

# 1



## Lesson 1

# What does it mean to follow Jesus?

### Introduction

A call to follow is at the heart of the Christian life. On numerous occasions in the gospels, Jesus is portrayed ushering forth the words “follow me.” The Greek word used in the New Testament to speak of the act of following was a compound one. It was made up of two words that strictly meant “together on the way.” It conveyed the idea of two people traveling together on a road or path. As a result, the original word could be translated “to go along with” or “to accompany.”

Such is a fitting picture of Christian discipleship. When one trusts in Christ for salvation, a dramatic change occurs (2 Corinthians 5:17). The guilt of sin is removed (1 Corinthians 6:11) and one receives the Holy Spirit within his or her soul (Galatians 3:2). A new standing before God is enjoyed (Romans 8:1). God’s great work of salvation is all of grace. From a human perspective, there is nothing anyone can do to earn God’s favor. Redemption and salvation come to us via God’s undeserved favor (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**Key Scriptures:**  
**Galatians 5:16**  
**John 15:4**

### Big Question:

**WHAT IS INVOLVED WITH FOLLOWING JESUS?**

### Conversation Starter

Ask the question: Have you ever spoken with someone or met someone who had a view of Jesus that was a lot different than your view of Jesus?

*Throughout the lesson, be prepared to share personal stories as you lead the discussion. Personal stories are included from Pastor Patrick as examples.*

## Personal story example from Pastor Patrick

I remember discussing religion with a professing Muslim on one occasion. We shared about our respective views. When I spoke of how I enjoyed a relationship with God, he was a bit startled. "As a Muslim, I could never view Allah in such a way," he replied. "He is high and mighty. He is different than mankind. He would never relate to me in such a way."

## Transition

**In the New Testament, Jesus' words "follow me" reveal there are five key characteristics of true Christian living. Let's examine these characteristics by studying the individual gospel accounts that describe Jesus' invitations to follow.**

### 1. Following Jesus involves a willingness to change. (Mark 10:21)

Jesus doesn't want any of us to stay the way we are. Though we are all imperfect and broken, He wants to restore us. He calls every man, woman, boy, and girl to forsake sin and receive His salvation (Mark 1:15). He wants each of His children to grow and become all He wants them to be.

#### Key Scriptures:

**"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)**

**"You know the commandments: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother." (Mark 10:19)**

**"Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth." (Mark 10:20)**

**"You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mark 10:21)**

A call to follow Him involves a call to change. Such truth was expressed in Jesus' words to a young man in Mark 10:21. The gospel writer told of the way in which our Lord encouraged one who has often been called "the rich young ruler."

If the man wanted to know how to have eternal life, why didn't Jesus share the plan of salvation? Shouldn't He have talked about His upcoming death, burial, and resurrection? Were not things like faith and repentance most important? Why did Jesus tell the man to sell his possessions and give to the poor?

Jesus' response to the man may seem mysterious from our point of view, but the point was rather simple. Our Lord aimed to expose what kept the man from repenting

and believing. He put a finger on the thing that prevented the man from embracing Jesus as Lord – material wealth. In confronting the man in the way He did, Jesus unearthed the man's unwillingness to change. The young man would not receive eternal life because he loved gold and gain more than God. Such painful truth is evident in the way Mark closed his narrative concerning the man – "He was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions" (Mark 10:22).

## Apply

Jesus' interaction with the rich, young ruler reveals a lot about what's required to follow Him. In order to be a disciple, one must have a willingness to change. One cannot hold on to sin or idols and walk in the way of the Master. Christian living requires a continual commitment to turning from sin and self. Those who want to be all

God wants them to be must be willing to lay their habits, hangups, faults, failures, addictions, and aspirations at the feet of Jesus. No person, priority, or possession can take precedence over Him. To truly follow Him, one must be willing to forsake all and make Him first.

### Discussion

Is there anything holding you back from real discipleship? As with the rich, young ruler, is there anything concerning which Jesus could say, "You lack one thing." Perhaps your reputation or resources stand in conflict with Christ. Maybe possessions or pleasure are a problem. Is fear, your future, or fun a stumbling block?

## 2. Following Jesus involves new life. (Mark 2:14)

All in all, the Christian life is marked by both a qualitatively and quantitatively better type of life.

Such new life is depicted through another one of Jesus' "follow me" statements. In Mark 2:14, Jesus offered His famous call to a man known as "Levi the son of Alphaeus." In other places in the New Testament, we learn that Levi also went by the name "Matthew" (Matthew 9:9, 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). The man wasn't just any man. According to the gospel accounts, he was a tax collector (Matthew 9:9 and Luke 5:27). The man's occupation may not seem that important to modern readers, but it was for his contemporaries. In Jesus' day, some Jewish nationals agreed to work under contract for the Romans to collect taxes in their respective villages from their native kinsmen and women. Because of the work they did, they were despised by their fellow countrymen. They were regarded as horrible sinners, since they took money from God's people and gave it to a foreign government. Their work was seen as blasphemous and idolatrous, since it supported the kingdom of an emperor who claimed to be God.

