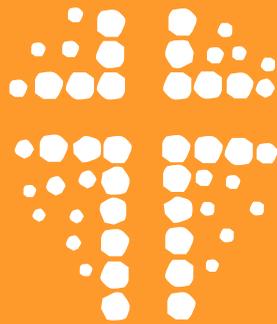


FOLLOW ME

BIBLE STUDY



DAVID
PLATT

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THE AUTHOR

Dr. David Platt, the pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, is deeply devoted to Christ and His Word. David's first love in ministry is disciple making—the simple, biblical model of teaching God's Word, mentoring others, and sharing faith. He's traveled extensively to teach the Bible alongside church leaders throughout the United States and around the world.

David has authored several books, including *Radical*, *Radical Together*, and *Follow Me*. He's the founder of Radical (*Radical.net*), a resource ministry dedicated to serving the church in making disciples of all nations.

David and his wife, Heather, have four children: Caleb, Joshua, Mara Ruth, and Isaiah.

INTRODUCTION

“Follow me.” Jesus spoke those words two thousand years ago to a group of fishermen, and they answered. They followed, and they changed the world. Today Jesus is still speaking those words to us. Will we answer? Will we follow?

This call to follow Christ is inevitably a call to die. That’s been clear since the beginning of Christianity. In the footsteps of Jesus, the first disciples found a path worth giving their lives to tread. Two thousand years later, I wonder how far we’ve wandered from that path.

Somewhere along the way, amid varying cultural tides and popular church trends, it seems we’ve minimized Jesus’ summons to total abandonment. Churches are filled with people who seem content to have a casual association with Jesus and to give nominal adherence to His commands. Scores of men, women, and children have been told that becoming a follower of Jesus simply involves believing certain truths or saying certain words.

This isn’t true. The call to follow Jesus isn’t simply an invitation to pray a prayer; it’s a summons to lose your life.

That’s why I’ve written this study. In a previous book, *Radical*, I sought to expose ideas that are common in our culture (and in the church) yet antithetical to the gospel. My aim was to identify thoughts and values of this world that we must let go of to follow Jesus.

The purpose of this study is to take the next step. I want to move from *what* we let go of to *Whom* we hold on to. I want to explore not only the gravity of what we must forsake in this world but also the greatness of the One we follow in this world—for there is indescribable joy to be found, deep satisfaction to be felt, and an eternal purpose to be fulfilled in dying to ourselves and living in Him. Are you ready to answer the call?

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

1. ATTEND EACH GROUP EXPERIENCE.

- Watch the DVD teaching.
- Participate in the group discussions.

2. COMPLETE THE MATERIAL IN THIS WORKBOOK.

- Read the daily lessons and complete the learning activities.
- Memorize each week’s suggested memory verse.
- Be honest with yourself and others about your thoughts, your questions, and your experiences as you study and apply the material.
- Ask God to show you His truth about each topic so that you can be confident you’re following Jesus as the Lord of your life.

WEEK 1

THE CALL

START

Welcome to this group discussion of *Follow Me*.

To facilitate introductions and to introduce the theme of *Follow Me*, work as a group to form a one-sentence definition of what it means to follow Christ—what it means to live as a Christian in today's society. Use the questions below to guide your discussion while forming this definition.

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word *Christian*? Why?

Describe what most Christians today see as their purpose in life.

What are the primary goals Christians should strive to achieve while living and working in the world?

Record your group's final definition.

A Christian is:

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud Matthew 10:37-38:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

WATCH

Complete the viewer guide below as you watch DVD session 1.

From the very beginning, Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is the _____, the Messiah.

Jesus is the Sovereign over the wise and the _____ of the weak.

Jesus is the Savior King and the Righteous _____.

Jesus is the new Adam and the true _____.

Jesus is clearly, absolutely worthy of far more than church attendance and casual _____.

Jesus is worthy of total abandonment and supreme _____.

To follow Jesus means to live with radical _____ for His glory.

To _____ means to confess your sin, to express sorrow over your sin, to turn from your sin, and ultimately to renounce yourself.

