
The gospel of John is book-ended and anchored in a simple command

John 1:43 ESV [Jesus] found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

And right in the middle, we hear Jesus say

John 10.27–28 ESV My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, **and they follow me.** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

And then at the end...

John 21.19 ESV [Jesus] said to [Peter], "Follow me."

You get this sense that John has a simple message for us

That's John's style - he says it in simple terms, and then says it again a few more times just to make sure we haven't missed it... **Follow me**

John doesn't want us to miss the utter simplicity of the gospel

... which begins and ends with Jesus inviting us to follow him

That's the gospel - come follow me, says Jesus, and you will enter into the life of God, the life of the Kingdom... eternal life

To believe in Jesus is to trust him... and to trust him is to follow him

To follow his way - in our priorities, in our relationships, in how we spend our time or our money... this is not easy

Luke 9.23–24 NIV Then [Jesus] said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

And immediately we find a couple of questions rising up within us

First - do I trust him? Can I trust him enough to set aside every other voice that I've been following - including my own - and follow him?

And second - what does it look like to follow him, anyway?

That's a crucial question: what does it look like to follow him?

Now the best way to learn to follow Jesus, is of course, to immerse ourselves in the gospels

The more you know of him, the better you can follow him, right?

And as we study the gospels, we discover a simple pattern in Jesus

We find Jesus moving toward his Father in solitude and prayer

Mark 1.35 NIV Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

This constant withdrawal from the busyness of his life to be alone with his Father was the foundation of Jesus' life... and everything he said and did flowed from that connection with his Father

John 8.28 NIV I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

We find him moving toward his friends in self-giving love

John 13.1 NIV It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

And this love for his friends flowed out of the love that Jesus experienced from the Father

John 15.9 NIV "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you."

And we find him moving toward the world around him in love

And this, too, flowed from his relationship with his Father... and was rooted in the Father's own love for the world

John 3.16–17 NIV For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

So you see the pattern

Jesus centers his life around three kinds of relationships - with God his Father... with those who follow him... with those who don't - yet

And so, that's become our framework for what it looks like to follow Jesus

You may have noticed that Andy & I have been talking about this very issue for a couple months now

And we've been using this idea of a **movement** as a framework

Because to follow Jesus is to be moving with him - as he leads

We're moving toward God in worship - to encounter him, to surrender to his love for us, to surrender all of who we are to him

We're moving toward one another in community - we're learning to love one another

We're moving toward the world around us on mission - as witnesses to the reconciling love of God that we've experienced in Jesus

Let me tell you about a couple ways we're seeking to be witnesses

On the **4th Friday** of each month, from April through September, Uptown Westerville hosts a family-oriented fun event from 6-9pm. For families, there are puppet shows, story time, bounce houses, arts and crafts activities, costumed characters, face painting and more... there's music, food, shopping... its just a great time for everyone. We plan to be there, and to serve and bless and give and be a witness of the love of God in Jesus in all sorts of ways.

Stop by the events booth after the service and talk to Wayne if you're interested

Kids Lunch Club

You may know of WARM - the Westerville Area Resource Ministry - they do some phenomenal work in the community.

WARM is hosting lunch clubs for children this summer at various Westerville parks, caring for and building relationships with children and their families that typically participate in the school lunch programs.

Again, talk with Zoe or Wayne at the Events Booth after the service if you'd like to help out

So that's as simple as it gets... that's what it means to follow Jesus

We're moving toward God in worship, toward one another in community, and toward the world on mission

And when you hear it, it sounds really clear and simple

But then you and I turn to the realities of our daily lives...

And things get muddy real quick

We live in a very complex world which constantly throws very difficult questions at us

As the violence around us escalates, are we to take up arms to protect ourselves - which simply seems to make sense?

Or are we to turn the other cheek and bless our enemies - whatever that might mean?

