

I am not sure if it is still played or not but growing up we played a game called, “follow me.” One was selected to be the leader and the rest were expected to do everything the leader did. Of course, the leader was supposed to challenge us and do things they knew we could not or would not do. I am not sure how we determined who won or lost or even who would lead – but it did pass the hours.

Today as we end our study of Acts and discipleship I want to focus on three individuals who knew that discipleship requires both following and leading. If we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ we must learn to follow and we must learn to lead.

My first “leader” is Job. We find that Job was one of the richest and most influential men in the land during his lifetime. Today we would say, “He had it all.” Job was not perfect. He was, though, “*blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil*” (1:1 NRSV). He had raised his family properly. His sons even invited their sisters to their parties and feasts (probably not a common practice). He was a good man.

The phrase that caught my eye in this passage though, is the last sentence of verse five in the NRSV. It explains Job’s habit of offering sacrifices after his sons and daughters have had a party, just in case they may have sinned. It reads, “*This is what Job always did.*” There was a steadfastness about Job and his faith. God confirms this in 42:7b as Job’s friends are admonished, “*For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has*” (underline mine). Job was a faithful follower and leader.

The next person I want to look at this morning is Daniel. Daniel was captured as a young man and taken into captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem has been captured and the best of the best taken. Daniel was of royalty or nobility. He was the cream of the crop. We read in Daniel 1:3-4: “*Then the king commanded his palace master, Ashpenaz, to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king’s palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans*” (NRSV). The king only wanted those who had the capacity to follow and then to lead.

We know from the story that Daniel and his friends stayed true to their faith. They refused to eat the rich fare of the king’s table. They challenged the palace master to feed them only vegetables and water for ten days to see if they fared as well or better than the others. They excelled. They progressed far ahead of the others, and Daniel also had the ability to interpret dreams and visions. This ability and his faithfulness allowed him to excel ahead of the others.

Now move ahead a few decades. Daniel has risen to a powerful position in the land and some of the Babylonians are jealous of his success. They must find a way to get rid of Daniel but there is no corruption in Daniel. His books are in perfect order. We read, “*But they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption could be found in him*” (6:4 NRSV). How can you topple someone with a record like this? There was one way: “*We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find **it in connection with the law of his God***” (6:5 NRSV). They knew of Daniel’s faithfulness to his faith. There was one way.

These men play on the ego of the king and have the king pass a law that states that for 30 days, only the king can be prayed to. The king agrees, this sounds like a good idea; it sounds like a great idea to him – so the edict is passed and for 30 days all other gods are off limits. Any infractions would result in being thrown into a den of hungry lions... We read Daniel’s response: “*Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued*

to go to his house, which had a window in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, **just as he had done previously**” (6:10 NRSV). Sounds a little bit like Job doesn’t it? Nothing would keep Daniel from following his faith and in following, lead.

We now move ahead to the Apostle Paul. He had worked with the church in Ephesus for about three years. Now as he heads Jerusalem and to an uncertain future he meets with the church in Ephesus one last time. Paul gives his final instructions to the congregation he has grown to love. He reminds them of his life in their midst. He recalls the difficult early days of their ministry and how days of difficulty may be in their future (remember Paul preaching and teaching caused a riot in Ephesus – Acts 19:21 ff). However, Paul has given them an example of how to live as members of the household of Christ. He has taught them, shared with them, strengthened them in the faith. His goal has been to build up the people of God. He has lived as Christ in their midst. He has set the direction for ministry. *“In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord...”* (Acts 20:35 NRSV). Paul has shown how to lead by following Christ and Christ’s example for ministry.

Who do we follow and who is following us? All of us have those people who have influenced our lives (for good or bad). We know how they imparted faith and how they encouraged us by words and actions. They imparted truth probably more by action than words, we saw in them something that we wanted to be. Someone we want to follow. We remember our Job’s, Daniel’s or Paul’s, who by their actions gave us an image of Christ. These saints have been with us over the years and continue to strengthen us in ministry.

The call to discipleship is for us to both **follow and lead**—to become one of the household of Christ – Christian.

- We know love because we have been loved.
- We know grace because grace has been given to us.
- We know trust because someone trusted us.
- We forgive because we have been forgiven.
- We lead because someone has shown us how to follow.

Paul’s call to the congregation at Ephesus and to us is the same call as the one given by the Living Christ—we are to **“go and make disciples”**. This mandate has not changed throughout the centuries. We have may have changed how we do it, but the outcome has always remained the same—we are to be making disciples—those who become a part of the household of Christ. Those who follow Christ by their words and their actions and in doing so lead others. Can we be as confident as Job, Daniel and Paul? Do we dare say to those who would come to faith, “follow me”?

Dallas Willard sums up the need for discipleship in this way in the introduction to his book, The Great Omission:

So the greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as “Christians” will become *disciples*—students, apprentices, practitioners—of *Jesus Christ*, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence. Will they break out of the churches to be his Church—to be, without human force or violence, his mighty force for good on the earth, drawing the churches after them toward the eternal purposes of God?