

06

Follow
in the
Footsteps
of Jesus

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me.”*

John 10:27, ESV

Believing and Following

In the Bible, Jesus calls people to both believe in and follow Him. The way we define “belief” in our modern context doesn’t carry the same weight as the words of Jesus. Belief can easily be boiled down to an intellectual exercise.

Here’s an example: You can intellectually believe that the country of Brazil exists even if you have never been there. Perhaps you’ve read an article about it. Maybe you’ve seen some pictures. Maybe someone you know has been there and has shared stories with you. When Jesus uses the word “believe” it means something more than merely an acknowledgement of facts. At its core, this kind of belief manifests itself in action. That’s what the Bible calls following Jesus.

Following Jesus means that we emulate His ways. Or to put it another way, we look at His life and ministry in the Bible, and we do the same. We speak the way He spoke. We see others the way He saw others. We stand for truth the way He stood for truth. This is how believing in Jesus moves from being an intellectual reality to an experience of following Him.

What if you were able to share your belief about Brazil not because you read about it, but because you lived it. Imagine that you took a few weeks to vacation there. You climbed the summit of Corcovado to see Cristo Redentor with your own eyes. You traveled to Iguazu Falls and felt the mist of the overflow on your skin. You put your bare feet in the sand of the beaches of Ipanema. How much more would that shape your belief about that country?

You see, that’s what belief in the Bible is about. It’s not just about agreeing with an idea. It’s about stepping into an experience to

realize the idea fully. Jesus calls this adventure of believing and following the “abundant life” (John 10:10), and He calls those who take up this journey “disciples.”

There are many ways we can follow Jesus. Let’s take some time to explore just a few below.

Follow His Compassion

The disciples of Jesus follow His compassionate ways. The Gospels often use the word “compassion” to describe the motive behind Jesus’ actions. Did you know that the word “compassion” literally means “to suffer together”? Often times we see Jesus moved by the plight of others in the Bible. In His compassion, we see Him rejoice with people, mourn and weep with people, and challenge people. Jesus’ compassion causes Him to move towards people. He willingly enters into the lives of others to be with them in every way.

Read Matthew 9:35-36.

Did you notice what motivated Jesus? He was moved to action because He had compassion for the people. His compassion towards us moved Him to travel, teach, share good news, and heal. There are so many beautiful stories contained in the Gospels where Jesus’ compassion is on display. Here’s one example.

Read Mark 1:40-42.

In this instance, Jesus’ compassion is questioned. The man with leprosy doesn’t come right out and say it, but in a sense he is asking, “Jesus, do you really care about what I’m dealing with?” He’s doing what we’re all tempted to do when it comes to God intervening in our own problems. Deep down we wonder if He even wants to heal us or help us. Jesus’ answer shows His compassion. “Of course! Be clean!”

When we look at Jesus, we see a compassionate heart that moves towards others to help them, guide them, and care for them. His followers are called to do the same. Here’s how Peter, one of Jesus’ earliest followers, puts it in a letter to the early Church.

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21, ESV)

Jesus wants His followers to be compassionate towards others.

Follow His Holiness

Jesus also wants His disciples to follow after His holiness.

Simply put, holiness means “set apart”. This is why God is described as holy in the Bible. He is set apart from humanity. He is consistently graceful, loving, and merciful in ways we could never be.

In the Old Testament God tells His people, the nation of Israel, that He wants them to be different than the nations around them. Why? To serve as a beacon of hope for those around them. They were never perfect in their pursuit of holiness. At times they were downright terrible. However, God doesn’t look for perfection—He looks for progress. He wants to see us aiming in the direction of holiness.

When Jesus came to earth, holiness took on a whole new image. Jesus modeled what a life devoted to holiness could look like here on earth. Being like Jesus is the aim of His followers.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

Holiness is not just about behaving in the right ways, it’s about following Jesus’ ways so that we will stand out as light in a world that can be, at times, very dark.

So what does the pursuit of holiness look like? It means we engage with what is right and true, not merely what is easy. If God’s Word speaks to something that goes against the grain of culture, we trust Him and stand on His Word. It means that we will sometimes find ourselves being “set apart” in the way we swim against the cultural current.

Leadership is a great example of this. To be a leader in the world, one has to climb up the ladder of success. Jesus’ view of

leadership was “set apart.” He said that in order to be a leader, you must first kneel down in humility and serve others.

Jesus wants His followers to be “set apart” in their pursuit of holiness.

Follow His Generosity

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.

This passage, and many more like it, paints a picture of the generosity of Jesus. Not only was He generous in giving us the ultimate gift of salvation, but throughout the Gospels, He was generous with His time, His words, His kindness, and so much more. Jesus truly valued people and gave them the best of Himself.

The early Church took up this characteristic of generosity as they followed Jesus.

Read Acts 4:32-35.

Generosity flowed freely in the early Church. No needs went unmet. Why did this happen? A lack of generosity tends to occur when we want to hold tightly to the things of this world. It's easy to find security in our money and our stuff. The early followers of Jesus began to recognize there was another way. Through His teachings, His death, and His resurrection, they began to see that the things of this world are not worth holding onto. This is not to say that their clothes or their house or their money didn't serve a purpose; they just didn't serve the ultimate purpose, which was to care for others like Jesus did.

This ultimate purpose of caring for others extended into their time, kindness, and words—just like Jesus. This call to generosity is still a mandate for the followers of Jesus today.

Follow His Mission

Disciples of Jesus also follow His mission. After His resurrection, Jesus met with His followers many times. During their last time together, Jesus shares what is known as the Great Commission. It's found in the final chapter of Matthew's Gospel.

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

Notice the bookends that this passage gives to us. First, it gives us the assurance that He is in control of all things. Nothing happens outside of His power. Second, it gives us the security of knowing He will always be with us. No matter where we go, or what we do, He will always be with us.

In between those bookends is a charge to go. Following Jesus is not a static exercise. His disciples are active in their faith. Specifically, they are active in sharing their faith to make more disciples. In other words, He wants us to go and give more people the hope of the Gospel!

Now, this doesn't mean you need to go invest in a good bullhorn and stand on the street corner to preach at the passerby. It simply means that you need to be open and willing to share about your own experience with Jesus.

Read 1 Peter 3:15.

Sharing personal stories of hope has always been a key part of following Jesus.

What's Next?

These are just a few ways to emulate Jesus as we follow Him. The more time we spend with Him in the Gospels, the more we will see His character jump off the page. The more we understand who He is and what He's about, the more we can embrace the opportunities to follow Him. We're called to follow Him as we interact with our families and our neighbors. We're called to follow Him as we go to work and spend time with friends. Everywhere we go, there is an opportunity to follow in the ways of Jesus.

Questions to Consider

- When you look at the four areas outlined above, which one most excites you when you think about following Jesus? Which one feels more challenging, and why?
- What does holiness mean to you? Does the Biblical idea of holiness outlined above differ from your view? If so, how?
- Consider someone in your life who would benefit from your generosity. How can you demonstrate generosity to that person today or this week?
- What apprehensions do you have about sharing your faith in Jesus with others?