“  
**Faith in Christ opens the door to a better type of existence. At the moment of salvation, one receives abundant life for life on earth (John 15:4).**  
”

### Key Scripture:

**“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)**

Jesus' call of Levi teaches us one other magnificent truth. It reveals the way in which the call to discipleship involves radical transformation. When people truly follow Jesus they experience new life. Luke's account of Matthew's conversion shares an extra detail. It says, "leaving everything behind, he got up and began to follow him" (Luke 5:28). In following Jesus, Matthew demonstrated that discipleship involves new life. Though the man was previously a greedy tax collector, the call to follow Christ radically transformed him.

### Apply

If you commit to following Christ, you will experience a new reality. He will change your passions and priorities. The desires and direction of your life will become radically different. Your identity and interests will transform.

### Personal story from Pastor Patrick

I have a vivid memory from the day I was saved. It was a Sunday afternoon and my mother was folding laundry in the kitchen. I remember telling her, "Mom, I feel like a new person." At that time, I didn't understand what all was involved in the change I was experiencing. In time I learned what was going on. The Spirit of God had

invaded my life, and He was giving me a new outlook on life, new desires, and new priorities. Since the time of my conversion, I have experienced more and more change. Thanks to His grace, He has made me into a different person! Such is the nature of Christian discipleship. Following Christ involves new life!

### Discussion

Has Christ changed your life? Do you have a memory of how your life changed after salvation? Like Matthew, have you experienced an adjustment of goals and values in life? Is your outlook different than the rest of the world, or are you living for a lot of the same things? True discipleship will change you. It will set you on the path to living a new life.

### 3. Following Jesus involves new priorities. (Matthew 8:22)

Matthew records an instance in which different people approached our Lord, professing a desire to follow Him. A scribe, who undoubtedly sought to test Jesus, boasted, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go" (Matthew 8:19). The man's problem was seen through the way in which he addressed our Lord. The moniker "teacher" was hardly sufficient. One will never follow Christ rightly if Jesus is regarded as a mere religious teacher or leader. It is only when one sees Jesus as the living God that he or she will be compelled to follow Him with the abandonment and dedication required of true disciples.

In response to the scribe, Jesus said, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Our Lord's announcement was designed to orient the man with the harsh realities of Christ's kingdom. Following Jesus requires a certain level of sacrifice. Not finding a foothold to ensnare Jesus, the scribe likely walked away in calloused indifference.

Overhearing the entire affair, one of Jesus' disciples spoke up. In response to Jesus' pronouncement about foxes and birds, he said, "First let me go bury my father" (Matthew 8:21). It is unknown whether the disciple in view was a part of Jesus' inner circle. He may have been one of the Twelve, or He may have been more of a fringe follower of Christ. Whatever the case, he had a pressing need. His father had died and he needed to bury him.

According to rabbinical custom in Jesus' day, it was an indignity for a son not to bury his father. To fully honor one's parents, a son had to oversee his father's internment. Considering the cultural context of the first century, Jesus' reply would have seemed rough and calloused. Our Lord told the disciple, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22).

Why did Jesus answer in such a way? His intent was partly to show that His truth trumped the man-made traditions of the religious leaders in His day. He also wanted to demonstrate that Christian discipleship places strong demands on one's priorities. Even something as serious as burying one's father was to be secondary to His commands.

### Apply

The lesson for us is clear. Following Christ means making His kingdom first. The priorities our culture may place on us should be secondary to His. Neither family issues nor financial interests should stand in the way of what He may call us to do. The one who walks on the way with the Master understands that Christ is first. Nothing can stand in the way of pursuing His will and ways.

### 4. Following Jesus involves spiritual endurance. (Mark 8:34)

Mark 8:34 contains another instance in which Jesus spoke of what's involved in following Him. His words within the passage were uttered to a large group of people that included His closest disciples. Addressing the crowd, He said, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Jesus' words are

often quoted by well-meaning Christians, but they are often misunderstood.

In particular, there is sometimes a misrepresentation of what it means for one to “take up his cross.” Part of the problem rests in our culture’s conception of crucifixion. Crosses are often a sign of love and hope. They are hung in homes as decorations, and some hang them around their necks with jewelry.

First-century people in the Roman world would have been horrified by such trite representations of crucifixion. It was reserved for the worst of criminals. Those who were sentenced to death by the Roman method of capital punishment experience great indignity and dishonor. The pain of crucifixion was immense, designed to be a great deterrent against crime and treason. The mere mention of the word would have made a first-century resident of Rome shudder.

