

BURN THE SHIPS

"COURAGEOUS LOYALTY"

MATTHEW 8:18-22

This Week's Core Competency

Single-mindedness – I focus on God and his priorities for my life. Matthew 6:33, *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Christ followers, disciples of Jesus, come in all shapes and sizes. And while it's generally true that Christ's disciples "focus on God and his priorities for their lives," they do so to varying degrees with varying degrees of success. After all, can any disciple focus on God and his priorities absolutely to the exclusion of everything else? Does any disciple follow Christ perfectly? Matthew 8:18-22 describes two disciples who were, let's say, "in process," so much so that we might be tempted to think that they weren't disciples at all, even though that's what Matthew calls them. As one writer wisely notes, "We should bear in mind that 'disciple' may be used of people with varying degrees of attachment to Jesus" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 202). Dallas Willard has written with much insight on discipleship; here's what he has to say about *good* and *bad* apprentices of Jesus.

"It is almost universally conceded today that you can be a Christian without being a disciple. And one who actually is an apprentice and co-laborer

I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I.

– Dallas Willard

with Jesus in his or her daily existence is sure to be a 'Christian' in every sense of the word that matters. The very term *Christian* was explicitly introduced in the New Testament—where, by the way, it is used only three times—to apply to disciples when they could no longer be called Jews, because many kinds of gentiles were now part of them.

"Now, people who are asked whether they are apprentices of a leading politician, musician, lawyer, or screenwriter would not need to think a second to respond. Similarly for those asked if they are studying Spanish or bricklaying with someone unknown to the public. It is hardly something that would escape one's attention. The same is all the more true if asked about discipleship to Jesus.

"But, if asked whether they are *good* apprentices of whatever person or line of work concerned, they very well might hesitate. They might say no. Or yes. Asked if they could be better students, they would probably say yes. And all of this falls squarely within the category of *being* a disciple, or apprentice. For to be a disciple in any area or relationship is not to be perfect. One can be a very raw and incompetent beginner and still be a disciple.

"It is a part of the refreshing realism of the Gospels that we often find Jesus doing nothing less than 'bawling out' his disciples. That, however, is very far from rejecting them. It is, in fact, a way of being faithful to them, just as chastisement is God's way of showing that someone is his child (Heb. 12:7-10). A good 'master' takes his apprentices seriously and therefore takes them to task as needed.

cont pg. 2

"Following us on what has already been said, then, a disciple, or apprentice, is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is . . . And as a disciple of Jesus I am with him, by choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God. This is the crucial idea. That means, we recall, how to live within the range of God's effective will, his life flowing through mine. Another important way of putting this is to say that I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I. I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did" (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 282-83).

For Discussion

Do you consider yourself a *good* or a *bad* disciple? How might you improve?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 8:18-22

18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

21 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Cf., another translation

18 Now when Jesus saw a large crowd around him, he gave orders to go to the other side of the lake. 19 Then an expert in the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 Jesus said to him, "Foxes have dens, and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." 21 Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (NET)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "when" and "then," *temporal connecting words* in vv. 18, 19.
- * Circle "the crowd" in v. 18.
- * Underline "gave orders" in v. 18.
- * Bracket "cross to the other side of the lake" in v. 18.

- * Circle "teacher of the law" in v. 19.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 20, 22.
- * Circle "another disciple" in v. 21.
- * Highlight v. 22b.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What do you *infer* about "the crowd" from the two members of it that address Jesus?
2. To whom did Jesus "give orders" to cross the lake?
3. What do you make of what the teacher of the law said to Jesus?
4. Explain the *contrast* in verse 20.
5. Put the point of Jesus' reply to the scribe in your own words.
6. *Contrast* the disciple in verse 19 and the one in verse 21.
7. Jesus appears to use the key term "follow" *literally* and *figuratively* in this passage. How so?
8. Explain what Jesus meant when he said, "let the dead bury their own dead."
9. **Discussion:** Discipleship is an important theme in Matthew's Gospel. Talk about what he wants his readers to learn about following Jesus from this passage.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Discipleship—some people are better at it than others. And while there is a correlation between being a disciple and being a Christian, the relationship is hardly mathematical. Dallas Willard is correct when he writes: "It is almost universally conceded today that you can be a Christian without being a disciple." If so, not all Christians are disciples. However, I'm not so sure he is correct when he goes on to write: "One who actually is an apprentice and co-laborer with Jesus in his or her daily existence is *sure to be a 'Christian'* in every sense of the word that matters" (*Divine Conspiracy*, 282 italics added). Perhaps people who think they are Christians because they work hard to follow Christ's teachings—rather than trust him alone for their salvation—are exceptions to the rule. Moreover, some people are simply confused about salvation; maybe they also fit into this category. Consider the "good Christian woman" who attends church for years only to discover that going to church doesn't make her a Christian. If so, not all disciples are Christians. In any case, our concern is for people who are Christians and who want to become better disciples, people we offhandedly refer to as "true disciples."

