



Sunday, April 26, 2020



Sermon Manuscript for

## **“The Good Disciple”**

Mark 1:35-39

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If you are a “disciple” of Jesus, then you are someone who claims to follow Jesus. You are someone who by following Jesus hopes to learn from Jesus to live life according to his way of doing things. This has been true of authentic Christians since the very beginning of the Church. Even before anyone was called a “Christian” Christians were known as “disciples” (Acts 11:26). Just look again at the early chapters of the Book of Acts. Luke calls the first Christians “believers” (Acts 2:44-47) but also “disciples” (Acts 6:1), because their daily life was characterized by following Jesus' teachings in order to learn Jesus' ways.

If you are a “disciple,” then I do not doubt that you intend to be a good follower of Jesus. I believe that you sincerely want to learn his ways. But none of us are perfect disciples. We all have much to learn about how to follow Jesus.

Our lesson today comes from Mark 1:35-39, where we learn how to follow Jesus from the one I'm calling “the good disciple.” We all know that it is much easier to learn how to do something when someone who is good at it shows us how. In fact, that's how we learn most things. It's the same when it comes to learning discipleship. It is helpful to follow the example of someone who is good at being a disciple. So, let's see what we find in Mark 1:35-39.

## The Good Disciple

The story we're learning from today happens the morning after crowds of people from all over Capernaum came to Jesus at Peter and Andrew's house. If you remember from last time, Jesus made a splash in Capernaum by his amazing teaching about the Kingdom of God and by his more amazing demonstrations of divine power to heal and to cast out demons. News quickly spread that Jesus could help people suffering sickness and demon possession, and they came from everywhere to get that help. They didn't start showing up until evening, after the Sabbath had ended. Jesus probably had a late night trying to help as many as he could.

Mark tells us what happened the next morning:

“<sup>35</sup> In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left *the house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. <sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions searched for Him; <sup>37</sup> they found Him, and said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for You.’ <sup>38</sup> He said to them, ‘Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.’ <sup>39</sup> And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.” (Mark 1:35-39 NASB)

Did you notice the one disciple of Jesus' four disciples who is named here? Simon. Simon was also known as Peter. We know that Peter becomes one of the top leaders even among the apostles. For example, in one of Jesus' appearances to the apostles after Jesus rose from the dead, he instructs Peter to “Shepherd my sheep” (John 21:16). Here in Mark 1, Peter and his brother Andrew are the first of the four that Jesus calls. And while they're in Capernaum, they are all staying at Peter's house. Peter is already shaping up to be a leader among the disciples. Maybe that helps explain why Peter is mentioned by name when the disciples go looking for Jesus.

Peter led the others to find Jesus, because, he tells Jesus, “Everyone is looking for you,” (v. 37). Evidently, there were more people needing healed and needing freed from demon possession. They either never left Peter's neighborhood the night before, or they came right back as soon as the sun came up. Clearly, Peter wants to make sure Jesus knows that there is already a crowd of people who need him.



It's interesting that they were able to find Jesus. Mark told us that Jesus had gotten up long before dawn to retreat for prayer in “a secluded place.” He needed to get away from people for awhile, and he didn't take the disciples with him this time. How did they find him?

Mark uses an interesting word to tell us that Peter and the others “searched” for Jesus. The word means that they “hunted him down.” Peter was like an expert tracker picking up Jesus' trail and following it to where Jesus was. Now that takes some skill. It also takes knowing really well what you're tracking. So, it sounds like Peter emerges as a leader among the disciples, because he was getting to know Jesus well enough to track him down in a deserted place. Maybe we could say Peter is emerging as a leading follower of Jesus.

When Peter and the hunting party finally find Jesus, Peter reports that the crowds of people back at his house are anxious for Jesus to do his thing. We know how this seemed to Peter and the rest.

Jesus was teaching them to catch people by casting the “net” of the good news of the Kingdom of God. Now, at Peter’s house, the crowds caught in that net are still coming in. What else is there to do but follow through on what they’re hoping for? It’s obvious that Jesus needs to capitalize on the great momentum going for his mission after just one day in Capernaum.

