



Following Jesus

Characteristics of authentic discipleship

B. J. Hamilton

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*This book is dedicated to the glory of God
through the mobilisation of His people who are called to imitate Jesus.*

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Follow

*“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will
send you out to fish for people.”
At once they left their nets and followed him.*

MATTHEW 4:19–20

Followers of Jesus follow Jesus. They live their lives with Him in view.

The New Testament is full of amazing stories of Jesus-followers who impacted others: people like Mary, Peter, and Paul. They changed the world as they lived their lives led by the Holy Spirit. Followers of Jesus are changed people who change lives – just imagine the impact if more Christians lived like that.

But what does it mean to follow Jesus?

A follower of Jesus accepts the teaching of Jesus as truth and seeks to live like Him. They listen to Him and actively obey His words. Obedient action does not save followers from sin, for we know we are saved by grace through faith alone.¹ Yet God desires obedience in our lives, nonetheless.

So how can we follow like that?

In the next chapters, we will consider some ways to follow Jesus more fully today by looking at the example of Jesus and His early followers. By observing their lives, we can learn to become genuine followers of Jesus and impact the world as they did.

¹ Ephesians 2:8–10

Know

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ...

PHILIPPIANS 3:8

Followers of Jesus know Jesus. They know His power to change lives. They recognise He is no ordinary person and want to walk with Him.

But how can we walk with Jesus today?

We can't walk with Jesus physically because He is not with us in human form any more. But we can walk with Him spiritually and know His very real presence through the Holy Spirit. At the heart of following Jesus is a relationship with Him.

The first part of walking with Jesus is to *know about Him*. We can't have a deep relationship with someone without knowing about them. Knowing about someone builds our relationship with them. Jesus is God¹, so He already knows us, yet we need to know Him. Peter tells us that God has given us *everything* we need to live a godly life through *our knowledge of Jesus*.² Therefore, the best way for us to know (learn) more about Jesus is by reading the Bible. God's primary way to reveal Himself to us is through His Word – the Bible.

We can obviously learn about Jesus by reading the New Testament section of the Bible.³ It tells us about what Jesus said and did and what that all means

¹ Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1–4; Matthew 1:23; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Philippians 2:6; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:1–8; compare Revelation 1:8 (either God the Father or Jesus), 1:17–18 (Jesus), 21:6 (either God the Father or Jesus), 22:13 (Jesus); Rev 5:12–14.

² 2 Peter 1:3

³ This is the second part of the Bible, focussing on Jesus' life, death, and the early church and its teachings.

for us and the world. But we can also learn about Jesus by reading the Old Testament. This section of the Bible, again and again, helps prepare us for Jesus through its characters and stories. So by the time we get to the New Testament, we already have a picture of what Jesus is like and what He came to do. We already know that Jesus is the one who crushed the head of the serpent (Satan), the one who was pierced for our sin, the real Passover Lamb whose blood saved us from judgement and death, the faithful one who defeated the enemy single-handed, the Prince of Peace, and the wise king.⁴ The entire Bible reveals Jesus to us.

Additionally, as we learn about Jesus, we begin to not just know *about* Him, but to *know Him* and develop a relationship with Him. As a result, our faith in His words and work increases. We learn to depend on Him, call on His name for help, and recognise His grace and goodness in our lives. We increasingly sense His presence, love like He does, and see the world through His eyes.

Real followers of Jesus desire to spend time with their Lord. They prioritise time with Jesus because they know He is good for them. They listen to His words (the Bible) and obey. They gather with other followers to experience Christian growth and fellowship. They speak to Jesus in prayer, ask Him for help, and take the time to listen for His answers. They worship Jesus for who He is and what He has done.⁵ As a result of their relationship with Jesus, the true vine, from which they stem and grow, their lives bear fruit.⁶

Learning about Jesus by reading the Bible, spending time with Him, and listening to Jesus helps to build our relationship with Him. Followers of Jesus do this often because they know that Jesus is the way, His words are true, and He alone gives life.⁷ True purpose, peace, and satisfaction only come in Jesus. There is no greater thing than knowing Him.⁸

⁴ Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:5; Exodus 12:1–30; 1 Samuel 17; Isaiah 9:6; 1 Kings 3. It's easy to see that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the most significant events in history.

⁵ This is normally done by singing or speaking words of truth about Jesus (God) or by thanking Him throughout the day for the things He has done for you. Many of the Psalms are songs or words of worship.

⁶ John 15:5

⁷ John 14:6

⁸ Philippians 3:8

Do you want to grow in relationship with Jesus?

- You can know Jesus by reading the Bible regularly, both the Old and New Testaments. As you read God's Word, which is living and active, and allow it to impact you, the Holy Spirit will change you to become more like Jesus.⁹ Your heart and desires will match with the purposes of God. This is how you can know *about* Jesus, and as you do, you will begin to *know* Jesus.
- Take the time to think about the things you read in the Bible. Think about why Jesus came, what He did, and what He offers you.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to grow your desire to spend time with Jesus.