Discipleship is an important theme in Matthew's gospel. The Greek word translated "follow" in chapter 8 verses 18 and 22 is a technical term often used "of the willing and obedient disciple who follows his teacher as one who learns and one who serves" (Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 11). Matthew uses this term 25 times in his Gospel, more than any of the other three evangelists. And it's no wonder; his Gospel ends with the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:18-20). Obviously, Matthew wanted his readers to become disciples who would, in turn, make other disciples. In 8:18-22 he wants "to make perfectly clear what Jesus looks for in a disciple" (Morris, 199). Undoubtedly, true disciples can without exception become better disciples.

The structure of Matthew 8:18-22 is easily recognized: it can be divided into a *setting* (v. 18) followed by *two scenes* (vv. 19-20, 21-22). The two

scenes unfold in parallel fashion. Each one contains the same two parts: a disciple addresses Jesus (vv. 19, 21), and then he responds (vv. 20, 22). In addition, each scene contains parallel elements. In the first scene, the disciple's *declaration*, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go," is followed by Jesus' *declaration*, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." In the second scene, the disciple's *request*, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father," is followed by the Lord's *request/command*, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Although the details are hotly debated, the gist of the narrative is easy to understand. Jesus is surrounded by a crowd, which he orders to cross to the other side of the lake. While the makeup of the crowd is not specified, two of its members, which speak to Jesus before he gets into the boat to navigate the lake, are apparently disciples. The second one is called "another disciple" (v. 21) implying that the first one is a disciple, too (see Robert H. Gundry, "On True and False Disciples in Matthew 8:18-22," *NTS* 40 [June 1994]: 433-39). These two men, one eager and the other reluctant, approach Jesus as whatever other number of "his disciples" (v. 23) follow him to the boat. In Matthew the term "follow" "is used both literally, in the sense of 'coming or going after a person in time, place, or sequence,' and figuratively or metaphorically, in the sense of 'coming or going after a person as his disciple'" (Jack Dean Kingsbury, "On Following Jesus: The 'Eager' Scribe and the 'Reluctant' Disciple," *NTS* 34 [January 1988]: 46). In this passage, the term seems to be used both literally and figuratively. Jesus commands his disciples to *literally* follow him across the lake, and in response to their reaction teaches them what it takes to *figuratively* follow him as his disciples.

Jesus tempers the first disciple's eagerness and self-confidence with a dose of reality. This disciple speaks with all the confidence of the apostle Peter who once made the blanket statement, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Mt 26:33). In his eagerness, he boldly assures Jesus, not only will I follow you to the other side of the lake, "I will follow you wherever you go." He needed to count the cost before making such a bold promise. Jesus doesn't ask him to take a vow of poverty, but he does

warn him that following won't be free. As one commentator writes: Jesus "did not have even the human equivalent of what *foxes* and *birds* possessed. A foxhole is not exactly luxury, but the fox who has it has somewhere to sleep at night. Jesus had no such place . . . To be the disciple of such a man might well be interesting, but it would be far from comfortable" (Morris, 201).