Peter and the others had to have been completely surprised by Jesus’ response to the news of his growing popularity. Crowds of new disciples are waiting for him in Capernaum, but what does Jesus want to do? He wants to go somewhere else. Not just anywhere else. Not another city like Capernaum. Jesus wants to now go around to the medium-sized towns of Galilee.

Why would Jesus turn his back on such an obvious mission success as he found in Capernaum? Why would he leave a major regional city like Capernaum, where everyone within many miles has personal or commercial connections, to go to much smaller towns? When Capernaum obviously wants him around, why doesn’t Jesus just establish a home base and let his gospel net continue to expand and draw people in?

Jesus himself gives us the answer to these questions. He tells Peter and the others that they need to travel to other towns in Galilee “so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for,” (v. 38).

Jesus has to know all those things that Peter and the others are thinking about. In fact, Jesus is human, too. There must be some part of him that is attracted to the idea of going back to Capernaum. And it’s not just about enjoying the popularity, or strategically making the most of this moment when he is in high demand. There are people suffering in Capernaum. Jesus can help them. We know that he is often moved by his compassion to help people. In fact, in the very next story in Mark 1, Jesus heals a leper, Mark says, because Jesus was “moved with compassion” for his trouble (v. 41). I have no doubt that for several reasons Jesus was drawn to do what Peter and the others assumed he would do.

What you and I would assume he should do. Why leave anyone suffering when you can help them? If the crowds showing up to receive what you have to offer are in Capernaum why go anywhere else?

We can see in Jesus’ answer that he is determined to stick to what he came to do. He came to preach the gospel to people all around, so that is what he needs to get back to. In other words, Jesus is not turning his back on the needy in Capernaum. He is turning his back on what he feels pulled to do but that is not what his mission is about. He is setting himself aside, and following the Father’s plan. What Mark is showing us is that Jesus—not Peter—is The Good Disciple. Peter means well, but he still has a lot to learn. Mark is showing us that Jesus is already practicing what he will preach to Peter and the others about true discipleship.

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me,” (Mark 8:34 NASB).

We might consider this the Law of Discipleship. In Mark 1:38, we see Jesus following it by denying himself and, instead, accepting the difficult task of traveling around to different places where people may or may not want to have anything to do with him.



## Following the Leader

This may be Mark's equivalent to an important theme in John's Gospel. John records several times when Jesus confesses that he does not act or speak on his own initiative. Rather, Jesus says that he is just following the Father, imitating what he sees the Father doing and saying the things that the Father gives Jesus to say (John 5:19). So, both John and Mark show us that Jesus was a disciple of, a follower of, God the Father.

So, if we want to learn how to be good followers of Jesus, there is no better example for us than Jesus himself. By paying attention to how Jesus followed the Father, we can learn to be better followers of Jesus.

In our passage in Mark 1:35-39 we see Jesus practicing his own Law of Discipleship. I want to suggest that Jesus gives us three lessons to follow.

### 1. Keep It Personal

First, Jesus sets the example of keeping discipleship personal. Disciples do not follow ideas. Disciples do not follow books. Disciples follow a leader—a person who is leading them in how to go. Jesus followed the Father, and we want to follow Jesus.

But how can we follow Jesus the person when he no longer walks around with us like he did when Peter and the others were following him?

Jesus shows us how in verse thirty-five. Remember that Mark said Jesus got up very early in the morning to go off by himself to “a secluded place, and was praying.” He got up before sunrise in order to meet with the Father in prayer. Praying to the Father is to talk to a person. We know that God hears prayer. We know that God answers prayer. Prayer is not exactly a conversation, but it is an interaction between ourselves and God.

This makes the location a little more interesting. Where did Jesus go to pray? The New American Standard uses the phrase “secluded place.” Jesus did not go to a desolate place to be alone, though he does go there to get away from other people for awhile. Jesus goes to the deserted place to meet with the Father. “And there he was praying.”

When Jesus is praying to the Father he is keeping up a personal relationship with him. We can do that, too! It is not important for us to pray as a religious requirement. It is important for us to pray just like it's important for a husband and wife to communicate with each other. Just like it's important for friends to keep up the relationship by spending time together and sharing their thoughts about things.

Prayer helps us to stay connected personally to God. It helps us to know him so that we can know how to recognize his way and to follow him. Jesus' example here teaches us three things we need to include in our practice of prayer.