Reflect and/or discuss.

Read Isaiah 9:6–7. List all the things we can learn *about* Jesus from this Old Testament passage.

How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? What is going well? What needs to be improved?

What are some things you could do to help strengthen your relationship with Jesus?

⁹ Hebrews 4:12; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 12:2.

Have faith

We live by faith, not by sight.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

Followers of Jesus have faith in Jesus. They trust that Jesus is who He says He is, they believe that He has done what He says He has done, and they know that Jesus will do what He said He will do.

Followers need to have faith that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.¹ Faith springs from a relationship of trust and is essential for Christian action. How can anyone passionately follow Jesus if they have significant doubts about these things?

The Bible defines faith:

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for
and certain of what we do not see.*

HEBREWS 11:1 ²

So then, faith is what convinces us to believe and trust something, even if we don't have all the proof or information.³ For example, followers of Jesus are certain that they will not be judged for their sin because they have been made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus.⁴ Not because they fully understand how it happened, but simply because they trust God's Word. They have faith in what they cannot yet see.

¹ John 14:6. Uncertainty in faith will have negative effects on our ability to follow.

² Taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society, used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

³ For example, if you were to swing across a dangerous river on a rope, you would need to have faith: faith that both the rope and whatever it was tied to would be strong enough to hold your weight.

⁴ John 5:24; Hebrews 10:10.

Early followers had faith that ...

- Jesus was the *Messiah* (*Christ*) they had been waiting for.⁵
- Jesus was the only Saviour and the only way to God.⁶
- They were saved by God's grace through faith and not by their own effort or good works.⁷
- Jesus would return soon.⁸
- They would be resurrected from the dead to eternal life, like Jesus.⁹
- They would be rewarded for their faith.¹⁰
- They would inherit the beautiful, perfect, and peaceful kingdom of God (heaven).¹¹
- They would dwell with God and be His people forever.¹²

In short, they believed that Jesus was the *only* hope for a broken and lost world and that it was their job to tell everyone this good news.¹³ Early Jesus-followers lived and died holding onto these truths and testifying to them. Their faith was so real that it changed the way they lived. They freely gave their possessions and lives for the cause of Christ because they believed that after death, they would receive a reward that would easily make up for their sacrifice.¹⁴ In their minds, the kingdom was worth giving everything for, simply because Jesus had said so.¹⁵

There are, however, times when followers of Jesus have doubts.¹⁶ Doubts can be overcome by investigating more, remembering what God has already

⁵ John 20:31

⁶ Acts 4:12; John 14:6.

⁷ Ephesians 2:8–9

⁸ Revelation 22:7

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17

¹⁰ Matthew 5:10–12

¹¹ Revelation 21:7, 22:14.

¹² Revelation 21:3

¹³ Acts 2:14–39, 4:8–12, 20:24.

¹⁴ They believed in the resurrection and that Jesus would be their great reward. They were giving something small that they could not keep, to gain something big that they could not lose: Matthew 19:29.

¹⁵ Matthew 13:44–46

¹⁶ Doubters include some of the 11 disciples – Matthew 28:16–17; John the Baptist – Luke 7:18–22; Thomas – John 20:25–28. Matthew's gospel account often portrays the disciples' lack of faith.

done, or by choosing to trust anyway.¹⁷ Doubts don't disqualify us from following Jesus, but if they are not dealt with, they can hinder our growth or lead us away from Him.

The lives of Jesus-followers are defined by faith and hope rooted in Christ, not the things of this world. They recognise the empty hope that the world offers and steer clear of it. Instead, they remember that their true citizenship is in heaven, and keep their eyes fixed on the things to come.¹⁸

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17–18 ¹⁹

So let us then, as Jesus-followers, focus on the hope of eternal treasures that are unseen, while working to let go of the temporary and vanishing earthly treasures. This hope is not based on our own efforts, achievements, or assets, but rather on the finished work of Jesus Christ. The Bible explains that we are all saved only by our faith in God's grace towards us:²⁰ faith that Jesus has done all that is needed to save, transform, and provide us eternal life. This faith changes everything.

Do you want to grow in faith and hope?

- The Bible says that “...*faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*”²¹ So then, the first way to grow in faith is by **reading or listening to the Bible**. It is good to do this daily, so your mind is filled with truth each day.
- Another way to grow in faith and hope is to find ways to **be reminded** regularly of things written in the Bible that give you hope. You could memorise Bible passages, so they are available to you at any

¹⁷ Remember that not one of God's promises has failed: Joshua 21:45.

¹⁸ Philippians 3:19–20

¹⁹ See also Matthew 6:19–21.

