CORE VALUE 4 OF 10 · WEEK 4

ANABAPTISH

Following Jesus

We value wholehearted obedience to Christ Jesus through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

John Dixon | Sunday, October 4, 2026 | Crest Community Church

For the Nightstand

THE TEACHING

"Follow me." They're the first thing Jesus ever says to Peter. And the last. In between, Peter fails. In a pretty epic way. That's the invitation Jesus extends to every person. Including the ones who've already blown it. And it doesn't come with a five-year plan. We're invited to put our trust not in a plan, but in a Person.

But if we aren't intentional, life shrinks. Following Jesus gets reduced to no messing up. Dallas Willard called it the gospel of sin management. It's like a high school student whose entire goal is to not get sent to detention. That kid will graduate. And miss everything. God is not just trying to keep you out of trouble. He wants to form you into the image of Christ. Live as Jesus did. Not "avoid what Jesus avoided."

So what did Jesus actually do? He did what he saw his Father doing. A whole crowd of sick people at a pool, and he walks up to one. He had to go through Samaria. He heard that one man got thrown out, and he went looking. Three questions. What is the Father doing? Where is he doing it? Who is he giving me? Not through willpower. That's just sin management with more caffeine. By the Holy Spirit. Sheep don't follow a plan. They follow a voice.

KEY SCRIPTURES

John 5:17–19
He does what he sees the Father doing.

John 4:34–35
Open your eyes. Look at the fields.

John 9:4
Not "I must." We must.

John 10:27
Sheep follow a voice, not a plan.

A PRAYER

Father, show us what you're doing right here. Open our eyes to where you've already been at work. Show us who you're giving us. Holy Spirit, when you nudge us, quiet and small, help us say yes. No plan. Just you. We're listening. In Jesus' name, amen.

PART TWO

For Your Home Church

Gather together. About 60 minutes, after your meal or around it.

FOR LEADERS

This is shared language, not a script. Everyone in the room can see these notes, so feel free to read them out loud. The times add up to an hour. Hold them loosely. If a conversation is alive, stay with it and trim somewhere else.

Check In

5 min

Start by hearing how last week actually went.

LEADER NOTE

Go around the room. **How did last week's practice go?** Three were offered: worship anywhere (one minute a day to stop and remember who God is), find the dry ditch (one step toward a relationship that has quietly gone wrong), or be somebody's other corner of the mat (sit near someone new at the gathering, sing for them, learn their name).

Some people will not have done it. That is fine, and it is worth saying out loud so nobody performs. Ask them instead what the week was like. No fixing and no follow-up questions. Just receive it.

Take Communion

5 min

The Shepherd leads, and the Shepherd sets a table. Come to it together.

LEADER NOTE

Share the bread and the cup, before, during, or after your meal. If your group doesn't have its own words yet, have someone read this psalm out loud first.

PSALM 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

[3] he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

[4] Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

[5] You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

[6] Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

Read This Overview

5 min

LEADER NOTE

Ask someone to read this out loud.

"Follow me."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer noticed something about those two words. They're the first thing Jesus ever says to Peter. And they're the last.

The first time, Peter's standing on a beach with a fishing net in his hands. A predictable life. The life he knew. A Rabbi walks by and says, "Follow me." For three years Peter goes places he never imagined. He sees God's work in the world up close. And then he fails. In a pretty epic way. The night Jesus is arrested, Peter swears, three times, that he's never met the man.

After the resurrection, Jesus finds him. On a beach. Again. And the last thing he says to him is the first thing he ever said to him. "Follow me."

That's the invitation Jesus extends to every person. Including the ones who've already blown it.

It doesn't come with a five-year plan. Danisa Ndlovu, a leader from Zimbabwe in the Brethren in Christ (the family of churches Crest belongs to), puts it this way. We're invited to put our trust not in a plan, but in a Person. Plans are meant to be accomplished. A person is meant to be known and trusted. If Jesus had handed Peter a plan, Peter could have stayed in control of his life.

Now look at one word in our core value. Wholehearted. Not nervous obedience. Wholehearted. Luke Keefer said a small boat can put its sails all the way up and be moved, same as a big ship. You don't have to be much of anybody to be wholehearted. You can be all in no matter where you're starting.

Following Jesus

We value wholehearted obedience to Christ Jesus through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

No plan. A Person. A voice. And his own Spirit, **breathed** on his friends.

Go Deeper in the Scripture

20 min

Watch Jesus walk into a crowd of need and do the one thing he sees his Father doing.

LEADER NOTE

Have someone read the passage out loud. Use the background notes as you need them. You won't get to every question. If time is short, start with the three marked START HERE

JOHN 5:1–9, 16–20

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.
2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is
called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a
great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the
paralyzed. 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this
condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the
water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of
me."

[8] Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” [9] At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

[16] So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. [17] In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”

[18] For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

[19] Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.”

BACKGROUND NOTES

Bethesda. A pool in Jerusalem with covered porches all the way around it. And John says those porches are full. The blind. The lame. The paralyzed.

Where is verse 4? It isn’t a typo. The oldest copies of John’s gospel go straight from verse 3 to verse 5. Later copies add a line saying an angel would stir the water and the first person in would be healed. That belief is what the man is talking about in verse 7.

“Do you want to get well?” It might be the strangest question in the Bible. And the man doesn’t even say yes. He explains why it’s impossible. If “Follow me” is Christ’s call to every person, this question is another.

One. A whole crowd of sick people. And as far as John tells us, Jesus heals one. There are other days when he heals everybody in town. But not here. His work is not dictated by a crowd. He’s watching his Father.

The Sabbath. Verse 9 goes on to say this happened on the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. Carrying a mat counted as work. So a man who couldn’t walk for thirty-eight years is on his feet, and all the religious leaders can talk about is which rule got broken. Work done on the wrong 24-hour period.

