

F O L L O W I N G
J E S U S

FOLLOWING JESUS

7 ESSENTIALS TO
FOLLOWING JESUS

SAMUEL DEUTH

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Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

—James 4:8 (NLT)

FOLLOWING JESUS

A NEW LIFE

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!
—2 Corinthians 5:17

The most important decision that you make in this life is deciding who you will follow. Who you follow impacts the quality of your life on earth and determines where you will spend eternity after this life is over. There is no greater life than the one lived following Jesus! It is a life where you lay down everything, only to find you have more than you ever had before.

One of the first and most influential followers of Jesus was a man named Paul. He had quite the impressive resume in life, but he didn't really experience fulfillment until he encountered Jesus and decided to live for him. This is what he said about this new life:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.
—Philippians 3:7-8

People are always looking for happiness and fulfillment, but only when we turn from our way to following Jesus will we experience the full life that he has for us! This is why the Bible is so specific about declaring Jesus as our Lord. It's not enough just to believe that he's real; you must choose to follow him.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As a follower of Jesus for many years now, I know firsthand the value of having someone help you learn to walk out your faith, which is why we created this book—to help with the essential beginning steps after choosing to follow Jesus.

The Bible is the exhaustive book on following Jesus, and this book is designed to be a quick guide to your next seven essential steps in your walk with him. Each chapter will break down one of the key things you need to know and show you how to do it. At the end of each chapter you'll see additional verses you can use if you'd like to study the topic through further.

Before we get into those steps, I want to talk about a foundational truth regarding the heart and character of God that the entire Bible and your relationship with Jesus are built on.

“GOD LOVES YOU AND WANTS TO BE CLOSE TO YOU.”

As you develop your relationship with God, it's important to know he isn't tolerating you, or putting up with you, or trying to get rid of you; he has done everything to be close to you. God loves us and wants to be with us. He wants a relationship with us for all eternity. *He's not satisfied with a distant association; he wants to be close to us.*

From the beginning of time, God walked with the people that he loves, as he did when he spent time with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But, because God loved them, he also gave them the ability to choose to love and follow him and experience all the good he had for them or the choice to go their own way and be separated from him.

Even in that perfect garden, where they had everything they needed, they chose to sin by disobeying God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That sin created a gap between God and humanity, yet in His mercy, God set a plan in motion to bring us back to himself, which is embodied in this incredible Bible verse:

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.
—John 3:16

God could have stayed away, but instead he cut through everything to be with us. Before Jesus came, God's presence was experienced primarily by the High Priest, who was the spiritual leader of God's people. On a few special occasions a year the High Priest would enter into an inner room of the temple called the Most Holy Place. There was a thick curtain that separated people from this room.

This curtain represented a separation between humanity and God. As you can imagine, God wasn't going to settle for that distance! Let the full reality and emotion of the next verse hit you as you realize God's heart to eliminate anything that would come between us:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
—Matthew 27:50-51

AT THAT MOMENT! How amazing is that? The first possible moment God had to be close to us, he took it. He made a strong statement to everyone—*all* were now welcome to come to him. Later, one of the great leaders of the Church wrote one of my favorite verses in the Bible:

Come close to God, and God will come close to you.
—James 4:8 (NLT)

Through Jesus, we now are able to come close to God again. The sin and brokenness that held us back and away from God are now taken care of by Jesus. The Bible says that the cost of sin is death. There is a price that has to be paid, and through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus that debt is satisfied.

The Bible says that Jesus was a "ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). I love the word *ransom*; it means to aggressively take back. Sin held us captive by the devil and a slave

to his ways, but Jesus left heaven, came to earth, and with his death on the cross, he ransomed us; he took us back from the control of the enemy to be close to himself again.

In the final book of the Bible, we see another example of God's desire to be close to us with this open invitation by Jesus:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

—Revelation 3:20

As you follow Jesus, never forget how much he loves you and wants to be close to you. Jesus' invitation isn't based on our perfection or our ability to do all the right things. It is because of the *grace* of Jesus that this invitation to come close was made available.

More than anything, I pray that this book will encourage you to come close to God!

HAVE YOU DECIDED?

Before continuing, I want to give you an opportunity to answer the question, "Who is the leader of your life?" If you've already declared Jesus as that leader, that is awesome! Get into the book! If not, then why wait? In Romans 10:9-10 it says that if we declare that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved. If you're ready to go all in and follow Jesus, begin with this passionate prayer:

"Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, and raising him from the dead to give me life. I repent of my sin and turn to you. Today I choose to follow you Jesus with all of my heart, for the rest of my life. I believe in you and declare that you are the leader and Lord of my life! Thank you for forgiving me and walking with me from this moment forward! Amen."

For more devotionals, videos, Bible reading plans, blogs and podcasts, download the Following Jesus App.

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

STUDY IT THROUGH:

Here are several key verses that walk you through an overview of God's Creation and the ultimate salvation of humanity.

God Created Us:

Genesis 1:27-28; Psalm 139:13-17

God Loves Us:

Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; 1 John 3:1

Our Sin/Disobedience:

Genesis 3; Romans 3:23-24; Romans 6:23

Jesus' Sacrifice/Cross:

Luke 9:22; Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 3:18

Our Decision/Repentance:

Romans 10:9-13; Acts 16:29-31

His Grace/Forgiveness:

Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:1-2

Life in Christ; Following Jesus:

John 10:10; Romans 8:37-39; Matthew 5:13-16; Luke 9:23-24

His Kingdom; the Church:

Matthew 6:9-13; Ephesians 1:17-23; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Heaven; Eternity:

John 14:1-6; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Corinthians 5:7-10