Followers of Jesus don't always know all the details about where they're going, but they always know _____ they're with.

When you become a follower of Jesus, you lose your _____ as you know it.

To follow Jesus is to lay down all of these things in order to live for one thing: to honor the _____.

To follow Jesus is to live with radical abandonment for His glory and to live with joyful _____ on His grace.

To follow Jesus is to live with faithful _____ to His person.

To follow Jesus is to live with total _____ in His sovereign, supreme authority in every domain and over every detail in your life.

To follow Jesus is to live with urgent _____ to His mission.

Video sessions available for purchase at www.lifeway.com/followme

RESPOND

Discuss the DVD segment with your group, using the questions below.

What did you like best from David's teaching? Why?

Review your earlier definition of what it means to follow Christ in today's culture. What would you change after hearing David's teaching?

How is Jesus viewed and portrayed in Western culture?

How is Jesus viewed and portrayed in the church?

Respond to David's statement: "You and I have nothing in us to draw Jesus to us, to give us this invitation. We are sinners, rebels to the core running from God. And the beautiful, gracious, glorious reality of the gospel is that Jesus comes running to us."

What emotions do you experience when you hear the word *evangelism*? Why?

Are you currently making disciples of Jesus? Explain.

Application: Before concluding this group discussion, make a list of five people from your sphere of influence who aren't following Christ. Commit to praying daily for each of these people throughout this week, asking the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sin and their need to experience salvation.

Scripture: Memorize Matthew 4:19-20 this week.

Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience.

This Week's Scripture Memory

**“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”
At once they left their nets and followed him. Matthew 4:19-20**

When we look back at the flow of history, we can identify a number of unique and critical turning points—events that not only impacted the world as they happened but also fundamentally changed everything that happened afterward. Today we refer to these events as watershed moments.

For example, the invention of the printing press in 1436 was unquestionably a watershed moment. Through the mass production of books, Johannes Gutenberg was instrumental in both the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. Similarly, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914 sparked World War I, which in turn created the political conditions leading to World War II.

The Bible records another watershed moment in Matthew 4: Jesus' calling of His first disciples. It was a simple event, relatively speaking. Walking along the Sea of Galilee in ancient Israel, Jesus encountered two sets of brothers working as fishermen. He asked them to drop what they were doing and follow Him as disciples instead. They answered His call. They followed.

This decision was certainly a watershed moment for those four men. Doing so changed everything about their lives from that day forward. But it was also a watershed moment in a much broader sense, because the impact of that decision still reverberates throughout human history. Through the power of God, they became part of a movement that's literally reshaped the course of human history and impacted billions of people throughout the following centuries, including you and me.

This week we'll focus on that moment when Jesus first called His disciples, along with several more of their experiences and encounters during His public ministry. Ultimately, we'll find answers to this important question: What does it mean to truly follow Jesus?

THE CALL

DAY 1

THE COST

Imagine a woman named Ayan. She's part of a community that prides itself on being 100 percent Muslim. To belong to Ayan's tribe is to be a Muslim. Ayan's personal identity, familial honor, relational standing, and social status are all inextricably intertwined with Islam. Simply put, if Ayan ever leaves her faith, she'll immediately lose her life. If Ayan's family ever found out that she was no longer a Muslim, they'd kill her without question or hesitation.

Now imagine having a conversation with Ayan about Jesus. You start by telling her God loves her so much that He sent His only Son to die on the cross for her sins as her Savior. As you speak, you sense her heart softening toward what you're saying. At the same time, you feel her spirit trembling as she contemplates what it would cost for her to follow Christ.

With fear in her eyes and faith in her heart, she looks at you and asks, "How do I become a Christian?"

How would you answer that question?

**Has your answer to that question changed over the course of your life?
Why or why not?**

There are really only two ways to answer Ayan's question. The first way is to tell her how easy it is to become a Christian. If Ayan will simply assent to certain truths and repeat a particular prayer, she can be saved. That's all it takes.

