



by

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Following Jesus

What happens after we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior? Does our life go back to the way it was before? Do we follow the old ways of living and thinking? It shouldn't. Receiving Christ into our life means becoming a **follower** of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple of God's Son is **serious**. Being a Christian is serious. It's much, much more than just attending the Sunday morning worship service at a church. It's a **lot** more than going to church twice a year for Christmas and Easter. So, what does it mean to "follow" Jesus Christ?

The New Testament introduces us to many kinds of followers of Jesus Christ. Some were serious, some just wanted to see what Jesus would do and say next. Let's first see examples of people who were serious about following Jesus.

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 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.” Matthew 4:17-22

As we continue reading through the New Testament, we see that Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John, were serious about following Christ. They all became members of the closest followers of Jesus Christ — known as Apostles. Peter later pointed out to Christ just how much following Him had cost them: “*See, we have left all and followed You.*” (Mark 10:28) Peter’s words describe well what it means to be a follower of Christ in any age. It is an all or nothing relationship. Jesus doesn’t want just a part of us — He wants everything.

Here’s how Jesus described those who would follow Him: “*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*” (Mark 8:34) Jesus was serious. He wasn’t playing mind or word games. He was telling people exactly what it meant to follow Him. Here’s what Jesus said to a wealthy man who expressed an interest in becoming a follower of Christ: “*One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.*” (Mark 10:21) That man went away saddened by the words of Christ because he was wealthy. He wanted to follow Jesus on his own terms, but God decides what it will cost to follow Him.

At different times during Christ’s earthly ministry thousands of people “followed” Him:

“And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.”
Matthew 12:15

“When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities.” Matthew 14:13

“Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi’s* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.” Mark 2:15

“So *Jesus* went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.” Mark 5:24

“Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!’”
Matthew 21:19

The last verse is very telling. Multitudes of people were “following” Jesus just days before He was arrested, beaten and crucified. Where were they during His arrest, beating and crucifixion? Almost every “follower” of Christ disappeared when the leaders of Israel determined to have Jesus murdered. A small number returned to Him after His resurrection, but that experience taught them much about the cost of discipleship. They learned that following Jesus could cost them everything.

Not everyone who says they are a Christian is a **true** Christian. Not everyone who says they are a follower of Christ is **really** following Christ. Following Christ will cost us something very precious: our love and devotion for starters — maybe even our very life. Being a follower of Jesus Christ means we love Jesus more than we love ourself — more than life itself. Being a follower of Jesus Christ means we are more devoted to Jesus than we are devoted to ourself — and anyone or anything else.

Think about that. Let it sink in. Following Christ is not cheap — in fact, it is the most costly thing we will ever do in life. Do we want to be a **real follower** of God's Son? Let's count the cost — knowing what it means to follow Him.

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks

conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” Luke 14:25-33

Jesus may not ask us to give all our riches to the poor, but He does ask us to be willing. He may not ask us to hate our father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and our own life also, but He does ask us to be willing. How serious are we about following Jesus Christ?

Jesus began His earthly ministry by working miracles — turning water to wine, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, raising the dead. People flocked to Him by the thousands to see His miracles and hear His teaching. Jesus brought His earthly ministry to a close by telling people how much it would cost them to be His disciples. They left Him by the thousands. Then Jesus went alone to the Cross to die for their sins. That’s **Who we follow**. He gave everything for us — what are we willing to give Him?

I Will Follow Him

Remember Little Peggy March? She had some hit songs in the '60s, but none as big as "I Will Follow Him" in 1963. She was 14 years old at the time. The song was about a girl's love for a boy. Look at how much she loved him:

"I Love him, I love him, I love him
And where he goes I'll follow, I'll follow,
I'll follow

I will follow him, follow him wherever he may go
There isn't an ocean too deep
A mountain so high it can keep me away

I must follow him, ever since he touched my hand I knew
That near him I always must be
And nothing can keep him from me
He is my destiny"

Do you see the depth of her young love and devotion for another human being? She was willing to follow him anywhere. There was no ocean too deep or mountain too high to keep her away from him. Ever since he touched her hand she knew she had to be near him. Nothing could keep him from her because he was her destiny. She had to follow him. She must follow him.