²⁰ Ephesians 2:8

²¹ Romans 10:17

time; or stick Bible verses on your walls; or discuss hope with other believers. What words or stories in the Bible give you hope? What is it about the coming kingdom that gives you hope?

- The Holy Spirit helps give us faith and hope, so **ask God for that**.

Reflect and/or discuss.

Do you believe (have faith) that Jesus is the only hope for our broken and lost world? If so, why? (See Colossians 1:20).

Is your hope primarily on the things of this world (money, assets, people), or in the eternal things of God? Which of your practices or actions confirm this?

Do you have doubts about your faith or beliefs? How could you work to overcome these?

Love

*“A new command I give you: Love one another.
As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my
disciples if you love one another.”*

JOHN 13:34–35

Jesus-followers are people of love. They reflect the love of their Lord Jesus.

God is a God of love: a Creator who made people and desired for them to live in peace with joy. A Father who went to great lengths to bring His children back to Himself after they went astray.¹

*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

Jesus modelled love by healing the sick, blessing children, accepting condemned sinners, and setting people free from their infirmities. He even asked His father to forgive those who nailed Him to the cross and He challenged us to love our enemies.²

There are two things to make special note of here. Jesus' love was directed towards *all* people, and it was practical in nature. The love He felt in His heart always resulted in action. *“For God so loved the world that he **gave** ...”* God's love was an action, not just a feeling.³

¹ Isaiah 53:4–6; Luke 15:4–7; 1 Peter 2:22–24. God placed our sin on His Son: Jesus suffered and died for it.

² Luke 23:34; Matthew 5:43–48.

³ Jesus took our place on the cross. We deserved death for our sin but got life; Jesus deserved life for His righteousness but got death: 1 John 2:2.

Jesus said people would recognise His followers by their love. Followers of Jesus reflect His character of active love.⁴

Do you love others like Jesus?

Is your love for others the kind of love that helps, serves, and gives? Would you describe your church family as a community of people who genuinely love one another?

The greatest commandment is all about love displayed through action.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

LUKE 10:27

Loving both God and other people (especially fellow Christians) is essential to following Jesus well. God’s love in us frees us from sin, selfishness, and hatred. It helps us to be gracious and forgive even those people who are against us.⁵ This is difficult, yet is made possible with the help of the Holy Spirit, who is God, living and working in us today. He desires to give us more love by changing our character.

As we follow Jesus, we too can learn to reflect His character of love.

Do you want to grow in love?

- **Ask yourself (or others) the following questions and make changes in your life for improvement:**
 - How can I obey God’s Word (as a demonstration of my love for God)?⁶
 - How can I love the other Christians that I know:
 - who do I need to apologise to?

⁴ Acts 2:44–47 is a great example of loving fellowship and generosity

⁵ Matthew 5:43–48, 6:12.

⁶ 2 John 1:6

- who do I need to forgive?
 - who can I serve, and how?
- How can I pray for others (including my enemies) and ask God to bless them?
- How can I speak well of everyone, and seek to build them up with my words and actions?
- How can I be more generous?
- How can I love others in practical ways (with kind words, acts of service, appropriate touch, gifts, or quality time)?
- **Look at 1 Corinthians 13:4–7** (*Love is ...*) and remember the context is unity in the church. In what ways could you develop and demonstrate this kind of love towards your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- **Ask God to give you more love.** Only the Holy Spirit can change you. Ask Him to show you areas of your life that are lacking love and be open to His promptings for change.

Reflect and/or discuss.

Read Matthew 22:37–39. How can you love your neighbour like this?

Read Colossians 3:12–15. What does Paul tell believers to do, and not do?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. List out what love is, and what love is not. In what areas can you improve?

Love is ...

Love is not ...

Pray

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

COLOSSIANS 4:2

Followers of Jesus are people who pray. They value their relationship with God, and recognise His power to change situations and lives. God is Almighty, He can do anything, and He acts when His people pray.¹ Therefore, followers of Jesus pray frequently.

Prayer is communication with God, it involves speaking *and* listening. We speak and God listens; God speaks and we listen. God primarily communicates to us through the Bible – His written Word. But He can also speak to us audibly, through other people, by opening and closing the way forward, and by giving us peace.

God made us for His purpose, to do His will. But we do not do it alone. God's work is supposed to be done in partnership with Him. Therefore Jesus-followers don't only use prayer to bless meals, journeys, and people, but more importantly for the advancing of His kingdom. Prayer should be used for both defence and attack. Early believers used prayer for mission. In one New Testament example the believers prayed for power to heal and boldness to speak about Jesus, and God responded by (re)filling them with the Holy Spirit.² As a result, lives were changed, people were impacted, and the church grew!

So then, prayer helps us walk with God and serve with His power. God is our King, and we are His soldiers. God arms us with the weapon of prayer to

¹ Well almost anything: God cannot sin.