Overall, a cross was a symbol of suffering and shame. We often think of the first symbol, but we sometimes forget about the second. Since thieves and insurrectionists were often put to death by crucifixion, a cross was often associated with the dregs of society. In addition, the methods used in execution subjected victims to great human indignity. Jesus Himself was stripped naked and publicly ridiculed (Mark 15:17-20). Victims usually hung on the cross naked. As they did, they were subject to the taunts and jeers of those who passed by (Mark 15:24-32).

**Key Scripture:**  
**Romans 1:16**

His words were meant to be a reference to the shame that was often associated with crucifixion. He intended to encourage His disciples to be willing to embrace the shame that would come from being one of His followers. Such an exhortation was necessary, when one considers the way the Twelve would later be tempted to deny Jesus (Mark 14:50-52).

**Apply**

The meaning of Jesus’ call for disciples to take up their cross remains for us. If we want to follow Him well, we must be willing to endure. Suffering shame on His behalf is a prerequisite for faithful discipleship. Like the Twelve, we will face hostility to our faith. The world will urge us to deny Christ. The world is rarely a friend of His truth. Those who bear His name will oftentimes be mocked and maligned. Christianity will never be regarded as clever or chic.

**Discussion**

How can we respond when the world makes fun of us?

**Personal story from Pastor Patrick**

I can remember the way in which I had to learn about this component of discipleship. When I first became serious about my walk with the Lord, some of my friends took note. Noticing that my speech and conduct changed, they teased me about the fact that I didn’t use some of the language they used. They made sport of the way in which I abstained from certain things that other college guys did. I took their ribbing in stride, never taking it to heart. However, my years as a Christian have taught that some have a more hostile perspective. It seems the world is amping up its hatred toward the church. Our common experience, current events, and observation of social media tell us that such is true.

**5. Following Jesus involves gospel witness. (Mark 1:17)**

Mark 1:17 contains an account of Jesus’ initial call to the first of His disciples. In inviting Peter and Andrew to follow Him, Jesus said, “Follow me...and I will make you fish for people.” Considering the fact that both Peter and Andrew were both fishermen, they were well aware of the metaphor associated with Jesus’ call. They knew what it was like to set snares in order to snag fish.

They were also well acquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures. Jeremiah famously used the example of fishing for

men. He once said, “I am about to send for many fishermen—this is the LORD’s declaration—and they will fish for them. Then I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and out of the clefts of the rocks” (Jeremiah 16:16). Jeremiah used the concept of fishing for people to speak of judgment.

Jesus made use of the prophet’s metaphor. In proclaiming the gospel, His followers would snag people from the coming judgment.

“

J.C. Ryle has commented on Jesus’ figure of speech, saying, “The meaning of this expression is clear and unmistakable. The disciples were to become fishers for souls. They were to labour to draw men out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan to God. They were to strive to bring men into the net of Christ’s church, that so they might be saved alive, and not perish everlastingly.”

”

### Discussion

Following Christ means fishing for people. If one truly walks with Christ, he or she will be compelled to witness for Christ. A relationship with Jesus will lead one to reflect Jesus to others. Have you discovered this to be true? Are you engaged in fishing? Are you actively trying to snatch people from the judgment that is to come?

### Apply

Sadly, telling others about Jesus is abnormal for many believers. Studies actually reveal that one is less likely to tell others about their faith the longer they are a Christian. Such a paradigm must be reversed. We need a new approach to Christian living that returns to the old truth of Jesus. Something is wrong with our discipleship when we don’t have a desire to tell others about Christ. Following should result in fishing. Later in this study we will provide more truth and training on this subject.

### Follow Me

We have examined some biblical characteristics of true discipleship. Hopefully, this information has given you a better perspective of what’s involved in following Christ. My prayer is that you will walk in the way together with Jesus, embodying the characteristics we have mentioned. For the rest of this study, we will look at nine areas of biblical truth that are important for you to grasp as you follow Christ. In examining these topics, we will ask questions that we will attempt to answer with Scripture. It is my conviction that believers need to have clarity regarding these matters to walk in a strong relationship with Jesus. The questions we will ask are as follows:

“Why am I alive?”

“Who is God?”

“Who is Jesus?”

“Who is the Holy Spirit?”

“What is the Bible?”

“What is prayer?”

“What is the Church?”

“How can I handle life’s problems?”

“How can I make an impact for Christ?”

### Follow Me Challenges

**PERSONAL:** Let’s get started creating a “My 5 List” where we’ll build a list of 5 people we know who need the love of Jesus and start connecting with them. This week, begin by thinking of 2-3 people in your family/neighborhood to get your “My 5” list kicked off.

**PUBLIC:** Participate in, invite folks to, and/or donate for a TBC Backyard Egg Hunt. More information can be found at [tabernaclebaptist.org/events](http://tabernaclebaptist.org/events).

**PRAYER:** Pray for...

- the people you added to your “My 5” list.
- God to show you other people you can add to your “My 5” list.
- TBC Backyard Egg Hunts.