

“Follow Me” is an invitation Jesus made to some people. Others volunteered to follow, but there was something they had to do first.

My friend Jen's son is going into a Masters/PhD program at Harvard in the fall. He graduated from the University of Toronto last month, but he hasn't been home yet. His new advisor at Harvard suggested that he do an internship in California, so instead of coming home to relax after 4 years in another country, he shipped back his dorm belongings and headed west.

Today, it's very typical of college students to “do internships” where they go work in a company, often for free, in exchange for college credit and work experience. If you want to be an electrician or hairdresser, or doctor, or minister...you have to do an internship—a period of study with an expert, someone who's got their license or board certification or ordination papers already.

In Biblical times, when culture and religion were largely the same, if a student wanted to study with a rabbi he would ask if he might “follow” the rabbi. The rabbi would consider the student's potential to become like him and whether he would make the commitment necessary. Many weren't accepted.

If a rabbi thought a student had exceptional possibility, he might invite that student with these words, “follow me”. In general, only the best and brightest were asked by the rabbi.

To follow a rabbi would mean to spend time with him, to live by his teaching; and to imitate his actions. Not so different really than being an artist's apprentice and learning that artist's style. Once the invitation was issued, it was up to the student to step up or step away. In other words, they had to demonstrate a total commitment. Not unlike my friend's son not going home after graduation, but instead going to California to work for someone for free—knowing that it would be to his benefit in the long term.

Friends, that's what following Jesus is like. It's a total commitment. We can't be wishy-washy Christians like the people in this passage. The first man approached Jesus and said he would follow. Jesus basically says (and I'm paraphrasing here), 'I don't have a particular home base and this existence isn't going to be comfortable for you.'

The second man says that he'll follow, but he has to go bury his father first. Jesus responds in a way that may have surprised some of you. He says, “Let the dead bury their dead.” (What is up with that?! Why would Jesus not be compassionate with a grieving man?)

We can't be **exactly** sure what's happened here. It could be that Jesus is saying let those who are spiritually dead bury those who are physically dead...or, it could be that the man's father had died some time ago and he was waiting to rebury the bones. That was a practice in Biblical times. A person would die and be placed in what was essentially a cave (like the tomb Jesus was in). A year later, the family would go back and move the bones to another shelf or the floor.

Some Jews, influenced by Greek and Roman practices would take the bones and put them in a box with the person's name on it. It could be that the second man was saying, I need time...perhaps several months before I come follow you. It would be like deferring your college acceptance and taking a gap year before going to the school of your choice.

It could even be that the man's father was still alive and he was saying he'd defer time with the teacher until after his father died.

That third man got some really harsh critique from Jesus. The man said he'd follow, but he had to say goodbye to his family first. Jesus says that you can't put your hand on the plow and look back. No one who does that is

fit for service of the kingdom of heaven. This is a big lesson for each of us as Christians! Plowing is part of the planting process. If you are holding the plow, you need to be looking forward to create a straight line. If you look back, your body turns and the row becomes crooked. If the man were preparing his heart and his life for Jesus, he needs to be looking forward, not back. He needs to be striving for the future, not living in the past.

Jesus called people to follow him. His classroom was the world and he taught others through real-life situations. He interpreted God's word and lived it.

Jesus is giving you that same invitation. "Follow me." Will you follow him even if you're uncomfortable? Will you leave the past behind and look to the future you'll have with Jesus? Will you live by his teachings-always, even when it's hard? Will you love your neighbor? Will you forgive others as you want God to forgive you? Will you bring help and hope and healing to difficult situations?

If you want to learn to play the piano, you need to practice. If you want to be a great lawyer, you need to pass the bar. If you want to lose weight, you need to skip the king size Reese's bar. If you want to follow Jesus, you need to put your heart, mind, and soul into learning his ways...and practicing his ways. Always. That means forgiving, even when you're sure you're right. That means being full of grace, even when the other party doesn't deserve it. That means loving your neighbor no matter who they are or what they do. God will sort it all out later. Just commit yourself to Christ and know that faith doesn't make all things easy, but it does make all things possible!

Remember that first man? The one who said he'd follow? Jesus said that the birds had nests and foxes had dens, but he had nowhere to lay his head. We don't know if he scared the man away or if the man sticks it out, trusting that the creature comforts of safety and stability are worth the sacrifice to learn how to heal, how to bring peace, and how to love like Jesus.

What do you think?

What would you have done if you were that man? Knowing that discipleship requires your all, what will you do today? Blessed be and amen.