Are we to advocate for fiscal discipline and individual responsibility, and therefore allow people to suffer the consequences of their own poor decisions

Or are we to self-sacrificially care for all the poor and the oppressed - without trying to sort out the reasons for their suffering?

Is my identity rooted in my race? In my gender? In my sexuality? In my politics? In my particular tribal ideology?

Or is it rooted in Jesus, in the choice I've made to follow him?

And what does that mean when everyone across the political spectrum claims that Jesus is on their side?

Perhaps you're a mother of three young children...

Plus... you're a busy professional working in a demanding context. Your husband is way too busy with his own career and other interests to be of much help in caring for the children...

You barely have time and energy to come to church - how on earth are you to be in community? And what could it possibly mean for you to you on mission? You don't even have time to do your laundry

What about this massive influx of Muslim refugees around us?

They've certainly changed the social landscape, haven't they? Are they a threat? What does it look like to follow Jesus in this context?

BTW, I thought Mike Burnard last week had some wonderful perspective for us on how to approach the refugee issue

Perhaps you've done your best to raise your children to love and follow Jesus...

And now your eldest - who you know loves Jesus, and has been following him from a very early age - just told you last week that she's gay, and in a relationship? What are you supposed to do?

These, and many more very difficult questions face us as we seek to follow him

How are we to resolve these complexities?

How does this simple framework we've been talking about - moving toward God, moving toward one another, and moving toward the world around us - translate into real life?

I'd like to offer you two thoughts on that question

First, this simple framework gives you a rock-solid foundation to every context you will ever face

No matter what you're facing, if you are consistently seeking to encounter God in worship and surrender to his love for you...

If you're anchored in genuine healing and loving friendships...

If you stay focused on reconciliation and on being a witness to the love of God in Jesus wherever you find yourself...

If these things are true of you, you are then in the best possible place to be able to discern the Jesus way through your specific complexity

Second: to discern the Jesus way in the midst of your particular complexity requires you to dive deep into Jesus yourself

The more you are immersed in him, the more you reflect on him, the more you understand his heart, his way, his mission... the more wisdom and insight you'll gain to guide you through the specific challenges you're facing

And so, as the world around us spirals into ever increasing complexity...

I'd like to suggest that the absolute best way for you and I to be equipped to face the complexities of our lives is to dive deep into Jesus himself

Dive deep into the gospels, in particular

And let the Jesus story infuse your heart and mind and soul... and shape your imagination, and fuel your aspirations

Now we've been given not one, but four distinct gospels, and there's a reason we're given so much detail about him

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell us about the same Jesus - from somewhat different vantage points - all essential for us to explore

And so we dive into the gospels... we pay attention to the little details...

We don't smooth Jesus out to fit our own opinions and preferences

We allow him to disturb us... to convict us... to comfort us... to puzzle us... to command us... to enchant us...

And Jesus starts becoming truly real to you...

His voice begins to sound familiar to you... you get a sense of how he might respond... you're getting to know him, his heart, his way

And now you begin to sense his voice guiding you...

And then, as Jesus becomes progressively clearer to you...

You discover that the Bible as a whole starts to come into focus

You may have already discovered that the Bible is a really complex book in all its individual parts

But when you begin to read the Bible with Jesus at the center...

It all begins to come into clear focus around Jesus

And when you begin to consider the events of your life with Jesus at the center

The complexities of our lives begin to find resolution

We begin to move from superficiality and confusion and despair to depth and insight and hope

Life only makes sense with Jesus at the center

And therefore you and I must dive deep into the story of Jesus

And this then fuels a life-long practice - learning to see the events of our lives, and the complexities of our world - with Jesus at the center

There is a very beautiful story in the gospel of Luke, chapter 24, that brings it all together for us

It's at the very end of Luke's gospel, after the crucifixion

It's Sunday evening at the start of our story...

