



Following Jesus

What does it mean to “follow Jesus”?

When Jesus began working to fulfill His God-planned mission on earth, He selected twelve men to be His disciples, and He said to them, “Follow me.”

He didn’t pull any punches. To Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew, and also to Zebedee’s sons, John and James, He said, or at least they understood, that following Him was more important than catching fish, even though that was how they earned their living. He told Levi (Matthew) to stop collecting taxes, and follow Him. It’s reasonable to conclude He did the same for the rest of the twelve.

Jesus implied that following Him was more important, and more urgent, than other things. One man to whom Jesus said, “Follow me,” said that he first wanted to bury his father. Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead. You go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

A rich young man asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus said, “Sell everything you own, give the money to the poor, and follow me.” Following Jesus is more important than possessions.

In fact, following Jesus may be costly. Before His final entry into Jerusalem, Jesus told His disciples that He would be killed, then rise from death. Peter rebuked Him for saying that, but then *he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

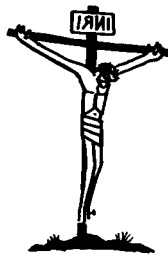
And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:33b-35)

So if following Jesus is hard and costly, why should we do it? The main reason is that He commands it. As we begin to learn about Jesus and understand His love for us, we hear Him saying to each of us: “Follow me.” Obviously that is God’s will for each of us. And God’s will for your life and my life is far better than anything we could plan or hope for.

Let’s look to the Bible to understand what it means to follow Jesus. I’m not giving you a recipe; I’m just telling you some things God has made clear for us in His word.



First, we need to understand what Jesus called “the gospel” — God’s good news. He summed it up this way: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)* And the Apostle Paul explained further: *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*



Did you get that? You and I are sinners, many times over, but all of our sins, past, present, and future, are forgiven as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The penalty has been paid by Jesus; in God’s eyes we are as innocent as He is. So should we just keep on sinning? No, no, that’s not what it’s about; that’s not where we should be. We still need to repent of every sinful act and thought. Jesus and John both say there are sins that will not be forgiven. But instead of worrying about unforgiveable sins, we should be learning how not to commit any sins.

Repentance is an important part of this. We have to commit, and dedicate ourselves, to not sinning. Things we did that were sinful, we simply don't do any more. Period. Things we should have done but didn't, we make up our minds to do, with God's help.

After we understand what God has done for us, by sending His Son to earth to pay for all of our sins, then we need to say "Yes" to His intention for our lives. We need to trust Him. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)* We must trust His wisdom, so much greater than ours; trust His goodness, for He is perfectly good; and trust His love, because He loves you and me with a love that is unconditional and endless. As we really begin to comprehend His nature and His will for each of us, it becomes easier and easier to trust Him, even when things happen that totally mystify us.

His word tells us what His intention is for each of our lives — He intends for us to live joyfully with Him in Heaven forever. That's why Jesus died so our sins could be forgiven. That is the ultimate goal for you and for me.

But He also has things for us to do along the way. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)* And Jesus said in John Chapter 15 that His disciples should bear fruit, and that the way we can bear much fruit is to abide in Him (read John 15). Our bearing fruit is certainly related to our doing the works that God prepared for us to walk in.

How does one abide in Jesus? I think this is pretty simple, really. First, we must make sure our lips are always ready to speak words of prayer. Praise God for the sunrise or the sunset, the breeze and the rain, the seasons of the year, and every wonderful thing that our eyes encounter. Thank Him often for both

blessings and challenges. Tell Him of our concerns and our needs.

Remember His words: *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:2-30) Yoked together with Jesus, as a young ox is yoked with an older, more experienced one, we can learn to do the fruitful work God has planned for us. And Jesus, of course, will be doing most of the work. To reinforce this, He also said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5) We also have this promise from Jesus: *"I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

We also need to read, study, and remember God's word — not necessarily to be able to quote it word for word, by chapter and verse, but at least to know what it says accurately, so that we can apply it to our situations.

We have three ways of knowing and being present with Jesus and the Father:

- seeing, enjoying, and appreciating His astonishing creation
- reading and understanding the messages for us in the holy Scriptures
- letting ourselves be guided and taught by the Holy Spirit.

In Isaiah, Jesus is called Immanuel: God with us. The Holy Spirit, given as God promised in Jeremiah, is Immanuel: God is still with us.

In a nutshell, following Jesus means giving ourselves completely to the process of letting God re-create us (sinners as we were and still are in too many ways) as new creatures who are becoming more and more like Jesus. God is saying to us: "Be holy, as I am holy." He is saying, "Be holy. I want you to be like Jesus." God truly loves you, just as you are. But He really also wants you to become your heavenly self that He always intended for you to be.

Father, help us follow Jesus and be like Him.

Brother Roland

“Turn and Connect”

by Chaplain Al Smith

Some years back my friend Fred and I taught a class on sexual addiction in the prison. We used a book by Mike Genung titled *The Road to Grace*. The book was enlightening. It said that each of us has approximately 6000 thoughts per day. About half of these thoughts are random, the result of mind drift or daydreaming and such. Yikes! And in that drifting, unfocused state, just about anything — even something as innocent as a toothpaste commercial — can evoke thoughts that are sexual.

The book teaches a technique called “Turn and Connect” which works like this: as soon as we realize that our thoughts have drifted to an impure place, we “turn and connect” by starting a conversation with Jesus.

