

One night last week, I sat down with my Bible and a notebook to search through Luke, chapter 9 ... which is this action-packed, day-in-the-life of a disciple of Jesus. This is the chapter where Jesus sends out his disciples, feeds five thousand people, foretells his death ... twice, is seen Moses and Elijah, heals people and explains the cost of following him. Reading through all that, I was sort of amazed by everything I saw the disciples doing ... so I started a list ... and I ended up with a list of forty things followers do. The next day, I was with one of you and we were talking about your small group. You were telling me how your new study is going and how your group was talking last week about real discipleship and you were telling me that you want to get your group up and serving and not just talking about it. That alone is a pretty dreamy kind of conversation for a pastor. But then you said, “You know ... it’s one thing to *talk* about following Jesus, but its another thing to actually *do* it ... I mean, when I follow Jesus, what do I *do*?”

And there I was, with my list of forty things followers do ... so I said, “Well, Brilliant Small Group Leader, funny you should ask ...” And I whipped out my list and read it to him ... and I can’t promise that the Brilliant Small Group Leader was quite as overwhelmed by the moment as I was ... but nonetheless, what a question. **When I follow Jesus, what do I do?** When I hear someone ask a question like that, I know they’re ready to live it. What a great question.

That’s where we are this month. We’re remembering what it means to be a follower, because until we learn to follow Jesus the way he calls us to follow him, we won’t be much good at leading anyone else down a better path than the one they’re on. George Barna surveyed born-again Christians on the point of what it means to follow Jesus. Four out of five of them stated that they believe spiritual maturity comes from “trying hard to follow the *rules*.” Which is not the same as following Jesus. It is *Jesus* we are learning to follow ... not the rules. *Jesus*.

If you have a Bible with you, look with me at Luke, chapter 9. This is the place in the story of Jesus where he teaches his disciples what it means to follow him. He pulls them together and (Luke 9:1-6) - *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases ...*

Now, I'm thinking that laying hands on someone and giving them power to do battle with the enemy and authority over all those things that are destroying people ... that's about as far from a list of rules as you're going to get. He has just taken them past the letter of the law to the spirit of the law. And then ...

2 ... he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3 He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.

Why? Because there was a rule among rabbis in his day that when you went into the inner court of the temple, you shouldn't take anything with you ... not shoes, no money ... to avoid even the *appearance* of being distracted. This was Jesus telling them, "Guys, if you're going to follow me, you're going to have to learn how to focus on the person in front of you and the Jesus within you. So ... go do battle with the enemy. Take authority over all these things that are destroying people. And start by really paying attention to what you're doing. Don't give it half your brain. Stay with it. Be fully present." Because following begins with a decision to go in one direction instead of two directions or five or fifty. Do you think that would make a difference in your life right now? If you made a decision today to focus your life on one thing?

Jesus gave them an easy way to keep focused: *4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. 5 If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave*

their town, as a testimony against them." 6 So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

Folks, good news heals people. The news that your life is not a mistake, that you are actually loved, that you exist for a purpose and not just to become worm food ... that where you've screwed up, you are forgiven. That good news heals people. Followers tell people that news.

That conversation I had the other day with our Brilliant Small Group Leader? ... he said, "It's one thing to *talk* about following Jesus, but it is another thing to actually *do* it." This is where the disciples of Jesus actually started following him. It happened when they put feet to the news. When they went out to do battle with spiritual darkness and when they took authority over things that destroy people ... when they really paid attention to people and stayed there in their house until they got it. You know you're following when people get healed.

In Rob Bell's book, *Velvet Elvis*, he talks about the trampoline his kids got one Christmas, and how his son learned early on that if the two of them were jumping on that trampoline together, and if one of them timed his bounce with the other one just right, he could launch higher than if he jumped on his own. Have you ever done that? Its great fun. I have a scar on my forehead to prove just how much fun that is. Rob says he learned a few things about following Jesus from watching his kids on that trampoline: first, that jumping is more fun than watching.

Trampolines are fun only if you jump on them. So we jump, and when we invite others to jump with us it becomes even more fun. Another thing: we don't have to have it all figured out before we start jumping. As Rob says, we can jump and still have questions and doubts. It's the same with following Jesus. We tend to want to wait until we get all our questions answered before we jump. But that's not how it works. Bell says, "If we had all our questions answered,

we'd be ... God. The invitation to jump is an invitation to follow Jesus with all our doubts and questions right there with us.”

