

FOLLOWING CHRIST DILIGENTLY

By Marvin Hawbaker

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38)

What does it mean to "follow Christ" and how is it done? Those are legitimate questions for those who desire to accept Christ's invitation to follow Him. There is a lot at stake – like losing our life – or gaining it. It seems pretty important to get it right.

Even though these words of Christ are over 2000 years old, the idea of following someone is really not an unusual one in our present society. We all know what it means to "follow the wrong person." Parents, teachers, counselors and pastors have long used this analogy. We understand that "following the wrong person" means that we are being influenced by that person. We are buying into the way they think, the way they live and the way they act. We are imitating them and in the process are becoming like them. Our life is being motivated and changed by their influence.

So it is in following Christ. Jesus said, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."* (Luke 6:40) Paul said that God's purpose in saving us was that we would be *"conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."* (Romans 8:29) Therefore, to follow Christ is to learn from Him, imitate Him and become increasingly like Him. We are to progress in thinking, acting and living as Christ would. We are to learn His ways and follow His commands.

Followers of Christ are known by what they love – what they live for, enjoy investing themselves in, what they are committed to. At Calvary we express it this way:

Followers of Christ love God through a lifestyle of *worship*, love God's family through a commitment to *membership*, love *growing* to become more like Christ, love *servicing* God by serving others and love *reaching out* to others who need Christ.

Following Christ is a lifelong journey. It is a process made up of little steps that ultimately grow into a lifestyle. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of some of the crucial steps in this process – kind of a guide or a map that will help us take the steps necessary to follow Christ diligently.

THE FIRST STEP: SALVATION

Following Christ means first and foremost to turn away from sin and trust Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and deliverance from its penalty. A follower of Christ is a believer in Christ that has made a genuine commitment to Him. Jesus said to Nicodemus, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6)

BAPTISM

Baptism is public identification with Christ by immersion in water. It is our “birth announcement” that we have been born into family of God. Christ commanded his followers to baptize those who profess Him as Savior.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)

Jesus Himself was baptized by John in order to, as He put it, “fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15)

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Commit to partnership and participation in a local body of believers who are endeavoring to Follow Christ Together in worship, growth, service and outreach.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

Now you [the church at Corinth] are the body of Christ, and members individually. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

MEET TOGETHER REGULARLY

Through meeting together regularly believers receive encouragement and accountability to continue the path of following Christ.

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

PARTICIPATE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

Communion reminds us of Christ's sacrifice and calls us to examine our lives, confess sin and renew our commitment to live a pure life

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” (Luke 22:19)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes . . . Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:26,28)

DEVELOP A HABIT OF READING AND LISTENING TO THE WORD REGULARLY

Jesus knew the Word and used it to defend against Satan's temptation.

[Jesus] answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.’” (Matthew 4:4)

God designed His Word to be our strength and guide to spiritual growth. Jesus recognized the value of it when He prayed for His Father to sanctify, or set apart, His followers by His Word.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

Begin to develop a habit of regularly taking in God's Word through reading or listening to it read, as well as listening to it taught. We are blessed with technology that has provided us many options in this area.

DEVELOP A CONSISTENT PRAYER LIFE

Prayer is simply talking to God. Jesus talked to His Heavenly Father regularly.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father . . . (John 17:1)

Paul said that we should not be anxious, ". . . *but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*" (Philippians 4:6) Just as Paul prayed for others and asked others to pray for him, we should be communicating with God in prayer as well.

FIGHT TO OVERCOME SIN

Followers of Christ aren't perfect; they are forgiven and have a new attitude toward sin. They hate sin and desire to be free from it. This is part of being conformed to the image of Christ – becoming like Him. Christ fought giving in to temptation; so should we.

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND HIM ONLY YOU SHALL SERVE.'" (Matthew 4:10)

WORK ON FINANCIAL FREEDOM AND LEARN TO GIVE

Faithful stewardship, or management, of the resources God entrusts to us is a principle taught throughout the Scriptures. This stewardship is not limited to our finances, but includes abilities and time. We are to give generously to the support of God's work out of each—time, talents and treasure. But financial freedom is the key. Wisely managing our finances will give us freedom to be generous not only with money, but with time and abilities.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

FOCUS ON SERVING OTHERS THROUGH THE MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

God put us on this earth and saved us, not to live a selfish life, but to live a life of service to others.

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Jesus demonstrated this to his disciples by washing their feet. After He had served them in this way, He said, *"I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."* (John 13:15)

WRITE YOUR STORY AND BE ABLE TO TELL IT

The Apostle Paul used his story as a witness to others. You can find two of these accounts in Acts 22 and Acts 26. Your story gives glory to God and will be used by God to encourage someone else to take the step of faith in Christ.

TELL OTHERS THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST (THE GOSPEL)

Our responsibility as followers of Christ is to proclaim the good news that Jesus suffered, died and rose again as a sacrifice for sin and that anyone who will trust Him may have forgiveness of sin and become one of His followers.

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:46-48)

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, . . . (Matthew 28:19)

CONCLUSION

Where are you on this path of following Christ? A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. What's your next step in following Christ diligently? Take that step!

All Scripture references are from the NKJV except where otherwise noted.

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