The example of Jesus shows us that prayer must be a high **priority** every day. Jesus got up “very early in the morning” to pray (Mark 1:35 ESV). This would have been much more difficult than usual after such a busy evening healing and casting out demons. This only makes it all the more clear that personal time in prayer with the Father is more important than sleep, than breakfast, or being “on time” to wherever others are expecting us. These things seem urgent and important according to human ways of thinking. But Jesus shows us that prayer is most important of all and should be done first of all every day.

Jesus also sets the example that we should prioritize time for prayer with the Father in **private**. We have noticed that Jesus went off to a “secluded place” to meet with the Father. This was Jesus' normal practice. When you get time later, take a look at what Jesus does after feeding the five thousand in Mark 6, and where Jesus prays the night before his crucifixion in Mark 14.



When Jesus taught his disciples to pray—which instructs us, too, if we are also disciples—he gave them a model to follow. Many call this The Lord’s Prayer. It is found in Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus also taught us where to pray. He said

But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:6 NASB)

In other words, he wants us to do what he did. Find a place where we’re alone and spend quality time with the Father.

Speaking of quality time, we all know that the time we spend with someone should be worth it. Jesus shows us that our quality time with the Father should be in **proportion** to how important our relationship with him is. Jesus got up hours before anyone else to spend that time with the Father. That shows us that this relationship was extremely important to him.

It should be to us, too. This does not mean that every prayer needs to last for hours. It does not mean that brief times in prayer don’t count. Jesus shows us the ideal that we should try to practice as well as we can. In fact, Jesus probably would have spent more time praying that morning if he could have, but he was interrupted by Peter and the others. He accepted that it was time to start the day. So, in our practice of prayer, we should follow Jesus’ example by spending as much quality time as we can with the Father. There is no more important relationship that we have.

## 2. Keep It Focused

Jesus also teaches us that good disciples stay focused. It’s no accident that Jesus’ decision to move on to other towns around Galilee follows his time in prayer with the Father. Not only did that time keep up their personal relationship. It also helped Jesus to

refocus his thinking on the mission he was sent to accomplish.

If there were still people needing to be healed and freed from their demons the night before, Jesus surely knew it. Even if he took care of everyone who came to Peter’s house that evening, Jesus would have known there were more who would come the next morning. So, the pressures of his compassion to want to stay in Capernaum and heal everyone had to have already been working on him before Peter and the others ever found him. Maybe that is part of why he rose so early to pray that morning. Maybe he knew that he should move on but was torn by his desire to help the people of that city.

But from Jesus’ own words we know that the Father did not send him on a mission to heal all of the sick or to cast out all of the demons. This phase of the Father’s mission is to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and people can participate in it if they will repent and believe (Mark 1:15).

Why couldn’t he just keep preaching in Capernaum? It seems like he could have camped out at Capernaum and just let the gospel spread by word of mouth. As people came for healing or exorcism he would have had constant opportunities to preach and teach.

But remember what Jesus is teaching the four disciples to do? He is teaching them to catch people for the Kingdom of God. He is teaching them how to cast the gospel “net” that can catch people’s attention so they can be saved. We noticed last week that this is what is already happening in Capernaum. The gospel “net” is working. People are being caught.

Jesus’ mission is not just to find one good fishing spot and clean up everything he can there. He says that he came not simply to preach but to preach in all the towns in the area. His work is casting the gospel net in one place, then going to the next place and casting it there. By remaining focused on what he came to do, Jesus is being a good servant.

A “good servant,” according to Jesus, is one to whom the Father will say one day,

“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master,” (Matthew 25:21 NASB).

Jesus’ teachings about faithful servants have a common theme. Good servants stay focused on the task their master assigned to them. This is their responsibility and nothing else.

This is also true of the spiritual gifts that God has distributed to everyone who is part of the “body” of Christ, the Church. Some are equipped by God to teach, some to lead as elders, others to be missionaries, others for other “works of service” to make the Church better and more faithful to Jesus (Ephesians 4:11-12).