The key to following is in the jumping ... questions, doubts, fears and all. Maybe that's the real lesson of Luke 9. It teaches us what imperfect-but-faithful followers do:

1. Followers come when Jesus calls.
2. They *accept* power and authority given by Jesus.
3. They go where he sends.
4. They talk about the Kingdom of God.
5. They heal people.
6. They depend exclusively on his resources (and don't get side-tracked by their own needs).
7. They follow Jesus' instructions.
8. They talk to Jesus about what it's like to follow his lead.
9. They go off with him to rest after serving.
10. They come to him with ideas and questions.
11. They have conversations with him.
12. They tell him what they have and don't have.
13. They do what he says, even when they don't understand.
14. They pray with him in private.
15. They talk to him about how they see the world.
16. They talk to him about how they see him.
17. They express their belief in him.
18. They keep quiet about things he shares with them when he asks them to.
19. They listen when he talks about the future.

Around verse 28, Jesus takes three of the apostles up onto a mountain. So I learned that not all of Jesus' followers, but ...

20. Some of them will get away with him to pray.
21. Some of them will see him in his glorified body.
22. Some of them are enveloped by God's glory.
23. Some of them are afraid of what they experience when they are with him.
24. Some of them hear the voice of God.
25. Some of them have dramatic spiritual experiences they don't talk about.
26. Some of them will experience dramatic spiritual things, but will be asked move on from it.
27. Some of them will attempt to drive out demons and fail.
28. Followers see Jesus get frustrated by perversion and unbelief.
29. They step aside and watch Jesus heal people.
30. They hear Jesus but don't understand.
31. They are afraid to ask Jesus questions.
32. They argue among themselves.
33. They compete with each other for greatness.
34. They try to stop people outside their group from doing things in the name of Jesus.
35. They are admonished by Jesus when they try to stop people from doing things in His name.
36. Some are sent ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for him.
37. They ask Jesus for permission to be vengeful. (note: permission denied.)
38. They walk with him.
39. They promise to follow Jesus wherever he goes, without fully understanding the cost of that commitment.
40. They hear his call to follow, but tend to put conditions on obedience.

That's what followers do. Followers of Jesus are flawed ... fallible ... human. Even when they are at their best. But as flawed, fallible and human as they are, they still ... *jump*.

I learned that thing Rob mentioned in his book ... about jumping in rhythm with someone else so you ended up jumping twice as high. I learned that you have to be careful about how you land on the trampoline on the jump that launches you, because if you land a little to the left or a little to the right, the trajectory will take you over the side and into the grass. Not a fun lesson to learn, but I still like to jump. That's what it was like for the disciples. They learned to jump by doing it, even if they didn't do it exactly right. I'm sure they wanted rules. It would have been easier with rules. But I guess Jesus knew ... that if you don't already have them written on your heart ... you're not going to be helped by a list. Just jump.

At the end of Luke, chapter nine ... after taking authority and going out and sharing the news and healing people and feeding five thousand of them at a pop and watching Jesus glow in the dark ... these followers of Jesus were more committed than they'd ever been. One said (Luke 9:57-62) – *"I will follow you wherever you go."* 58 *Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* (in other words, 'I can't promise where following will take you.')

59 *He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* 60 *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you ... **go and proclaim** the kingdom of God."* 61 *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."* 62 *Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

Following costs. We don't get to decide what it means to follow. Following means focusing on Jesus, and he decides what direction we take. And we think we all want that until we start

following, and then we get it that following is risky ... and so we try to control it with rules or conditions or whatever ... but that's not following. We say we're going to wait until we have our questions answered. We say, "I'm going to wait until I know more about Jesus before I follow. Until I see him or feel him or whatever." But actually, I think we don't follow Jesus ... not because we don't know *him* ... but because we don't know ourselves.

There's a line in Luke 9 that isn't there. Or at least it isn't part of the earliest manuscripts. Somewhere along the way, it got added between verses 55 and 56. It's sort of interesting, isn't it, that some scribe along the way felt a need to add a line. Scholars give it about an average chance of being an actual word from Jesus. Since it doesn't show up in the earliest manuscripts, you won't find it in the main text ... but if your Bible has study notes, they probably mention this line. And I'm really glad they do because the spirit of Jesus is all over this line. It comes at a point in the story when the disciples are being really childish, and the Bible says (Luke 9:55-56) - *Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village.* That's the official version. But some ancient manuscripts include another sentence so that the passage reads (Luke 9:55-56) - *But Jesus turned and rebuked them **and he said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives but to save them."** Then he and his disciples went to another village.*

Even if Jesus didn't say it here, Jesus said this often. In fact, I think this is a key to the life of a follower. It tells us we don't follow Jesus ... not because we don't know who to follow ... but because we don't know who we are. We do not know what kind of spirit we have. We've bought some lie that the spirit of Jesus is a spirit of rules and rigidity and condemnation and destruction and guilt. We think it's all about performance and control ... and that's why we are so afraid to jump. But it turns out ... and this is good news! ... The Son of Man did not come to

destroy people's lives but to save them. And that's what Jesus wants to write on your heart. That's the spirit he wants to put into you. And that's what he wants you to tell the others. This is great news: God is not against us. God is for us. Which means that following will not destroy you. In fact, it is the following that saves us.