

# DON'T SETTLE FOR CHRISTIAN

Becoming a Christian is easy. We tend to frame it as the simple process of accepting a free gift of grace. But the new testament doesn't spend much time talking about simple *conversion*. Rather than focusing on a quick change in beliefs, the writers of scripture seem far more interested in the dramatically-altered way of life displayed by people who traded in the status quo to become *followers* of Jesus— the King who came to upend the social order. And if we remain content to count ourselves as Christians without tangibly following Jesus, we may *believe* all the right things, but we will still contribute to the chaos and toxicity of our culture by failing to practice Jesus's law of sacrificial love in our day to day interactions with the people around us, and failing to stand up for the dignity of human beings who are treated unjustly. The truth is, the people who make a difference on behalf of others in the world aren't those who *believe* right, but those who act in love when something isn't right, even at great cost to themselves.

## Start Talking

1. Some people love being able to associate themselves with groups or movements, and find the sense of community invigorating. Others chafe at labels. What about you? Why do you think you feel the way you do?
2. What's the single most memorable cultural event you ever experienced in person? (For instance, Andy talked about being in Braves stadium during the '92 NLCS.)

## Looking Back

1. What did you do to improve the way people who don't look like you experience you over the past week?
2. When were you able to practice the law of Christ? When did you come up short?
3. Whose burdens did you carry in recent days? What forms did it take?
4. What did you do to move from simply not being racist, to being actively anti-racist?



## What About You?

1. When did you first become aware that there was this cultural category of people called “Christians?” What did you understand as being distinctive about this group? What did it take to “get in?”
2. Why is it sometimes easier to sacrifice for “faceless” strangers than for people we truly know?
3. In your experience, why is it so tempting to simply lump yourself into the cultural category of “Christian,” than it is to consistently follow Jesus?
4. What did you hear about the “Sermon on the Mount” growing up? Did your early experiences with faith encourage you to take Jesus’s most famous teachings about sacrificial love seriously in day-to-day life? Did the people who identified themselves as Christians seem to take it seriously?

## Look It Up

*Read the Following Passages: Acts 11:26. Matthew 5: 1–12. 7: 26– 30. 8:1-13. Luke 6:33. Romans 5:8.*

1. In Acts, Luke records the first instance of anyone applying the label “Christian” to followers of Jesus. What does this passage tell you about that term as it functioned then? How has the word changed?
2. Which parts of the Sermon on the Mount do you think struck Jesus’ original audience as most counterintuitive or countercultural? Which do you find most difficult to live out?
3. Why was it so awkward that the “Roman” centurion approached Jesus and asked for healing for his servant? How does Jesus respond to this offensive breach of the social order?
4. What do you make of Jesus’s willingness to accompany the centurion to his home?
5. How did Jesus’s way of seeing the people in this world differ from the cultural categories of those around him?
6. What does Jesus have to say about people who mentally ‘agree’ without actually acting?

## Putting It All Together

1. How can you prepare yourself to do good for those who won’t do good for you this week?
2. Who do you find it hardest to practice Jesus’s law of love with in your own life?
3. If we’re to put aside the simple category of “Christian” and actually follow Jesus, what has to change about the way we categorize people? The way we understand our own “rights” in any given interaction? Our obligation to the people around us?
4. Who is the “centurion” in your world? How can you embody the example of Jesus in your interactions with them this week?
5. What can you do as you start each day this week to remind yourself of what it will mean to follow Jesus that day?

