



Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Would-Be Followers of Jesus

by Nate King

Have you ever had a child try to follow you out of the house? If you're a parent this has probably happened to you. Last night my son Jon screamed, "But I want to go with you!" from the top of the stairs as I was headed out the front door. I could still hear him crying as I got into my car to drive away.

The discomfort of that moment is one that tugs at the heart of any parent. If you are one, you already know what I'm talking about. You have lived it.

When you love someone you want them to go with you. Also, when you love someone you want to go with them. It's that simple. And we almost always recognize this even if it doesn't seem possible in every circumstance. So why is it so hard to nail this when it comes to following Jesus?

I want to follow Jesus. I want to follow him with every aspect of my life. If you landed here today—chances are pretty good you do too. We want to follow Jesus. But we both have to acknowledge that the distance between our desire and our behavior is often greater than we'd like. Why? Because plenty of stuff seems to get in the way.

Think about that for a moment. You have this desire to follow Jesus with your life, but it routinely comes into conflict with your everyday circumstances. What exactly is it that gets in the way?

Sometimes, we are influenced from the outside in ways we don't even realize. One day we may look up and realize we've taken too many steps down a different path. How does this happen? It happens because of our everyday choices and decisions. We were influenced by something or someone to the detriment of our relationship with Christ. Even good things in our lives can lead to a life that goes off the tracks. Obligations can become obstacles when we aren't diligent. Diligent about what? About what God wants for you.

It's not like it's a big secret. Jesus wants you to follow him. He compels each of us to. His incredible life and selfless sacrifice are the invitation into something truly remarkable—a life spent following the Son of God. Jesus lived and died to make a clear path for you to follow.

He wants you to go with him. And if you've committed your life to Christ you want to go with him. Which is why it's crazy and confusing when we realize we aren't doing it very well. Mistakes are inevitable. Distractions are abundant. Perfection lies far outside our reach. But that's okay, not because we're actively looking to self destruct our relationship with God. It's okay, because He never expected us to ace it all of the time.

Jesus wants us to follow him. Jesus wants us to hear His heart spoken words from heaven declaring "follow me." Upon hearing these words, He hopes each of us will begin to take our first baby steps in an eternity of following Him.

When I'm playing in the yard with my kids there's a significant difference between how my eight year old son can follow me and my eighteen month old daughter. Ethan can run, and play, ride bikes and be adventurous. Anna tries to run too. And she falls a lot. The biggest differences in the way my kids follow me are the size of the things that impede them. Ethan might shrug at the waist-high grass if we're at the family farm; while to Anna it seems like an insurmountable jungle.

The truth is, there will always be something trying to trip you up. There will always seem to be something else in the way. There's always the next choice, the next fork in the road, the next potential disaster, or the next hurdle. Every parent I know tries to keep their kids from dealing with this stuff sometimes, especially when they are young. But God doesn't seem to do it that way. Why?

It's because He knows what we get to learn from them. Hurdles aren't disasters. They are part of the journey. Embrace what we learn from the impediments. Take them in stride. Jesus didn't consider the cross and the discomforts of the road as disqualifying experiences. They were hard, sure. But they made it worth it. What He offers each of us is the opportunity to walk in His love and grace. Not free of fault, but in spite of it.

When I'm following Jesus closely I am walking where He walked. My life is taking me into contact with people in need of God's love. There, I find the opportunity to love those Jesus loved—those who are rejected, broken, and in need. Faced with the ones Jesus loves, I am presented with an opportunity to give what He gave—myself. This might mean I give my time, my resources, my attention, or any number of things. Mostly it means I am giving them what I can.

This is the kind of life Jesus has invited us into. One that follows closely. Loving who He loved. Giving what He gave. When I'm getting it right I have a better sense for where my next step should land. If I have let distance creep in, it might be harder to understand how He wants me to take the next corner.

Decide to follow Jesus closely. There's a really good chance you're going to get tripped up along the way. When you do you'll just bump into Him all over again.

Walk where He walked. Love who He loved. Give what He gave. When you walk where He walked you'll always find yourself moving in the right direction. When you love who He loved you'll always find yourself surrounded by people who need Jesus. When you give what He gave you'll never stop living from the abundance of God's big plan for life. What could be better than that?