How does a girl's love for a boy compare with a Christian's love for Jesus Christ? Do we **have** to follow him? Will we follow Him **wherever** He may go? Is there any ocean **too deep**, any mountain **too high** to keep us away from Him? Is Jesus Christ our **destiny**?

We should love God's Son more than any other love in life. We should love Jesus with every beat of our heart. Every breath we take should be about Jesus. Every thought should be of Him.

Here's how Jesus explained that kind of love.

“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.” Mark 12:30

That is love! That is devotion! To love God with **all** your heart, **all** your soul, **all** your mind, **all** your strength. What does that kind of love lead us to do? Follow Him wherever He should go.

How much do I love Jesus? How much do you love Jesus? Let's be honest. That's the only way to really take our spiritual love temperature. Did you know that God takes the temperature of our love for Him? Look at what Jesus said about that. It's pretty sobering.

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that*

the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” Revelation 3:14-21

Those words must have stunned the Christian disciples who lived, worked and worshiped in Laodicea. My guess is they thought of themselves as good **followers** of Christ. They certainly would have stood out in their community in the 1st Century AD since Christianity was such a new belief system in the world at that time. They saw themselves as rich and in need of nothing, but how did their Lord and Savior see them? Lukewarm. Wretched. Miserable. Poor. Blind. Naked. Jesus told the Laodicean disciples that He wished they were cold or hot. He said that was so much better than being lukewarm.

The words that Jesus spoke to the 7 Churches of Revelation give me pause — to consider what kind of follower I am. Jesus is so loving and kind to point out our spiritual love temperature. He rebukes and chastens those He loves. If I don't like what I see, there is something I can do about it. *“Therefore be zealous and repent.”* What happens if we do what Jesus commands? He has a special promise for us. *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”*

Lukewarm discipleship sickens Jesus (*“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth”*), but He still loves us and is waiting for us to be zealous and repent. He stands at the door and knocks and if we hear His voice and open the door to Him, He will come in and dine.

Let’s take our temperature today. If we don’t like what we see, we have the option to be zealous and repent — and Jesus will come in and our close relationship with Him will be restored. How sweet it is to follow Jesus.

A Disciple Is A Learner

People who follow Jesus Christ are called **disciples**.

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.” Matthew 5:1

His disciples **came** to Him. That’s what disciples do — they go where the Lord goes. They **follow** Him. They want to be with Him. Their every thought is surrounded by the desire to follow Him. Their highest goal in life is to be with Him.

“Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him.”
Matthew 8:3

One of the primary messages of the New Testament is that people who believe in Jesus Christ follow Him. They watch, listen, think, learn and follow.

The word “disciple” means **a learner**. The original word in the New Testament is the Greek *mathetes* — “a learner, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor.” A disciple of Jesus Christ learns about their Lord and what He wants them to do, then does something about what they learn. A disciple is **not** someone who just knows. Disciples hear, learn and **do**.

I used to think Christians were not thinkers; that they just did what they were told to do without using their brains to search and consider what is truth. I thought of Christians as non-thinkers. I took pride in

my atheism believing it made me a “free thinker.” Then I became a Christian and found out my brain did not turn to mush when I believed in God. In fact, I learned for the first time in my life I really could think for myself. I wasn’t following what the world believed, said and did. God placed His Holy Spirit inside of me and spoke to me through **His Word**. I heard from God, caught His wisdom and lived a life far better than anything I could have ever come up with by myself. Talk about being a free thinker!

Hearing from God is just the start of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Hearing should lead to thinking. Thinking should lead to learning. Learning should lead to doing.

1. Hearing
2. Thinking
3. Learning
4. Doing

It’s a simple process, but it’s not easy — and it’s not quick. It takes effort and time to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. However, I can’t think of any better way to spend my time on earth. Jesus gives us the “gift of eternal life” when we become His disciple. Our short time on earth is just the beginning of an everlasting love song with Jesus on the throne of our heart.

