

## CHAPTER III

### BIBLICAL *FOLLOWERSHIP*

#### **Examples**

##### Joshua

Joshua of OT scriptures personifies a follower of a great leader. There were obvious occasions for this leader-to-be under Moses' tutelage to observe and assess risk-taking, visioning, confrontation, and self-sacrifice. He accompanied Moses up Mt. Sinai where he received God's special communication, heard the voice of God, and saw the glorious, earth-shaking epiphany with God's servant. This on-the-job training proved invaluable for Joshua as he followed Moses' leadership. Contrast this with the leadership rebellion by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram or the worship of the golden calf under Aaron's poor leadership. Joshua demonstrated courage when he joined the twelve to spy out the land of Canaan. This factor fostered *followership* that had been inbred within his heart and soul. Coming back from the land of Canaan, Joshua and Caleb were ready to enter the Promised Land. And much later upon entry, Joshua obeyed God's instructions as His leader in taking Jericho. In the debacle with Achan's sin, Joshua firmly confronted the iniquity of disobedient Achan. These *followership* factors can be traced back to his following of Moses and Moses' God. Many leadership factors had been exchanged in the *followership* conducted by Moses and followed by Joshua.

## Elisha

Elisha as an intern prophet received the rational and emotional assignment of the Spirit of God from Elijah. Elisha established schools for religious education, but also exhibited trust in the God of Elijah and called captives back from death and disease. Elisha witnessed the courage of a great prophet of God while together with Elijah encountering the ills and idolatry of Israel and their wicked leadership, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. When the mantle of leadership exchange occurred, Elisha was ready. Ordained with a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he knew about courage, visioning, serving, self-sacrificing, and collaborating together. Scriptures portray a powerful servant of God who followed in the path of Elijah's God for ministry to people—working miracles, seeing with eyes of faith what even his own frightened servant could not observe. “Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them” (2 Kgs 6:16). The mantle of *followership* had been exchanged for leadership. Elisha had been empowered by God and an incredibly exemplary leader—Elijah.

## Timothy

In the NT Timothy is an example of a follower. His spiritual mentor and spiritual father directed these words to him: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). The Apostle Paul gently, but firmly prodded this spiritual follower to carry on his appointed work of empowering leadership. His counsel basically stated: “Carry on the work of ministry emulating me. Follow my demonstration of leadership.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 498.

Timothy was not only known for carrying on the legacy of the Apostle Paul's mission by pastoring the church at Ephesus, but also served faithfully and loyally his spiritual mentor and the body of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### Jesus

Larry Evans calls *followership* a gift.<sup>2</sup> Jesus modeled gifted followership. Many of the factors that foster *followership* in spiritual mentoring are evident in conjunction with His Father God. Jesus obviously expanded His servant model ministry to people, His disciples, and His Father. Matthew declared that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

Jesus exemplified an obedient follower. He obeyed His Father's will explicitly. Note Jesus' own testimony: "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30; see also John 4:34). The quintessential exhibition of obedience occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane where the Saviour pled to have the cup of bitter suffering removed from Him, but intoned obediently, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matt 26:42).

Time and space do not allow for further exploration of Jesus following His Father's leadership and the multitudinous *followership* factors. But certainly Jesus exemplified the rational and the relational *followership* factors in His collaboration of

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<sup>1</sup>White, 498.

<sup>2</sup>Larry Evans, "The Gift of Followership," *Adventist Review* 179, no. Special issue on prayer (2002): 6.

shared objectives, risk-taking, self-sacrificing, trusting, visioning, inspiring, and confronting.

### **Bible Terms**

#### Disciple

By Jesus' own model a disciple is someone who follows—in this case a call to be fishers of men. When Jesus began to gather His twelve disciples, Matthew reports the call of two sets of brothers: “And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (Matt 4:18-22). Jesus' appeal was to make his disciples committed followers of a new lifestyle.

From the Hendricks' explanation “*disciple* means ‘learner.’”<sup>1</sup> In the days of Jesus, teachers would roam the countryside enlisting these “learners” as followers of themselves. Disciples would then follow their masters and teachings.

