

R12.2 February 2024 Blog Follow Me!

One of the most frequent phrases, and a repeated refrain in the message of Jesus, is “Follow Me”. If Jesus thought that it was necessary to repeat this phrase over and over during His earthly ministry, then we would be well served to do some due diligence on what is meant by this important statement. Since this is such an all-encompassing topic, with far reaching implications for all believers, the objective of this short blog is simply to encourage all of us to dig deeper into what Jesus meant when He said: “Come, follow Me.”

“At the beginning of his ministry, he called his first disciples with the terse command, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’ (see Matthew 4:19). As his ministry progressed, he told the crowds, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me’ (see Mark 8:34). At the end of his earthly ministry, he recommissioned the repentant Peter with the words, ‘Follow me’ (see John 21:19).”¹

In Mark 12:30, Jesus repeated the words of Deuteronomy 6:5 which reads, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”² God wants us to be committed to Him with every aspect of our being. That was so with God the Father in the Old Testament, and it didn’t change with the coming of Jesus, the Son of God. Rather, the importance of loving Him is stressed even more.

So, what does it mean to be a *Follower of Jesus*? Although following Jesus can involve many things, two irreducible minimums are:

- Acceptance of the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God;
- A heart desire to:

¹ Attributed to Thomas A. Tarrants of C.S. Lewis Institute

² All scripture references are NASB95 unless otherwise noted

- understand and obey Jesus' teachings; and
- follow His examples, such as those set forth in Matthew 5:1-7:29; John 13:34-35; Matthew 18:21-22; Philippians 2:5-8.

This requires a commitment to the regular exposure and intake of God's Word: "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."³ All of this with the end goal of living a life pleasing to Him as we become "Conformed to His Image" (see Romans 8:29) and prepared for heaven.

Following Jesus is not a one-time decision but an ongoing choice of both the mind and the heart. It is more than just to believe in Jesus, it is to commit to Him involving a childlike attitude of surrender, submission, and obedience. These three heart attitudes are progressive. Beginning with a surrender of our will to the will of God, which naturally leads to a submissive heart resulting in obedience. The following poem beautifully describes the truth of this process:

None of Self and all of Thee⁴

Theodore Monod – 1875

Oh, the bitter pain and sorrow
That a time could ever be,
When I proudly said to Jesus,
"All of self, and none of Thee."

Yet He found me; I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
And my wistful heart said faintly,
"Some of self, and some of Thee."

Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Brought me lower while I whispered,
"Less of self, and more of Thee."

³ Psalms 119:105

⁴ Later published as a hymn in 1886

Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered:
“None of self, and *all* of Thee.”

No one can follow Jesus in their own strength, effort, or ability. Jesus said in John 15:4, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.” Just as we obtain our relationship with Jesus by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9), so also the lifelong process of sanctification is by grace through faith (see Colossians 2:6-7 and Acts 20:32).

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus contrasts the narrow and wide gates. The *Follower of Jesus* chooses the uncrowded, narrow gate: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Matthew 7:24-25 compares the one who builds his house on sand to the *Follower of Jesus* who builds his house on a solid foundation: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.”

The *Follower of Jesus* is serious about the Bible being the Word of God and the foundation of truth for his life. He puts his “life chips” on God’s revelation in the Bible. He is committed to living a life of surrender, submission and obedience to God and His Word. Although doing it imperfectly, the *Follower of Jesus* has a sincere commitment to the process. Not perfect compliance but a persistent pursuit that begins with and is sustained by a genuine and ongoing surrendering of the will.

Let me conclude with some suggested applications that should assist all of us who are serious about being *Followers of Jesus*:

- Make a regular habit of reviewing your testimony and your journey thus far with Jesus. Do it with a heart of gratitude for all that Jesus has done in your life. Keeping a regular journal is a helpful way to do this.
- Ask yourself the question: Are you a *Believer in Jesus* or a *Follower of Jesus*? Are they different or one in the same?
- Personalize your time in the Word of God by asking these simple questions: What does it say, what does it mean, what does it mean to me, is there anything I should do as a result? This is critical for us to gain application from our time in the Word. Remember, our intake of the Word is not primarily to gain knowledge but is for the purpose of glorifying God by allowing God's Word to change the way we live, conforming us to the image of Jesus.
- Take the time to study John 15, to better understand your utter dependence on the indwelling Christ. "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" (Colossians 1:27)
- Do a three-point check: (i) check your heart on your sincerity; (ii) count the cost; and (iii) commit to following Jesus without conditions.