² Acts 4:29–30

advance and take back what is rightfully His.³ Prayer propels mission forward and changes lives. Only God can change hearts and minds. Therefore, Jesus-followers should pray regularly for people, communities, and nations to know and live for Jesus.⁴ God wants His people to pray in line with His will.

Prayer also connects us to our Heavenly Father for help. We all need the assistance of God. Prayer constantly reminds us that it is not by our own strength, but rather by the strength God gives that we live lives of significance. Prayer keeps us humble and trusting in Him more than ourselves. For this reason, prayer and worship are often inseparable. God-centred worship reminds us of who God is, what He has done, and what He can do. Prayer calls on Him to act.

Communication is important for every healthy relationship. God is our Father who understands our needs. We pray because God is both willing and able to help.⁵ So, as His children, we ought to come to Him honestly, regularly, and wholeheartedly for help to live holy lives and advance His kingdom. Jesus-followers partner with God through prayer.

Do you want to grow in prayer?

- **Remind yourself regularly of God's power in contrast to your weakness** by reading (or listening to) the Bible. You may like to begin with Genesis 1–2; Exodus 14; Joshua 3, 4, 6; Daniel 3, 6; Mark 1–8; or Acts 2.
- **Start your prayers with words of praise** and adoration, rather than just getting into your 'shopping list' of needs. You could use your favourite Psalm or (God-centred) song of praise.
- **Prayer is communicating with God:** remember to speak *and* listen. Answers may come from the Bible or when sitting in silence.
- **Pray in line with God's will:** ask God to improve the situation of others, not only your own situation. Ask Him to advance *His* kingdom, not yours.

³ See also Ephesians 6:10–18: the armour that God gives us for the battle.

⁴ One important thing Jesus instructed His followers to do is to pray for more workers for the harvest: Matthew 9:37–38.

⁵ God has a “mighty hand and outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15, 7:19). This means He is strong enough and willing to help.

- **Pray the Lord's Prayer** regularly and slowly so you can think about the words (Matthew 6:9–13). Remember you are talking to God, not reciting a memory verse.
- **Pray more often:** short prayers throughout the day are just as important as longer times of prayer.
- **Pray with others regularly:** with your family or other believers, in pairs, in a group, or online.
- **Pray in the name of Jesus:** we can pray to the Father because of what the Son did. Jesus' name is not magic, but it is powerful,⁶ especially to drive out the powers of darkness.
- **Focus worship on God,** not on yourself or others. Worship is not for *your* entertainment, but rather to praise and adore *God*. You can do this through song, movement, and by speaking words of truth and praise.⁷ Sing songs that focus on God, not on us.⁸

⁶ Acts 3:6–8

⁷ Revelation 5:9–14

⁸ If the song contains a lot of "I" statements, then it may not be so God-focussed.

Reflect and/or discuss.

Do you believe that mission is always in partnership with God? Why?

What does “pray in line with God’s will” mean, and how can you do it more?

Why do you pray if God already knows everything you want or need?

How can you grow in prayer; what will you start doing?

Serve

“Anyone who wants to be first, must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

MARK 9:35

Jesus-followers are servant-hearted. They serve like Jesus because they know it is a powerful way to demonstrate God’s love.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

MARK 10:45

Jesus did not come to earth for His own benefit, but for ours. He loved, taught, healed, and died for *us*. Jesus was so humble in His service that He even washed the feet of Judas, His own student who just hours later would betray Him.¹ He made it clear that His disciples were to follow His example.²

Thus, serving is another characteristic of a Jesus-follower. It’s an action done to benefit others rather than yourself. Serving could be making a cup of tea for a guest, taking the time to teach a child, or helping a neighbour to do a task without reward or payment. We are to use the gifts God gives us to serve others.³ Serving is a channel through which God works to both shape us and provide for those in need.

The basis of Christian service is love. Jesus served because He loved.⁴ Most people struggle to serve wholeheartedly because they are selfish by nature.

¹ John 13: this is particularly gracious because Jesus knew Judas would betray Him before He washed his feet (John 13:11).

² John 13:15

³ Romans 12:6–8; 1 Peter 4:10–11.

⁴ John 13:1

They simply lack love. We must learn to love and serve cheerfully and willingly. Thankfully the Holy Spirit is the source of love, and can change our selfishness into service.

Followers of Jesus live to serve both God and others. They see it as their very purpose in life, and an important way God works and demonstrates His love through them. Followers of Jesus recognise life is not all about themselves.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ...

EPHESIANS 4:11–12

Adam was given a role of service, to work and take care of the garden and to rule the earth for God.⁵ His wife was given the role to help him do this.⁶ Therefore, both were to serve as part of God's good creation. Our service for God begins now and continues forever in heaven as part of God's perfect eternal plan.⁷

We have been created to serve and encouraged to do it with our whole heart.⁸ Our willing service always pleases and glorifies God. It should be done cheerfully for God loves a cheerful giver.⁹

Do you want to grow in service?

