospels barely mention Christ's early-ministry period (slide 2), John alone tells us of Jesus' first followers, His first miracle when those followers believed in Him, Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, and the Woman at the well. On the other hand, John completely omitted events 2–4 (slide 3): the calling of Andrew and Peter (event 2), James and John (event 3) and Matthew (event 4) to "follow Him" in committed discipleship. John also does not mention the selection of the Twelve (Mark 3:14). In addition, John neglected to incorporate events 5-10 (slide 3), which related to following Christ in discipleship. Yet events 2–10 were addressed in detail in the other three gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Consequently, John's use of the phrase *follow Me* should not be confused with the way the phrase is used in the other three gospels. In fact, other than in 1:43 when Jesus commanded Philip to "follow Me" on the second day of Jesus' ministry, John does not even use the phrase as a command again until the "final week" of His ministry. While a connection with Jesus is indeed indicated, John did not address the "call to discipleship" as in the other gospels. Rather, John's concern was for a closer association with Christ, whether by curious or by committed followers.



Endnotes:

1. Words combined with the suffix *-ship* indicate a relational condition and connection. Examples of nouns used with the suffix *-ship* concern skill (craftsmanship), position (professorship), rank (ladyship), quantity (readership), and status (friendship or discipleship).
2. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 13-21.
Pentecost indicated the distinction between *curious*, *convinced*, and *committed* followers of Christ.
3. Ken Neff, *Choose to Live* (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2012), 23-142.
4. The seven "signs" in John:

Changing water to wine	2:1-11
Healing the official's son	4:46-54
Healing the paralytic	5:1-9
Feeding the 5,000	6:1-15
Walking on water	6:16-21
Healing a man born blind	9:1-12
Raising Lazarus	11:1-16