

The Power of Following in the Dust: What It Truly Means to Be a Disciple

There's something captivating about wanting to be like someone we admire. As children, we dress up as superheroes, mimic our parents' professions, and dream of growing up to embody the qualities we see in those we look up to. This natural human tendency doesn't disappear with age—it simply evolves. Throughout our lives, we continue observing others, taking cues, and adopting practices that resonate with us.

But what if this instinct for imitation was actually designed for something profound? What if it's the very mechanism through which we're meant to become who God created us to be?

The Ancient Path of Discipleship

In first-century Jewish culture, the relationship between a rabbi and his disciples was unlike anything we experience in modern education. It wasn't a weekly lecture series or a semester-long course. It was total life immersion.

Young men would go through an extensive selection process to become a disciple. They had to memorize vast portions of Scripture—often the entire Torah. They underwent rigorous interviews. And at the end of this process, a rabbi might extend the life-changing invitation: "Come follow me."

But Jesus flipped this model completely upside down.

While traditional rabbis selected only the most qualified students, Jesus chose fishermen, tax collectors, and others who had been passed over by the religious establishment. He found them busy at their trades—occupations they'd learned because they *weren't* chosen—and He spoke those transformative words: "Come follow me."

The ancient Mishnah instructs that a student should "cover himself in the dust of his rabbi's feet"—meaning you should walk so close behind your teacher that you breathe in the trail of dust kicked up by their sandals. This wasn't about attending lectures; it was about total transformation through proximity and imitation.

Identity Produces Action

In John 13, we encounter one of the most powerful demonstrations of servant leadership in all of Scripture. Jesus gathers with His disciples for what would be His final Passover meal with them. The text tells us something crucial: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God."

Jesus knew exactly who He was. He understood His position at the top of every hierarchy of power and authority. He had every right to remain seated and expect others to serve Him.

And yet, knowing all of this, He got up from the table, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin, and began washing His disciples' feet.

This wasn't just unusual—it was scandalous. Rabbis of Jesus' day had actually debated whether it was even appropriate for a Jewish disciple to wash their rabbi's feet, considering the task too degrading. Yet here was the Rabbi of all rabbis, the Creator of the universe, kneeling before His students with a towel and basin.

Paul captures this beautifully in Philippians 2:5-8: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant."

Jesus wasn't performing to gain something from His disciples. This wasn't about manipulation or setting up an obligation. This was pure love—a demonstration of amazing grace so absurd and unexpected that it would forever mark what it means to follow Him.

When Others' Identities Don't Excuse Our Inaction

Here's where the story gets even more challenging. John makes it clear that Jesus washed *all* the disciples' feet—including Judas, the one who would betray Him. Jesus knew what Judas was about to do, yet He still knelt before him and met his need.

This is a stunning model for us. We don't get to choose who deserves our service based on their worthiness, their beliefs, or whether they'll appreciate it. Our identity as disciples produces action regardless of others' identities.

Jesus didn't let Judas's impending betrayal keep Him from serving. He exposed the sin while still serving the sinner. That's amazing grace in action.

In our lives, we'll encounter people who think differently, believe differently, vote differently, and live differently than we do. Jesus' model is clear: their identity doesn't excuse us from the action our identity requires. If we are disciples—students of Jesus, covered in the dust of His feet—then we serve. Period.

Actions Speak When Words Fall Short

Jesus had spent three and a half years teaching about serving others. He'd given sermon after sermon about loving the overlooked, caring for the marginalized, and choosing humility. His words were powerful and true.

But in this final moment before the cross, Jesus stopped talking about service and simply demonstrated it. He showed them what He'd been teaching all along.

Mark 10:45 captures His mission statement: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Our actions will often communicate louder than our words ever could. People may forget what we said, but they'll remember how we made them feel and what we did for them. The demonstration of a transformed life—one that consistently chooses to go low and serve others—cannot be ignored.

The Blessing of Embodied Faith

After washing His disciples' feet, Jesus asked them, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He explained that since He, their Lord and teacher, had washed their feet, they should wash one another's feet. He'd set an example that they should follow.

Then He said something remarkable: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

There's a blessing tied to walking in the way Jesus walked. Not just knowing about it. Not just agreeing with it intellectually. But actually doing it.

Following Jesus was never meant to be merely a spiritual or intellectual exercise. It's an invitation into life change—into embodying His character in every interaction, every relationship, every ordinary moment of our days.

Getting Up From the Table

Sometimes we stop feeling spiritually fed because we've been sitting at the table too long. We've consumed enough teaching, attended enough services, and accumulated enough knowledge. What we need isn't another meal—it's to get up from the table, pick up the towel and basin, and start serving.

This is where transformation happens. This is where head knowledge becomes heart change. This is where we stop being consumers of religious content and become disciples who look like Jesus.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to serve like He served—in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities. It's choosing to see needs and meet them. It's going low when we could stay high. It's loving people who may never love us back.

It's covering ourselves in the dust of our Rabbi's feet, walking so close behind Him that we can't help but become like Him.

And in that journey, we discover the blessing Jesus promised—the deep fulfillment that comes not from being served, but from serving others in His name.

Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Mentioned or Quoted:

1. **Mark 10:45** - "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."
2. **John 15:15** - "I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my father I've made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go bear fruit, fruit that will last."
3. **John 1:1-3** - Referenced as "John 1 says he is the word, and the word was with God in the beginning, and through him all things have been made."
4. **Philippians 2:5-8** - "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God to be something to use to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant. Being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."
5. **John 13:1-17** - The entire passage about Jesus washing the disciples' feet (read extensively throughout the sermon)
6. **Mark 10:42-45** - "Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Relevant Verses for Main Themes:

Based on the sermon's themes of discipleship, servanthood, and following Jesus' example, these additional verses align with the message:

7. **Matthew 4:19** - "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

8. **Luke 9:23** - "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

9. **Matthew 20:26-28** - Parallel passage to Mark 10:42-45 about servant leadership

10. **1 Peter 2:21** - "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

11. **Galatians 5:13** - "Serve one another humbly in love."

12. **1 John 3:16-18** - About loving in action and truth, not just words