“Always at his work.” A lot of us live like God is a landlord who moved out of state. He owns the place. We’ve got his number somewhere. We just don’t expect him to actually show up and do anything. Jesus lived the exact opposite way.

> **Fully God, fully human.** The leaders understood verse 17 as a claim to be equal with God. So how did Jesus live this way? Danisa Ndlovu's answer: the same way you're going to. By the Holy Spirit. Jesus is fully God. And he lived a fully human life, listening for the Spirit, leaning on the Spirit, moment by moment. If we forget that, we let ourselves off the hook.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Jesus asks the man a question in verse 6. Read verse 7 again. What does the man actually answer? START HERE
2. In verses 17 and 19, what does Jesus say his Father is doing? How does Jesus decide what he himself will do?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. A crowd of sick people, and Jesus heals one. If you walk around with a burden to be everything for everybody, you burn out. Or you get so overwhelmed you do nothing. What does Jesus do instead? What would that free you from? START HERE
4. Why is it important to keep in tension the divinity of Jesus with his humanity? What happens when one is emphasized over the other?
5. Dallas Willard called it "the gospel of sin management." Your whole relationship with God gets defined by what you're avoiding. Where do you see that in the religious leaders here? Where have you seen it in your own story?

WHAT DOES IT ASK OF US?

6. What implications are there for this life of a believer to have Christ as our model and to walk in his footsteps? START HERE
7. "Do you want to get well?" Where have you been explaining why it's impossible instead of answering him?

FOR ANOTHER NIGHT

Two more questions from John, for a night when your group has room. They're big ones. Don't rush them.

In a world that is so heavily polarized due to various factors such as the geopolitical landscape, world economics, and religious differences, how do we as followers of Christ, in practical terms, love God wholeheartedly and our neighbor as ourselves?

In the midst of highly militarized societies where everyone is pushed to be patriotic, how do we live in a way that demonstrates we belong to another kingdom other than this world?

Practice for the Night: Ask the Three Together

20 min

Stop staring at yourself and start looking for him. Leave with one place and one name.

A couple of years ago, two people ended up sharing the same tiny office. One of them followed Jesus. Months of coffee and conversation later, the other was baptized at Crest. Out of every office in that building, God put those two in the same one. You can't save anybody. But you can love them. And serve them. And you can point them to where that love is coming from.

LEADER NOTE

Have paper and pens on hand. The silence will feel long. Don't fill it. When it's time to share, go first, and keep yours small and ordinary so nobody feels they need a dramatic word from God.

Some people won't hear anything. Say out loud that this is normal. It will probably be quiet, and it will probably be small. A first name is plenty, or just "a neighbor." Passing is always fine.

1. **Get quiet** · 3 min
   Phones face down. A couple of minutes of silence. Then the leader prays: **"Father, show us what you're doing right here. Holy Spirit, lead us to where you're already working."**

2. **Ask the three** · 6 min
   The leader prays each question out loud, slowly, and leaves two minutes of silence after each one. **"Father, what are you doing?" "Where are you doing it?" "Who are you giving me?"** Write down whatever comes. One place. One name. If nothing comes, write that down too.

3. **Say it out loud** · 8 min
   Pair up. Share your place and your name. Not sure what you heard? Walk it through the three checks below. Then pray for each other's person, by name.

4. **Send each other** · 3 min
   Come back together. One person reads John 20:21–22: **"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."** Then go around the circle. Each person tells the one beside them what Mary told the servants: **"Do whatever he tells you."**

HOW DO I KNOW IT'S HIM AND NOT JUST ME?

1. **It will sound like Jesus.** If what you think you're hearing doesn't look like the Jesus you meet in the gospels, it isn't him.
2. **It will line up with Scripture.** All of it, read with Jesus at the center.
3. **You test it in community.** You say it out loud to people who love you and know their Bibles. That's what you're doing right now.

Practice for the Week Ahead

3 min

Choose one small, honest step. Start where you are, not where you think you should be.

One week. Every morning, before you pick up your phone. Pick one:

IF YOU'RE STILL EXPLORING

When you walk into a house and you don't know if anyone's home, you say, "Hello? Is anybody home?" You don't find out without asking. Your prayer this week, every morning: **"Jesus, if you're real, and you're calling me, I'm listening."**

IF YOU'VE FOLLOWED JESUS A WHILE

Ask him the three questions. Then, when he nudges you, and it will be quiet, and it will probably be small, say yes. Send the text. Cross the street. Make the apology. Stay in the conversation five more minutes. One week of saying yes.

IF YOU'RE READY FOR MORE

Ask the three, and tune in. You can't hear a whisper standing on the tarmac next to a jet engine. Jesus got away from the crowd, regularly, to be alone with the Father. Find ten quiet minutes a day. No phone. Keep praying for the name you wrote down tonight. And tell one person from your home church what you're hearing, so they can test it with you.

EVERY MORNING, BEFORE YOUR PHONE

What is the Father doing?
Where is he doing it?
Who is he giving me?

Then, when he nudges you, say yes.

Cut this card out and put it where you'll see it first thing.

Next week, we'll start by checking in on how it went.

Close in Prayer

2 min

LEADER NOTE

Gather everyone and close your time in prayer, however the Spirit leads.

COMING UP · SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11

Core Value 5: Belonging to the Community of Faith

We value integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance.

You can't live the radical, loving, self-giving way of Jesus by yourself. Why? More on that next week.

WANT TO GO FURTHER?

Compelling Convictions, the companion book to this series, is free to borrow from the church library. The chapter behind this week's value is written by Danisa Ndlovu. Just ask John.

The three questions are borrowed from Jon Tyson, a pastor in New York, who spoke about radical obedience.