



FOLLOW ME

BIBLE STUDY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION
- CALLING OF PETER LESSON ONE
- CALLING OF MATTHEW LESSON TWO
- CALLING OF NATHANIAL
- CALLING OF PETER
- CALLING OF MATTHEW
- INTRODUCTION
- CALLING OF PETER
- CALLING OF MATTHEW
- INTRODUCTION
- CALLING OF PETER
- CALLING OF MATTHEW

Introduction

I started following Jesus in 1999. I had been living such a destructive lifestyle that I simply reached a point where I needed God to be my entire life or I simply wasn't going to make it. For me finding God was not some religious activity or concept. It was as real as can be and since then I have always wanted the real thing; the real Christianity. But what was real Christianity? You see, as many of you can relate, there was this nagging question in me. Is there more to this Christian life that we see and experience here in America and in other parts of the Western world compared to the Christianity of the Bible? I am sure many of you have asked that question before. It was a struggle for me. Not just a little struggle, but a battle! I had a deep fire within me for the real thing, an authentic faith. Was I just too radical? Am I just too passionate? Was this just my personality? If only I were a missionary in another country, then I would be normal! What does that say? Is there something different about Christianity in other countries than it is here? Why am I hearing all these amazing stories about the gospel spreading rapidly in other countries, people fully giving their lives to God, people even losing everything for the sake of the gospel, but I wasn't seeing that here? Is it even a biblical concept to give all for following Jesus and was it actually being put into practice somewhere? I knew one thing was for sure, I was not going to settle. The battle within me was a quest to find the real thing. I just wanted the real God, and of course, I am sure you do too.

So how do you we know if we are living the kind of Christianity that Jesus wants us to live? A great question to ask would be this: Does your Christianity match up with the way the followers of Jesus lived out their life for the sake of the spreading of the mission and message of Jesus?

Think about that for a minute. And if it is anything less, then should we not come back to the Bible and reevaluate our Christianity? If it is anything less, are we settling? And again, and even more important, is a Christianity that does not look like New Testament Christianity, even Christianity at all? I have full confidence that if you

question the calling to follow Jesus with your entire life, the confirmation to do so will be right there in the Bible.

I encourage you to read the New Testament from beginning to end, but try it with the mind set that you had never read it before, heard any sermon, read any Christian book, or knew anything about Christianity at all. I know its difficult to imagine this, but imagine you knew nothing, was handed a Bible, read it, and ask yourself what is the message of the Bible and how I am supposed to live my life in according to its message. I promise you, if you can do this, you might end up with something radically different from what your perception of what Christianity is supposed to be.

If you do come away with something radically different from what you are seeing with Christianity today, you are naturally going to ask why. This is the question that I still battle with 25 years after following Christ. Below is my best attempt to answer this question.

I believe the following is the problem in our belief system about what Christianity is supposed to be. It is the scriptures that say we just have to believe to be saved vs Jesus calling us to be His disciples. Are these scriptures contradicting each other? I would say that most people in our culture of Christianity in America and other Western countries believe that if we just believe in Christ, be a good person, go to church, then we will be saved. At some point in our childhood, many of us were taught to say "the sinners prayer" and that was it. We had salvation and it was a done deal. From then we just needed to pray, live a good life the best we can, be kind to people, and go to church. That is being a Christian. But as I read the Bible over and over seeking for answers, it didn't seem like this is what the Bible was teaching. I never found the sinners prayer in the Bible (it's not there) and there was a much greater purpose for God's people than just living a good life, praying, being kind, and going to church.

Two examples of scriptures we get out of the Bible on just believing and being saved are these:

John 3:16 *"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."*

Romans 10:9 *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Yes, if you read these scriptures alone, you would think it's just about believing. But is it?

Over and over Jesus is challenging people about the cost of following Him. Let's

remember that Jesus is the one saying the following.

Luke 14:25-34 *“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 ‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate (hate is greek word miseo, meaning to ‘love less’ than the Lord) father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross (an instrument of death; full commitment to the cost of following Jesus) and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

Verse 33 *“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”*

Matthew 16:24-26 *“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

Wow, this sure seems different from just believing, being a good person, and going to church? What is going on here? You might say that there is not supposed to be a cost to salvation and that it’s all about Grace. Sure, salvation is a gift, but if you’re following the scriptures, doing what they say, and doing what Jesus called us to do, then there will be a cost. In Jesus’ context in that time, believing meant there would be a cost.

Do you have to be a disciple to be saved or can you just be a “believer”? It is a great question. If you read the New Testament as whole, the clear answer is a disciple. What is a disciple of Jesus? A disciple is one who denies his own life and purposes in exchange for the purposes and will of Jesus. The above scriptures about the “cost” of following Jesus are the expectations that Jesus had to be a disciple. In fact, the term “believers” and the term “Christian” are only used in the New Testament a few times and those terms were synonymous with being disciples. In contrast, the word disciple is used around 250 (depending on the Bible translation) times!

He is not calling us to be only believers. He is calling us to be disciples.

Matthew 28:18-20 *“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

The answer is this; God has a message to the world. The message is God saved the world from sin through the death of His son and he leaves us with the responsibility and privilege of spreading that message and teaching people to obey the commands of God all under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*

Verse 19 *“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”*

Why is Jesus calling us to deny our own lives and give up all for the sake of the gospel? Probably because He knows what it is going to take to spread His message. Disciples will be hated. *“You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* (Matt 10:22). Disciples will be persecuted. **“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”** (John 15:20.) Many disciples are even going to die. **“They will put some of you to death.”** (Luke 21:16) It was not even an option for the disciples of Jesus to choose between just believing and giving up all to follow Him. In that culture, if you followed Christ, you certainly could lose your life over it. So it is important to remember this when we are reading the scriptures about believing. We might think it means just believe, but giving up your life and believing were not disconnected from each other. There was no difference.