So, you and I must figure out—if we have not already—what place in the body of Christ God has gifted us to perform. This is a matter of knowing what we do well, what comes easy to us. There will be at least one thing we can think of. Our gifts are not given to us for our own personal fulfillment, though. If there is something we love to do, then we need to follow Jesus by finding ways to use our skills to help with the Church’s mission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). What you can do may contribute to the unity of the Church, or it may help directly with reaching out to lost souls.

When we have an idea of our assignment as servants in God’s Kingdom, then we need to stay focused on it as good servants do.

We cannot let other things—which may be good things—become distractions keeping us from doing our own work. As long as we live, we can help the mission by doing what we love to do and by doing it for the Church and her mission.

This brings us to our third and final lesson from this story.

### 3. Keep It Going

The third thing Jesus’ example teaches us is to continue the gospel mission.

Jesus had to have been exhausted from delivering so many people from their diseases and from their demons. After praying since long before sunrise Jesus must have been ready for a good nap already. He could easily have justified starting out to the other Galilee towns “tomorrow.” They could have gone back to Peter and Andrew’s house for the rest of the day, in order to be fresh for an early start on the journey the next day. But it looks like they departed right then and there.

Whether or not they went back to Peter’s house to grab their things, the point is that Jesus wasted no time in continuing the gospel mission. That’s what the Father sent him to do so that is what he pursued day in and day out. Mark writes, “He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons,” (Mark 1:39).

In verse thirty-eight, Jesus expressed self-denial in his resolution to stay focused on the assignment he came to accomplish. Now, in verse thirty-nine, we see that Jesus actually followed the Father, doing what he knew the Father wanted. This third lesson is about **persevering in obedience** to our calling, our assigned task in the “body” of Christ.

In one of his parables about good servants, Jesus makes this point about persevering in obedience to God. He said,

“<sup>45</sup> Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes,” (Matthew 24:45-46 NASB).

The only qualification of a good servant, according to Jesus, is that the “master finds ... doing” their assigned work “when he comes.” A servant who starts out obeying the master, then stops after awhile to do whatever he or she wants, is an unfaithful servant.

So, we can easily apply this lesson to ourselves. Whatever we are convinced our assignment from the Lord is, we must remain busy doing it as long as we are able. We do not want Jesus to return, and we have to think up an excuse for why we lost focus on what he assigned to us. Helping a brother or sister with their assignment is not ok if it keeps us from doing our own work. Just as in school, helping another student with their homework won’t keep us from failing the assignment if we did not have our own work to turn in.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus’ decision to move on from Capernaum at the height of his popularity there teaches us powerful lessons in discipleship. Jesus teaches us to keep up our personal relationship with the Father by spending time with him in prayer. In the practice of prayer, Jesus’ example teaches us to make it our highest daily priority. He shows us how important it is to spend time alone with the Father, praying privately. And Jesus teaches us by his example to spend as much time with the Father as we can every day. The proportion of our time with him in prayer is a reflection of just how important our relationship with God really is to us.

Jesus shows us how important it is to stay focused, like good servants do, on the task the Father has given us. As a “body,” as the Church, that means that whatever each of us does individual-

ly, our collective efforts should aim to continue casting the Kingdom net in everywhere we can.

Jesus’ perseverance in obeying his assigned mission teaches us to do the same. We know that it is not enough to start out well in our walk with the Lord. Every day and every breath of our life we owe in obedient service to God, accomplishing the work he has given us to do. This will give us a sense of fulfillment, but it is not about that. Our work must somehow contribute to the strength and success of the Church in our collective mission to seek and to save the lost.

The key to being able to do these things is to obey the Law of Discipleship, which is to set aside our own preferences. Deny ourselves, and instead follow wholeheartedly the leadership of the Father.

We know that Jesus has called us to follow him and to learn from him how to follow the Father. Are you still following Jesus? Or, do you realize that you have let good things distract you from your God-given assignment in the Kingdom? It’s not too late to get back on track.

Most important: priority, proportioned, private prayer with the Father is a daily assignment for all of us from Jesus our Master. Let’s all resolve to do more on this one. This will be the one thing we can begin to do right away that will help us follow Jesus as we should.

Are you one who has not yet started following Jesus? If you want to know how to begin that walk with him, please contact us through our website.

May God bless you in your service in his Kingdom and to his glory!

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