Prayer has many forms: praise and worship, meditation, intercession, and others. And a conversation with Jesus is indeed a form of prayer. Also, the Apostle Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, instructs Christians to “Pray without ceasing.” Being ready to initiate or continue a conversation with Jesus at any moment is a way of doing that.

Jesus doesn’t want followers at a distance. He is right here beside us as we go through this life. He loves us, and He wants us to love Him. He defines the relationship he desires with each one of us as “abiding” in Him. “Turn and connect” is a way to help us do that.

What sort of conversations should we have with Jesus? There are obviously right and wrong things to say, but if we keep a few simple facts in mind, that won’t be a problem.

First, we can forget about buttering Him up or trying to impress Him. Neither of those approaches is useful. If our heart says to praise Him or thank Him for something, we can do it. But the main thing is just to turn to Him and connect Him to where we are, how we feel, what we’re going through. Tell Him about our fears, our frustrations, our pain if we’re in pain, our loneliness if we’re lonely, our desires for ourselves and others. We can ask Him for wisdom, for a new heart, a new spirit, and Hallelujah! He will do it.

Often the key is being humble enough to say, “Lord, I need Your help. I can’t be what I should be; I can’t do what I ought to do or go where I ought to go, without You.” Jesus tells us what to do. *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)* *“Abide in me ... apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4,5)*

And as you converse with Him, spend part of the time listening. The Holy Spirit may be trying to impress something upon your mind or your heart. Expect that.

In John Chapters 14, 15, and 16 Jesus promises three times that we may ask for anything, and God will give it to us. Is that a magic formula? No, it’s a promise for those who truly are his beloved children in Christ. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus says there will be those who say, “Lord, Lord,” to Him, but He will say to them, “I never knew you.” He wants us to really know Him face-to-face and fully realize how good He is, so that we can actually come to love Him with all our heart, mind, and strength. And His love will carry us into that joyful, intimate, eternal relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that is the destiny He planned for us from before the Universe was created.

[“Turn and Connect” is also helpful when any unprofitable thought comes to mind — anger, jealousy, envy, frustration, and so on. Keep this tool handy, and keep it sharp. B.R.]

If you have a question about the Bible or the Christian life, send it to me and I’ll try to give you an answer. It may be something I can share in the “Good News Guide.”

Brother Roland, P. O. Box 14, Fayetteville, PA 17222

Becoming Like Jesus

Do you want to be more and more like Jesus? That's God's plan for you and me, and the best thing we can do is cooperate with it. This puzzle has a lot of words that can be applied to Jesus. Do they apply to you? Enjoy!

Puzzle:

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D I B V F S G B B E F E N Q P E E P L R E S V C E Z O D E U A E
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Z D P R S L V N W G F T O R U I C O P M L U M I L G M Z S N A I
G L J U N L I S D F N D M U K S A M K V L F D H U F Z E M H V T
V Y W A U M G G E E O I K E S O V M G V O E X L F R C P C L A B
X L V B O A R Z D R N X G L F H T I V D R S H P T R H G V Z S E
W A V C R I O I E E Y O R A Z T E T Q A T O W A H E G C O S V K
E X L J W S F S D H W Z W Y R R T T T A N P V I G R O C E I C Z
J E Y U I N P Q T S K I V O U U G E J J O R O G U N I N S N N C
W U V X O E A R K X U H U L H T O D X R C U P R O W S A O Z P Q
S O N C C U O K M A C W F N F H I C P T F P K S H I U Q L E Q Y
Q A C T A W C P F I C W G D R F N B N Y L W W M T S N B A L W C
Y M F P T L C G U Q Z J V U R U T B I E E J O I R X O C K Q C M
P U S S I O I K T A Q T I M G L E K K T S D V E S T E N G H D G
L M U N S V I N P A T I E N T X R V Q K K E P L E F C E O R N G
V R Y A Y N M K P N P E R S E V E R I N G E Z S U C N R Z I M D
T Y O B D S L E E U A N T E L X S S S J P U R L N T N F V G O K
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G V R Y X L I O L J U E T O O H E Y C Q G I A E T F L O S K W G
J O Y F U L Z Z U B F J O F B R D E C I S I V E L D Y S C T B Y
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F D T D Q W L R R X R W N M D L E U R T U L R Y Q L J X G H H A
A D Q X H K D A Q J J I T A I Z B V G X P W D H R Y Z D K Z J Q
N A R O E P F R F D B W V N E H O M C H V T H A N K F U L Q P A
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W A X D Z D G G S H O N E S T U Y R C H K F T B S S M O V P E X

Words:

AVAILABLE
CHILDLIKE
COMMITTED
CONFIDENT
CONSIDERATE
DECISIVE
DEPENDABLE
DETERMINED
DILIGENT
DISCIPLINED
ENCOURAGING
FAITHFUL

FEARLESS
FORGIVING
FRIENDLY
GENEROUS
GENTLE
GOOD
HOLY
HONEST
HUMBLE
INTERESTED
JOYFUL
KIND

LOVING
LOYAL
MEEK
OBEDIENT
PATIENT
PEACEFUL
PERSEVERING
PERSUASIVE
PURE
PURPOSEFUL
RESPECTFUL
SELF-CONTROLLED

SENSITIVE
THANKFUL
THOROUGH
THOUGHTFUL
TRUE
TRUSTWORTHY
TRUTHFUL
UNSELFISH
VIRTUOUS
WELCOMING
WISE
ZEALOUS