A Disciple Is Obedient

Yesterday, we looked at how a follower of Jesus Christ is a **learner**. They listen to what He says and seriously consider His words of wisdom and direction. But it doesn't stop there.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is also a **doer**. They hear what God says and then obey His commands. Jesus made it clear to His followers that obeying Him was a vital part of being a disciple.

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

Before Jesus said anything about the **process** of discipleship, He pointed them to the **power** of discipleship: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” We can be as busy as we want to be in the process of following Jesus Christ, but our efforts are nothing without His Power. Jesus has ALL **authority** in Heaven and earth. The Greek word is *exousia* and means “the right to act, the power to act, permission to act, freedom of action.” The idea here is that Jesus Christ has the **right** and the **might** to do as He pleases. Jesus has the authority to do whatever He wants to do and receive

from His followers anything He wants. What does Jesus want us to do? “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” Jesus wants us to **go** in His authority and disciple people from every nation. How do we disciple people? We teach them to observe everything He’s commanded us.

Did you see what Jesus wants us to become? Teachers! “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” A disciple is one who knows based on learning and obedience. Jesus did not say, “Teaching them to observe all things that I have asked you to do.” He said “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” A teacher is one who has obeyed the commands of their Lord and Savior and instructs others to do the same.

Jesus wants us to first follow Him in complete obedience, then teach others how to follow Him in complete obedience.

1. Jesus leads — we follow.
2. Jesus teaches — we learn.
3. Jesus commands — we obey.
4. Jesus gives us His authority to disciple nations — we teach others how to follow and obey Him.

So simple, yet so complex. The idea is magnificently simple, but it takes a lifetime of devotion and obedience to complete the task. Are you up for the challenge? I can’t think of anything better to do with our lives than to trust and obey Jesus Christ.

A Disciple Is Not Alone

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:16-20

Have you ever wondered why some of the 11 disciples doubted? They are in the presence of the risen Christ. They’ve all seen Him, they’ve walked with Him, talked with Him, listened to Him, prayed with Him, eaten with Him, and touched Him. They know that Jesus died and they know He rose from the dead. So, why did they doubt? What did they doubt?

The Greek word translated “doubted ” is *edistan*. It means “double standing, to stand in two ways” and implies uncertainty and hesitation about which way to go. It’s the picture of a person standing where two paths meet and not knowing which one to choose. The word “hesitation” would be a better translation than “doubted.” All of the disciples worshiped Christ, but some “hesitated.”

Think about what they had just been through. The last five weeks of their life had been traumatic. Jesus was arrested. All the disciples ran for their lives. Jesus was tried, beaten and crucified. He died and was buried in a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. They feared for their own lives. Their hopes and dreams for a Messianic Kingdom had been crushed. They didn't know what their future held for them and their families. Then, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples many times. He told them about their mission on earth and that He was going back to Heaven to rule and reign.

Is it any wonder that some of His disciples would “hesitate” at the path Jesus was calling them to follow? Could they do it? Were they up to the challenge? Would they have the strength? Would they have the wisdom? How could they accomplish the great task placed before them? They stood where two paths met and they hesitated.

Where do we hesitate in our discipleship? What double paths are we facing right now that are causing us to pause in following God's Son? I doubt that many of us are facing the depth of challenges that caused some of the 11 disciples to hesitate, so why can't we move forward in our faith?

Hear what Jesus is saying to you. He has all authority, all power, so go — go and disciple your family, your neighbors, your school, your workplace, your community. And don't forget His wonderful promise: “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

That reminds me of what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:9. He said that followers of Jesus Christ may be persecuted, but they will never be forsaken. Jesus has been with you, is with you, and will be with you, even to the end of the age. **You are not alone.** Jesus will never leave you. He will never forsake you. Take the path He wants you to walk and He will be with you. Always.

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