Though similar, the terms disciple and follower are not necessarily interchangeable. Larry Evans answers this question about the similarity of disciple and follower citing the

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<sup>1</sup>Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 182.

fact that these terms have different nuances of meaning based upon different relationships toward leaders,

“In one sense I suppose it depends on what is being asked by the leader, but generally I do not see the terms as being synonymous. A conference president, for example, needs the responsible following of all of his constituents and certainly his officers, but a disciple connotes a closer relationship than what a constituency can have with the leader . . . . Even those who do not know the leader can be responsible followers. There is no blind support but neither is there rejection of individuals in leadership just because we were raised during the Vietnam era -- an excuse given regarding someone critical of administration when I was in Georgia-Cumberland Conference.”<sup>1</sup>

Evans suggests that the reason a follower is not the same as a disciple is that a disciple has a closer relationship to his/her leader than a follower of a large organization. It simply means that all followers are not disciples, but the close, intimate relationships which a disciple has with his/her leader still qualifies them as a follower.

In Jesus’ spiritual mentoring, His disciples followed Him in the learning context of a group. Often the context for the disciple following the spiritual leader or mentor (authority figure) was a small band of followers, like the disciples of John the Baptist or Jesus.

Jesus’ disciples were obvious followers of Him. The accompanying passages demonstrate this description: “And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed Him” (Matt 8:23). “And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus” (John 1:37).

Context is critical here. The first quotation (Matt.8:23) simply refers to Jesus’ disciples following His path to get into a boat; however, the second quotation speaks to

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<sup>1</sup>Larry Evans, "Follower," e-mail to Steven Poenitz (11 February 2006).

the disciples following Him because they responded to His appeal to be committed followers in a new way of life that included fishing for men.

### Follower

Explaining who a follower of Christ is, Brian Jones and Linda Phillips-Jones equate the *followership* relationship with making disciples. In the Christian context they do not differentiate between disciple and follower. Note how they see this intimate *followership* of Christ, “Even though the term *mentee* doesn’t appear in the Bible, we equate it to the use of disciple in both the Old and New Testaments. We consider a ‘Christ-centered mentee’ to be a ‘New Testament **D**isciple’ (with a capital **D**), a committed follower of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Observe how the Joneses compare “a committed follower of Jesus Christ” in the above quotation to a New Testament disciple. While not disallowing what Larry Evans has proposed (that a follower could be a rather distant subject in a large organization in relationship to a leader or authority figure), the Joneses add a broad-stroke dimension to their disciple-follower definition. They go on to explain that the disciple model established by Jesus for His followers encompasses “a life-changing course.”<sup>2</sup> There definitely is a higher level of expectation from Jesus than a distant subject in an organization. This commitment to Jesus calls for more than the disciple who originally had only one specific

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<sup>1</sup>G. Brian Jones and Linda Phillips-Jones, *A Case for Discipling with a Capital D*, Workbook ed., Christ-Centered Mentoring (Grass Valley, CA: Coalition of Counseling Centers, Inc., 2002), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3.

goal (i.e., in the narrow sense of a mentor assisting a mentee to develop their writing skill). The disciple/follower is now expected to “improve spiritually, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and socially so that they could face every situation and challenge ahead of them.”<sup>1</sup>

The Joneses remind their readers of the original character named Mentor in Greek mythology, the first source from where the noun “mentor” became meaningful. When Odysseus was embarking for the Trojan War in Homer’s story, he left his son Telemachus with a trusted friend named Mentor, which is the first use on record of this term. This sage counselor and advisor served as the boy’s guide and tutor for twenty years while his father was off fighting the war. That explains the initial use of the word “mentor,”<sup>2</sup> but also offers us hints about *followership*.

Brian Jones and Linda Phillips-Jones point out that Mentor’s relationship with Telemachus serves to illustrate OT biblical relationships such as Moses and Joshua, Deborah and Barak, Elijah and Elisha, Naomi and Ruth, Elizabeth and Mary, Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Timothy, and others . However, these spiritual mentoring relationships often only depict *followership* as basically one-on-one tutoring and modeling with a singular goal. But Jesus raised the bar for *followership* in His spiritual mentoring of twelve disciples. His comprehensive discipling commitment moved from a narrow sense of specific assignments in *followership* to Christ-centered *followership* with a whole new expectation. His commission (in Matt 20:18-20) expanded the appeal and role of

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<sup>1</sup>Jones and Phillips-Jones, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

*followership*. Now Jesus' disciples must accept a new directive—make followers like Christ, not themselves and go into all the world and make more disciples.<sup>1</sup> Usually, the master disciple maker expects replication of his/her self, but the Christian is called to a Christ-centered *followership*.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [teach or make disciples of all nations]<sup>2</sup> Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt 28:18-20).

Anderson and Reese call this new principle of Christ in spiritual mentoring—“the paradox of faith—those who go are those who follow.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jones and Phillips-Jones, 1-3.

<sup>2</sup>*Bible Works, Ver. 6.0* (Norfolk, VA).

<sup>3</sup>Anderson and Reese, 16.