- **Challenge yourself and be honest:**
 - do you seek to serve, or to be served? (Mark 10:42–45)
 - are you ashamed to be last, or embarrassed to serve others? (Mark 9:35)
 - would you be willing to wash the dirty feet of your enemy? (John 13)
 - do you primarily serve people who can repay you? (Luke 14:12–14)

⁵ Genesis 1:26–29, 2:15.

⁶ Genesis 2:20–22

⁷ Revelation 22:3, 9.

⁸ Ephesians 6:7–8

⁹ 2 Corinthians 9:7; Romans 12:8.

- **In what ways could you serve others? Make a list of ideas:** include in your list *who*, *how*, and *when*. Then take action. The more you serve, the more God will use you and you will grow. Try also to serve your enemies, or those who cannot repay you.¹⁰ Remember, Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive.¹¹
- **Ask God to help you serve others:** ask Him to take away your pride and selfishness and show you opportunities to serve.
- **Look at examples of service** in your Bible:
 - read Paul's letter to the Philippians and look for the servant examples of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Reflect and/or discuss.

Do you struggle to serve like Jesus? Why?

What is personally stopping you from serving more fully and more cheerfully?

What three things can you do this week to serve others? List *what* you will do and *when*.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:44; Luke 14:12–14.

¹¹ Acts 20:35

Submit

*You are not your own; you were bought at a price.
Therefore honour God with your bodies.*

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19–20

Followers of Jesus are submissive. They listen to God's Word and obey.

Yet the idea of submission has become unpopular these days because it is associated with weakness, inequality, and dominance. But the Bible reveals something much richer and more beautiful.

Submission is accepting, obediently and freely, the will of God or another person. As Christians, God never forces us to obey Him or others; instead, we are encouraged to offer our submissive obedience freely. This takes courage and depth of character.

The Bible teaches us to submit firstly to God, then to those in authority and to one another out of love and respect.¹ Submission is part of God's created order.² We must all submit to someone: for example, the government, police, parents, or leaders. It is a part of life whether we like it or not. We should willingly submit to earthly authority unless their instructions contradict God's Word.³ Submitting to earthly authorities trains us to submit to God.

Again, Jesus is the example to follow. Jesus submitted to His Father willingly and actively. He came to earth to die on a cross for us, even though it involved intense suffering and pain. Jesus cried,

¹ Ephesians 5:21–6:9; Colossians 3:18–25; James 4:7.

² Romans 13:1

³ Acts 5:29

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

LUKE 22:42

Like Jesus, we should be ready and willing to submit to the will of God, even when we would rather not.

Are you submitting like this?

Comfort and fun are often more attractive than genuinely following God. But this will simply not produce the fruit that God desires in us and through us.

Jesus is our Lord. The word “Lord” means “master”. A master should be obeyed. If Jesus tells us to do, or not to do, something, then we should submit (obey). His instructions and plans for us are always better than our own plans because He has the bigger picture in view.⁴

So, what are God’s directions for our life and where can we find them?

While God speaks to us in various ways, primarily God leads us and instructs us through the Bible. So we should read the Bible and focus on obeying that first. Our active submission to God’s Word is a demonstration of our love for God.⁵ A disciple of Jesus obeys and acts upon God’s Word.

We ought to be people who submit to God’s Word rather than to our own fleshly desires. Jesus does *not* call us to build up riches here on earth, or to go and make a comfortable life, to retire, relax, or even travel for pleasure.⁶ Instead, Jesus commands us to go and make disciples, to live for His purposes and His will. It’s not so easy or comfortable, but it is God’s will for our lives.

So don’t ask what God can do *for you*, but rather what you can do *for God*. Don’t ask God to help accomplish *your* plan, ask Him how you can help accomplish *His*.

⁴ Romans 8:28: God has a bigger plan, even our challenges and hardships can serve His bigger purpose.

⁵ 1 John 5:3: real faith shows itself through real works (James 2:14–26). Let’s keep in mind however that we are not saved by our good works, but by grace through faith in Jesus only (Ephesians 2:8). Jesus loves us – we know that, not through what He felt or said, but primarily by what He *did*.

⁶ These things are not necessarily wrong, yet Jesus does not direct us to do them. How much time and resources then should we dedicate to these things?

When we live our lives for God's purposes, God can use us in amazing ways to build His kingdom.

Do you want to grow in submission?