It is difficult to understand these scriptures living in our American culture (or in other Western Cultures). There seems to be minimal cost to following Jesus in the United States or in Western countries, but it is important to know that all eleven (Judas betrayed Jesus and hung himself) disciples were all martyred except one (John) who was exiled. Paul himself wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon from prison. Thousands of the early Christians were murdered in those first hundred years for their faith. All through history up until now, they were still being murdered and persecuted. Let us not make the mistake that this doesn’t go on anymore. The fact is Christians are martyred and thrown into prison for their faith now more than ever before in history and it goes mostly unnoticed in the western world. So we cannot let our culture dictate our belief system in what Jesus is calling us to.

The belief that we are just supposed to say a prayer, be saved, live a good and quiet life, falls short when we think about the billions of people not saved who have not even heard the gospel. What about them? What about the Christians living in persecuted conditions, facing death, torture, and imprisonment every day? What about them? Let us not fall into the trap of thinking that we just live in another culture and this is the way God wants us to live.

It is a very scary verse in the Bible but we have to take a serious look into it. Matthew 7:20-22 **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”** Is Jesus not saying here that there will be those who think they are saved but are really not? And what is His will for us? Along with being in relationship with the God of the universe, praising Him, obeying His commands, and being in fellowship with the people of God, His will is to spread the message of Jesus that He died for the sins of the world to everyone on earth and to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Romans 10:14-15 **“14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”** Clearly here Paul is saying that we have the responsibility to go share because how can they believe if they have not heard?

Am I adding to grace or saying that Christianity is works based? I believe this passage from James. James 2:19-20, **“You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?”** Clearly if you read all of James 2:14-26, it is not just about believing. Yes, I believe grace is a gift from God and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-10), but works is the evidence of true faith. If you truly believe, you will follow Him.

How do we get to the place of knowing what this all means for our life? Follow me is the answer. I’ll call it the Follow Me lifestyle.

You maybe be thinking, “all that Jesus is calling us to seems like such a burden,” which is such an incredible and costly deception! I argue it is totally the opposite. If Jesus is who he says he is, meaning He is the God of the universe, then what better way to live your life than following Him! If you are looking for a radical life adventure, “Follow Me” is the answer!

“Follow Me” might scare people. Pastors might be hesitate to talk about following Jesus because they are fearful of losing church members. Christians sharing the gospel might not include “follow me,” for fear that people won’t accept the gospel message. What pastors, Christian leaders, and Christians need to understand is that there are those out there that want to follow Jesus the ways it is described in the Bible! Take it from me, going to church and being a good Christian might attract many people, but it didn’t for me. As someone who was seeking Jesus, the follow me message excited me! The thought of giving up my life for Jesus gave me great

purpose. I would go as far to to say, I didn't start following Jesus until I knew that was even an option. I wasn't told it was an option!

My prayer is that all of this leads you to the scriptures and I pray that you find full and abundant life in Christ. Giving your life completely to Christ and His will is the answer to the abundant life!

LESSON ONE-CALLING OF PETER

Luke 5:1-11 (New Living Translation)

5 One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. 2 He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. 3 Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

5 "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." 6 And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! 7 A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

8 When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." 9 For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. 10 His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" 11 And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

I think often times we gloss over a story like this so quickly and move on. I want to encourage you to really imagine being there. Imagine being Simon Peter. He probably already knew about Jesus. He is obviously listening to him speak to this crowd of people. He knows that this man is special but he probably doesn't imagine in a million years that Jesus was about to give Simon Peter special attention and definitely not a special invitation and purpose.

After not catching anything all night, because Simon is a professional fishermen, he knows it would be impossible to catch two net fulls of fish right there near the shore and at that time of the day. What Simon witnessed was a miracle.

I wonder at what moment in Simon's brain did he realize that Jesus somehow commanded or made those fish go into the net? At what point did he realize that Jesus has power over nature? It certainly hit him at some point because he fell on his knees the moment he realized that this is more than just a religious man.

After Simon tries to persuade Jesus to leave him because he is so sinful, could Simon imagine what was going to happen next? Was Jesus going to say, "thank you for being honest, I will move away from you?"

No, Jesus said *"Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!"* In the book of Matthew and Mark, it says Jesus said to him, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"
20 And they left their nets at once and followed him.

Instead of Jesus moving away, he chose the sinful man. To say the least, Simon was shocked. There were probably hundreds of people there, and Jesus picked him to follow him. After this experience, Simon didn't even hesitate to leave everything he knew behind to follow Jesus.

What would you do in this situation? Again we really need to imagine us being there. Or imagine this. The Jesus appears into the room where you are reading this now. Just appears and you knew without a doubt that it is was him. He even performs a miracle in front of you to help with your unbelief. What would your response be?

Would you fall before him? Would you weep before him? Would you be in complete shock that in that moment because you knew without a doubt that Jesus was actually real? Would you feel unworthy? What would your response be if the God of the universe stepped into your room and

asked you to follow him? Would you leave everything behind? Or would you just say to him, nah, I would rather just continue with my own mundane life? What would you do? Please take sometime to really think about this because the reality is he is real and we need to believe it and we need to believe that he is calling you to follow him.

STUDY QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS:

- Do you believe Jesus is real?
- Do you believe Jesus is God?
- Do you believe Jesus is calling you to follow Him?
- Do you believe are you are worthy?
- What is stopping you from following Jesus?
- What changes in my life do I need to make to follow Jesus?

LESSON TWO-CALLING OF PETER

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LESSON TWO-CALLING OF MATTHEW

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