About 48 hours after Jesus had died on the cross... 48 hours after his dead body had been placed in a stone tomb

And then that morning, Sunday morning, there had been strange reports that the tomb was empty - the body was missing

Some of the women who used to follow Jesus had apparently encountered angels at the tomb - angels who told them that Jesus was not dead, but alive

And then Peter had gone to the tomb

... and found it empty as the women had said, but he hadn't seen Jesus, nor had he seen any angels

None of it made any sense to them

Their understanding of their Scriptures had led them to expect a very different kind of Messiah, a very different kind of king, a very different kind of God

And a very different kind of ending to the story

At the start, when they had set out to follow Jesus, it had all seemed so wonderful and so clear... listen to how Luke recalls it

Luke 4.14–22 NIV Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.”

So when Jesus began preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God

It was clear that he was fulfilling the ancient prophecies...

And had come to redeem God’s people out of their suffering and affliction and shame into goodness and peace and blessing

Now this section from Isaiah that Jesus read from continues like this

Isaiah 61.1-7 NIV The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me ... to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair...

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations...

Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance.

And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.

And so, that was exactly what his disciples expected would happen

Jesus was their hope for all these things to come about

But now...he'd been brutally executed - crucified... he was gone

And their hopes and dreams had died with him

It was all very discouraging, confusing, disappointing

It wasn't what they had hoped for, wasn't what they'd expected...

It had all gone dark on them

And so, as they walk back home, they are processing their confusion, their disappointment, their hurt

Luke 24.13-17 NIV Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

Now these two disciples knew Jesus well

They'd left everything to follow him... they'd walked with him for years

And yet, they didn't recognize him... I wonder why

Perhaps they couldn't see him because their hearts were entirely caught up in the sadness and the despair of their situation

This happens to us too, you know? Sometimes we are so consumed with pain and hurt and disappointment - that we aren't able to see Jesus when he shows up

Luke 24.17-24 NIV They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

“The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but **we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.**

And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, **but they did not see Jesus.**”

We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel

We had put all our hope in him, and it all collapsed so quickly

This is a most helpful moment for us to consider

Something absolutely amazing had just happened - Jesus had triumphed over sin and death and all the forces of evil

And Jesus had in fact redeemed not only Israel, but all the world... everything was now different

But the two disciples couldn’t see it

They just couldn’t wrap their heads around how the suffering and death of Jesus had anything to do with their redemption

God’s ways are often so counter-intuitive that we miss him altogether

These two disciples had absolutely no reason to be in despair - in fact, they ought to have been dancing for joy

But they did not see Jesus

And that's a perfect description of their plight

They had an incomplete understanding of Jesus, and a mistaken understanding of Scripture

And therefore had completely missed this most amazing thing that had just happened

And so Jesus lays it all out for them, once more

Luke 24.25–27 NIV He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

What a marvelous moment!

I love that the way Jesus sets out to remove their despair is not with merely comforting or encouraging words - but with the Scriptures

The only final answer to our deepest griefs, disappointments and despair is a deeper understanding of Jesus himself, a deeper encounter with him, and a deeper understanding of the entire Bible with him at the center

So they're beginning to see, beginning to understand

Luke 24.28–29 NIV As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Were not our hearts burning within us?

So when we immerse ourselves in Jesus, in the gospels

... and then learn to read the entire Bible with Jesus at the center

And then see the circumstances of our lives and the complexities of the world around us from this new vantage point

Our hearts too, will burn within us

...we will discover incredible wisdom and insight and understanding

We too will see Jesus... in the text and in the world around us

One final thought

Luke 24.28–29 NIV When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him

It was at the table, while they were sharing a meal together that Jesus became clear to those two disciples

We too, are going to share a meal now - we're going to join together in communion at the Lord's table

It may be that you are discouraged right now

Perhaps you're experiencing hurt, disappointment, betrayal, pain...

And Jesus seems to be missing right when you need him... here's the truth: Jesus is fully present with you, beside you, in you

You may not yet see him, but perhaps as we take the bread and the cup, he may yet open your eyes to his presence...