- **Read the New Testament and search for commands to follow:** try to obey them. Be careful not to become legalistic or judgemental towards others who may not be following them as you think they should. And don't become discouraged when you fail, just do your best with the strength God gives. Keep in mind our success or failure does not affect our salvation, for we are saved through faith only.
- **Ask God what *He* made you for and what *He* wants to do with your life:** remember it is all about God, not you. We live for Him; He does not live for us. We are all to make disciples, but how we do that in our life and context will vary. Discussing and praying for guidance with other mature followers of Jesus can be helpful. Get into the habit of asking yourself and others God-centred questions: not "What do *you* want to do with your life?", but rather "What does *God* want you to do with your life?" or "Where is God directing you for the coming years?"
- **Think about those in authority over you:** God, government, leaders, parents, etc.
 - are you submitting to them willingly both in your thoughts and actions?
 - what are they wanting you to do?
 - what is stopping you from doing it, and is that okay in God's opinion?
- **Ask God to help you submit to Him:** ask God to take away your pride and laziness, and replace it with humility, discipline, and self-control. Ask God to help you let go of anything that is getting in the way of following Him more fully – for example, the desire for comfort, possessions, family, fame, culture, dreams, or the illusion of safety.⁷

⁷ The illusion of safety is the idea that we, as people, can control everything and therefore be safe. It is an illusion; we can still die crossing the road, choking on food, playing sport, or from a genetic defect. But more importantly, we will all die because of human mortality. Therefore, the only thing that truly makes us safe, eternally, is believing in Jesus and being found in Him on the day we die. It is *only* through Jesus that we will live forever, in safety and security.

Reflect and/or discuss.

How would you describe submission?

Can you give some good examples of submission? (Think of a believer, husband or wife, child, worker, student ...)

When should you not submit to authority? (See Daniel 3:8–12, 6:6–10; Acts 4:18–20, 5:27–29, 5:40–42).

Are you willing to submit fully to God and His will for your life? Why or why not?

Suffer

if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

1 PETER 2:20–21

Followers of Jesus are willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. They recognise that their present sufferings are nothing in comparison to the glory to come.¹

Jesus' life on earth was a life of suffering. He was ridiculed, rejected, abandoned, stripped, beaten, flogged, and crucified publicly between two criminals. Suffering was God's will for Jesus, and Jesus accepted it.

The disciples of Jesus followed in His footsteps. All but John were killed for their faith, and even John spent his last days imprisoned on an island because he would not stop testifying about Jesus his Saviour.² Other first century followers were imprisoned, tortured, flogged, stoned, sawn in two, and killed for entertainment.³ They all suffered because of their focussed pursuit to follow Jesus and make Him known.⁴ They refused to stop acknowledging and speaking about Jesus, who was crucified for our sin and raised to life again.

Suffering is God's will for us.⁵

While our persecution may differ in nature, Paul reminds us that those who want to live a godly life *will* be persecuted.⁶ Therefore, we ought to be

¹ Romans 8:18

² They were apparently speared, shot with arrows, cut with the sword, and crucified; they suffered greatly for the sake of Christ (Acts 12:1–12, 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, Revelation 1:9).

³ Hebrews 11:35–38

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16

⁵ 1 Peter 2:21

⁶ 2 Timothy 3:12

ready and willing to suffer for Christ because persecution comes to those who follow Him. Following Jesus is not comfortable or convenient, yet our obedience amidst challenges glorifies God. Jesus has asked us to follow, no matter the cost. So, a follower of Jesus expects and accepts rejection, ridicule, or physical suffering for the cause and glory of God.⁷ It's not easy, and yet, Jesus describes persecution as a blessing.⁸

Suffering is part of following Jesus. Jesus calls us to follow His example of suffering and take up our cross daily.⁹ The apostle Paul urges believers to join with him in suffering for the gospel with the power God gives.¹⁰

Living a life that prioritises comfort and safety is not God's will for our lives here on earth. Instead, Jesus expects us to be *willing* to give up our comfort and safety to follow Him.¹¹ This kind of living reflects Christ's sacrificial love for *others*. Therefore, early believers like Paul welcomed hardship and suffering because they knew of its benefits.¹² It stood as a powerful testimony to others.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to:

fix... our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

HEBREWS 12:2–3

As we prepare to suffer, or as we experience suffering, we should look to Jesus for strength to endure. In every area He is our perfect example. When we suffer for good reasons, we reflect Jesus' love for the world and help others to see Him.

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 3:4

⁸ Matthew 5:10–12

⁹ Luke 9:23–24, 14:27

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 1:7–8

¹¹ Matthew 19:21; Luke 9:58: our lives should not reflect the love we have for ourselves, but rather the love we have for God.

¹² Philippians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 12:10; 2 Timothy 2:10: suffering helps to shape followers to be more like Jesus, but it also serves to reflect the sacrificial love of Jesus to others.

Suffering is part of God's plan and purpose for His followers; it was the way Jesus purchased our salvation, and a significant way that God still builds His Church through us. We should not avoid suffering for Christ, because God shapes us and expands His kingdom through suffering.¹³

Do you want to be prepared and ready to suffer?