Jesus responds to the second disciple's reluctance with a curt command to turn his priorities upside down. This disciple is stalling for time—perhaps for a good reason, perhaps not. It's difficult to know for sure because his request is unclear. One commentator explains: "The man is not ready to follow quite yet. 'Bury my father' implies at the very least that the man wishes to postpone discipleship until after a funeral and the mandatory months of mourning that followed" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 147). This request would be *reasonable* given the implications of the fourth commandment, "Honor your father and mother" (Ex 20:12). So important is this commandment that that to fail to do any of the

following is to disobey the Torah: "to bury a father who has just died, to participate in the six days of official mourning after such a death, to look after one who is sick and perhaps near death, and to provide for an aging parent who may yet live many years" (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, v. 33a, *Matthew 1-13*, 217). However, he may be requesting much more: "the expression may well have been an idiom for let me wait until my father is dead" (Blomberg, 147-48). This request would clearly be *unreasonable*. Reasonable or not, however, Jesus makes it clear that following him comes *first*. "Let the dead bury their own dead," he tells the man. Many commentators take this to mean, "Let the *spiritually* dead bury the *physically* dead," but it's more likely an idiomatic way of saying something like, "Let that business take care of itself—it's of no concern to you" (see Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew*, 153). In any case, Jesus' point is clear. His demand that disciples follow him comes *first*, ahead of all the other demands of life

The Message of the Passage

Although following Jesus is costly, putting learning how to live your life from him first is priceless.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about how God is making himself known to you . . . or how God wants to change you . . . or how God is calling you to change your world . . .

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 18 **When** "The 'crowd' seems to refer to those who had come to Peter's house" (Gundry, *Matthew*, 151). Jesus was healing and casting out demons in Capernaum where Peter lived (Mt 8:5; cf., v. 14). Seeing that a crowd had gathered, perhaps the morning after he had healed many (v. 16), he ordered the disciples to "cross to the other side of the lake," i.e., the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.

v. 18 **the crowd** I.e., disciples. "Matthew refers to the crowd as 'round him [Jesus]' (absent from Mark) and later omits this phrase in 12:46-47 (contrast Mark 3:31-32). We may infer, then, that Matthew draws the phrase from Mark 3:31-32, where Jesus identifies the crowd around him as his true family, those who do God's will. The crowd around Jesus are his disciples, then. Both of those who speak to Jesus in the next verses represent the crowd of disciples. In contrast with Luke, where the start of discipleship is in view, Matthew's teaching on discipleship has to do with its genuineness in those who already profess it" (Gundry, 151).

v. 18 **gave orders** Jesus' exorcisms and healings displayed his authority. Here "to play up Jesus' authority, Matthew inserts [εκελευσεν], 'commanded' or 'gave orders.' The verb occurs also in 14:9, 19, 28; 18:25; 27:58, 64, but not at all in Mark and only once in Luke" (151). "In the word 'commanded' (cf. 8:9) and in the verb [απερχεσθαι], 'to go' (the one common element in vv 18, 19-20, and 21-22), Matthew not only reminds the readers of the authority of Jesus but turns them to the rigors of discipleship, inserting the following material" (Hagner, 215).

v. 18 **other side** "The expression 'other side' usually marks Jesus' movement across the Sea of Galilee, on this occasion from the primarily Jewish region on the west side to the primarily Gentile region on the east side (cf. 8:28; 9:1" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 346).

v. 19 **teacher of the law** Cf., "scribe" (ESV; NKJV); "scribe" does not communicate much to the modern English reader, for whom the term might mean 'professional copyist,' if it means anything at all. The people referred to here were recognized experts in the law of Moses and in traditional laws and regulations. Thus 'expert in the law' comes closer to the meaning for the modern reader" (the NET Bible, 8^{tn} on Mt 2:4). "A scribe was a professional Torah scholar and would have had a very special interest in what Jesus taught" (Hagner, 216). Whether this man was a disciple of Jesus or not is debated by commentators. According to one, "Several things favor that this scribe is to be considered a disciple, i.e., a 'scribe' by Christian discipleship though not necessarily by Jewish occupational background" (Gundry, 153). Then he lists five reasons why he thinks so (153-54; see also the same author's article, "On True and False Disciples in Matthew 8:18-22," *NTS* 40 [June 1994]; 433-41). And another writes, "Matthew may mean us to see this man as in some sense a disciple of Jesus; he does not call him one of 'their scribes' (cf. 7:29), and 'another of the disciples' (v. 21) may be meant to point back to this man and include him in the number" (Morris, 200). According to one taking the opposite view, "He is not yet a disciple (correctly Kingsbury, *NTS* 34 [1988] 47-48) but believes he would like to become one" (Hagner, 216).

v. 19 **follow** "Follow may be used simply of coming along behind, but here it has the fuller meaning, 'follow as a disciple.' Wherever you go indicates a readiness to be with Jesus through thick and thin" (Morris, 200).

v. 20 **Foxes have . . .** "There is undeniably a hyperbolic element here (e.g., during the Galilean ministry Jesus used Capernaum as his 'home'), but Jesus' mode of life was anything but a 'settled' one" (Hagner, 216). "Rabbis enjoyed a relatively high status within Judaism, but Jesus has no school or synagogue or prestigious place of honor among the religious establishment. He stays at the home of friends, relatives, and disciples through most of his ministry (e.g., 8:14). So the expression 'no place to lay his head' does not indicate a homeless, Cynic-type philosopher but rather that his ministry will not result in an institutional establishment with comfortable benefits, and this will also be the lot of those who follow him" (Wilkins, 347). "'Laying the head' here stands for owning a place where one may rest; Jesus cannot claim a place of his own where he can sleep . . . Jesus sat loose to possessions, he had no secure job, and he owned very little" (Morris, 201).

v. 20 **Son of Man** "This is the first use of the Son of Man in this Gospel. It is used over 80 times in the New Testament and, with the exception of Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 (both quoting Jesus) and Acts 7:56, it is always on the lips of Jesus. It was his favorite way of referring to himself . . . There is lowliness about it because the unthinking could see in it no more than the meaning 'a man.' But there is also greatness, for it is not unlikely that it is derived from the reference to the heavenly being describe as 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7:13-14" (Morris 201).

v. 21 **another disciple** Cf., "another of the disciples" (ESV); "another of his disciples" (NKJV).

v. 21 **bury my father** "It was accepted that, faced with a burial, a man was exempted from a whole string of important religious duties: the saying of the daily prayers, the study of the law, the temple service, the observance of circumcision, the killing of the Passover sacrifice, and the reading of the Megilla (*Ber.* 3:1; *Meg.* 3b)" (Morris, 202-203). "Burial of the dead superseded other religious obligation in Israel, even for the priests, who were allowed to be defiled by touching the dead if it was a family member (*Lev.* 21:2)" (Wilkins, 349).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

This week I had the awesome privilege of speaking to elementary-aged students in chapel at Pantego Christian Academy. I was so impressed by their opening chapel exercises. They recited the pledge to the Bible, the Christian flag and the American flag. It was so great to listen to all those children pledging their allegiance to God, His Word and our great country. Allegiance is a powerful word. The dictionary defines it as "the loyalty of a subject to his or her sovereign." I love that! In our passage today, Jesus told His disciples the cost of following Him. They were to be completely devoted and dedicated to Him and His kingdom. Their allegiance was to be to Him and Him alone. Our lives will reveal our devotion. Am I more devoted to being a good parent than being a good Christ follower? Am I more dedicated to making a paycheck than laying it all down for Christ? These are important questions for us to answer as parents because our kids will be able to tell where our allegiance lies. Surprise your kids this week by having your family recite the Pledge of Allegiance at dinner. Ask them questions about the word "allegiance" and what we are committing to in the pledge. Ask, Do we show that kind of allegiance to God? In what ways? What are some things we can do better to show our devotion to Christ?

What Does The Bible Say

Read: Matthew 8:18-22

1. What question did the teacher ask Jesus?

2. Jesus' answer seems strange. What did He mean by it?

What Do You Think

There are many missionaries around the world who have given up their homes, families and sometimes even their lives to follow Jesus. Why do you think they would do that?

What R U Going To Do

Pray with your family about a way you can show your allegiance to God. Suggestions: Give up eating out and a movie to give money to a charity, give your time away at a nursing home, invite a neighbor to church, pray for someone who is sick. When our loyalty is to God, it shows up in the way we live!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Single-mindedness - I pay attention to the important things God has for my life.

Memory Verse

Philippians 3:8b-9a - *I consider them rubbish, that I might gain Christ, and be found in him.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC _____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.