- **Recognise that suffering is a part of following Jesus:** expect it and prepare for it.¹⁴
- **Learn about those who have suffered for Christ:** the Bible is full of examples and there are many books and films of Christians who have suffered for Christ. Learning from these will help put things in perspective and strengthen your resolve when suffering comes.¹⁵
- **Practice suffering:** this might sound strange, but you can train yourself to endure suffering. Deny yourself things you want, such as food or comfort.¹⁶ Practice self-discipline by waiting, instead of giving in to your fleshly desires. Discipline yourself by pushing your physical limits when you walk, run, climb, or work. Push yourself a little harder and farther each time so your body will become stronger, your mind more resilient, and your spirit more resolved.
- **Ask God to help you** prepare for and endure suffering when it comes: pray for strength, endurance, and peace amidst trials. Pray that you would “fix your eyes on Jesus”.¹⁷
- **Praise God when you face challenges:** instead of complaining, praise God with your words through prayer or song. Think of all the blessings you still have in Christ despite your situation.
- **Pray for those who are suffering:** learn about their needs and intercede for them.

¹³ Philippians 1:12-14; 1 Peter 5:19.

¹⁴ Mark 8:35

¹⁵ People such as Jim Elliot, Augustine, John Wesley, Robert Jermain Thomas, Adoniram Judson, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand, Perpetua, Amy Carmichael, Corrie ten Boom, and John Paton; go to <https://vm1.tv> and watch the free *Torchlighters* film series and other resources.

¹⁶ Fasting can be a helpful discipline for this area. But remember, the main purpose of Christian fasting is to focus on God. You should always drink water while fasting to remain hydrated and not fast if you have medical conditions that would make this dangerous. Many people fast for just one meal on certain days and use this time for prayer.

¹⁷ Hebrews 12:2-3

Reflect and/or discuss.

What kinds of suffering are you already experiencing for God? Why do you endure it?

Do you, or other believers, avoid suffering? Can you think of specific occasions? (For example, you may have stopped sharing the gospel after being scolded or threatened.)

Do you feel prepared to suffer? Why or why not?

How far are you willing to suffer for God? What are you willing to lose for God (friendships, family, health, dreams, life itself ...)?

Make disciples

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18–20

Followers of Jesus are disciple-makers. They teach others to follow and obey Jesus.

This starts by sharing the good news of the gospel so that people can believe in Jesus, then baptising any new believers and teaching them to obey His commands.¹ Making and mobilizing disciples is God’s plan to spread His life-giving message to every tribe, tongue, and nation. God wants everyone to be saved.²

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

ROMANS 10:14–15

Early followers knew that Jesus was (and still is) the *only* way to be saved.³ So they took every opportunity to share with others about Jesus because they knew the crop (of people) was ripe and needed to be harvested (gathered in) quickly. They understood the work was urgent and recognised the need to pray earnestly for workers.⁴ They spoke boldly about Jesus without shame,

¹ Matthew 28:18–20

² 2 Peter 3:9

³ John 3:16, 18, 36, 14:6; Acts 4:12.

⁴ Matthew 9:37–38

and kept their eyes fixed on the goal.⁵ They continued the work for this harvest despite persecution and kept in mind that God was with them.

Followers of Jesus invest time to train and mobilise believers to know His word, obey it, and live according to it.⁶ One of the key purposes of the church (God's people) is to train people and send them out into the world to make disciples. Jesus gave a call for disciple-making at the end of each gospel account, and the apostle Paul demonstrated disciple-making constantly.⁷ The purpose of the church, therefore, is to glorify God through the training and mobilisation of workers for the harvest.⁸

In the New Testament we see the church as an active group of Jesus-followers who are learning, praying, giving, and going to expand the kingdom of God. They were not perfect but were seeking to grow and change by the power of God to be more like Jesus. The early church grew in both size and maturity as its people partnered willingly with the Holy Spirit and ministered with His power. Sure, it got messy, but real life is always messy!

God's people (the church) saw themselves as a family of brothers and sisters eternally bound together by Jesus' blood.⁹ They actively demonstrated love for one another by building each other up, even when it was challenging. They made disciples who, in turn, made disciples. Each of these disciples impacted lives both inside and outside of the church. More and more people heard about Jesus, grew in Him, and new fellowships of Jesus-followers were established.

There are two things to especially note here. Firstly, that the Word of God was the primary tool and basis of all training;¹⁰ secondly, there was a

⁵ Acts 4:31, 5:41–42; Philippians 1:14. Jesus warns us not to be ashamed of Him (Matthew 10:32–33; 2 Timothy 1:8).

⁶ 2 Timothy 2:2

⁷ Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–20; Luke 24:46–49; John 21:15–17; Acts 15:41, 18:23; Colossians 1:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12.

⁸ Ephesians 4:11–13. The health of a church is not measured by the number of people who go *into* it, but rather the number of people that are trained and *sent out* of it. Like a fruitful tree, whose fruit gets spread to form new trees, a fruitful church is one that makes disciples and sends them out to plant new churches.

⁹ They did not see themselves as members of a club who received benefits.

¹⁰ The Old Testament and the apostles' teaching, which is now the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 states, "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

deep understanding that it was God, through the Holy Spirit, who would ultimately change lives.¹¹ The Holy Spirit is the one who draws people to Jesus, changes their character, and fuels Jesus-followers with power so that they can make disciples.¹² God was, and still is, the great disciple-maker who uses our lives as instruments to achieve His will.¹³

Disciples are Jesus-followers who live to spread God's glory to the ends of the earth. As a follower of Jesus, you are commanded to make disciples. Don't worry about what you don't yet have or know, just get started with what you can. Trust that God will use your efforts for His glory.¹⁴ God uses and equips those who are willing.

Do you want to make disciples?

- **Talk, plan, and pray about disciple-making on a regular basis.**
- **Share the good news about Jesus:**
 - **ask God** to give you confidence, boldness, and opportunities to speak.
 - **prepare to speak:**¹⁵
 - learn about the people group you are wanting to reach. What do they value, know, think, believe?
 - think of ways to start a conversation and then move it towards spiritual things.
 - practise a 1–2 minute story (testimony) of what God has done in your life. It should include what your life was like before, what God did for you, and what your life is like now. You can use this to engage people but remember it needs to be brief or people may stop listening.
 - practise sharing the good news of Jesus in a simple way that people will understand.
 - carry a tract or booklet, or be ready to point people to a website or app to help them learn about Jesus.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 3:18

¹² John 6:44, 65; Galatians 5:22–25; Acts 1:8, 2:1–41, 4:29–33. The Father draws people to Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

¹³ Acts 9:15; Philippians 2:13.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:6

¹⁵ 1 Peter 3:15

- **go to people** – don't wait for them to come to you; go in pairs if you can.¹⁶
- **do it** as often as you can, and it will become more natural and fun.
- **Baptise** new believers.
- **Teach believers to obey the word of God:** gather whoever you can. Regularly study the Bible together in small groups in a way that helps people discover the truth for themselves and put what they learn into action.¹⁷ Ultimately, we want people to hear God's Word, obey it, and share it with others. One way is to read a passage a few times, and then ask some simple questions like:
 - what does this tell us about God?
 - what does this tell us about people?
 - is there something we should do, or not do to obey this?
 There are apps that can help direct these Bible studies.¹⁸ When you learn something, pass it on to others immediately, so you extend the learning to as many as possible. Disciples are life-long learners. They are never too proud to learn something new and they want to pass it on.
- **View your church or Christian fellowship as a training centre** to equip and mobilise workers for the harvest. Pass on authority and power rather than holding on to it. *All* believers have been given the command to make disciples.¹⁹ We should mobilise all believers and commission them for God's work.
- **Make training practical:** always have people practise what they have just learnt and follow up with them for accountability.
- **Model, assist, watch, and leave (M.A.W.L.):** model to trainees what they need to do, assist them by doing it together, watch them do it themselves, and then leave and let them do it themselves. Training primarily happens through people, not programs.
- **Ask God** to send you willing people to build, grow, and mobilise: pray for them regularly and invest your time in them for as long as is healthy.

¹⁶ It's hard to go alone, but more than two people can be a little intimidating for those you meet. In pairs, one person can pray while the other speaks. This was Jesus' instruction for His disciples (Mark 6:7).

¹⁷ These are called "Discovery Bible Studies" (DBS). The aim is that people primarily discover for themselves rather than being told. What we discover for ourselves, we are more likely to remember.

¹⁸ Waha is a great free App for this. Go to Waha.app.

¹⁹ Matthew 28:18–20

Reflect and/or discuss.

What is stopping you from making disciples?

Who can you train (disciple)?

What could you train them to know and do? What resources could you use?

What steps can you take to make this happen?

Get it together

Peter's first letter to the early church (1 Peter) is a great summary of how to follow Jesus. Take the time to read it now. Write down the things that you would like to remember that match the categories here. You will quickly discover that many of the themes in that letter match the themes in this book.

Follow and know (Jesus)	Have faith (and hope)
Love	Pray
Serve	Submit (obey)

Suffer	Make disciples
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Reflect and/or discuss.

How will you respond to what you have now learned?

What will you *start* doing?

What will you *stop* doing?

What will you *keep* doing?



Jesus called His disciples to “come and follow”
Him. But what does this mean and how can
you obey today?

In this book, the author points out key
characteristics of discipleship as seen in the
early followers of Jesus. By looking at their
lives and seeking to imitate them, you too can
live the life God intended for you to live and
impact the world for His glory.