Your second option is to tell Ayan the truth. You can tell her through the gospel, God has called her to die. Literally. To die to her life. To die to her family. To die to her friends. To die to her future.

But there's more. In dying, God has called her to live in Jesus as part of a global family that includes every tribe, tongue, and nation. He's called her to live with friends who span every age. He's called her to find a future in which joy will last forever.

Which of the previous options have you primarily used when sharing the gospel?

Ayan isn't imaginary. She's a real woman who made a real choice to become a Christian—to die to herself and live in Christ, no matter the cost. Because of her decision, she was forced to flee her family and friends. Yet she's now working strategically and sacrificially to spread the gospel among her people.

The Cost Is High

What does it mean to truly, biblically follow Christ? And what does it mean to follow Him, not only in a hostile community like Ayan's but also in a place of relative comfort and security like America? What does it mean to know Jesus and identify your life with His? In short, what does it mean to be a Christian?

These are vitally important questions, and these are some of the subjects we'll explore throughout this study. To get started, let's take a look at how Jesus called His first disciples:

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Matthew 4:18-22

What strikes you as most interesting in these verses? Why?

I think it's fair to say Peter, Andrew, James, and John didn't have a complete understanding of what they were getting themselves into. They didn't fully grasp that Jesus was beckoning them to leave behind their professions, possessions, dreams, ambitions, family, friends, safety, and security—to abandon everything to follow Him.

But Jesus made sure to fill them in later:

**Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."
Matthew 16:24-25**

What does it mean for a person to deny himself or herself?

How would the people of Jesus' day have understood the phrase "take up his cross" (v. 24)?

How do we understand that phrase in today's culture?

In a world where everything revolves around self—protect yourself, promote yourself, preserve yourself, take care of yourself—Jesus said, "Slay yourself." And that's exactly what happened. According to Scripture and tradition, those four fishermen paid a steep price for following Jesus. Peter was hung upside down on a cross, Andrew was crucified in Greece, James was beheaded, and John was exiled.

Make no mistake about it: the cost of following Jesus is high. Whether we live in northern Africa or Beverly Hills, to become a Christian means to lose our lives.

How have you experienced the high cost of following Jesus?

The Reward Is Worth It

Peter, Andrew, James, and John believed following Jesus was worth the cost—even worth the loss of their freedom and their lives. *Why?* Because they received Jesus. They exchanged *their* lives for *His* life, and the results of that exchange were totally in their favor. In Jesus these men discovered a love that surpassed comprehension, a satisfaction that superseded circumstances, and a purpose that transcended every other possible pursuit in this world. They eagerly, willingly, and gladly lost their lives in order to know, follow, and proclaim Christ.

Can the same be said of you and me? That's another question we need to answer in this study.

What benefits have you received from your relationship with Christ? Record three of the most valuable to you.

1.

2.

3.

I invite you to join me on a journey in the pages ahead. I don't claim to have all of the answers, nor do I understand everything that following Jesus entails. But in a day when the basics of becoming and being a Christian are maligned by the culture and misunderstood in the church, the Bible makes it clear there's more to following Jesus than the routine religion we're tempted to settle for.

What do you hope to learn or experience about following Jesus as you participate in this study?

I'm convinced that when we take a serious look at what Jesus really meant when He said "Follow Me," we'll discover there's far more pleasure to be experienced in Him than in anything else. There's indescribably greater power to be realized with Christ and a much higher purpose to be accomplished for Him than in anything else this world has to offer.

As a result, all of us—every Christian—can be set free to eagerly, willingly, and gladly lose our lives in order to know and proclaim Christ.

THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW HIM.

DAY 2

DON'T INVITE JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

I'll never forget the day I received an e-mail from our adoption agency with a picture of a little boy. Nine months old. Abandoned at birth. In need of a home, a mom, and a dad. I printed the picture and ran to show it to Heather. We laughed, we cried, we rejoiced, we prayed, and within two weeks we were on a plane headed to Kazakhstan.

We arrived the day after Valentine's Day in 2006 and were immediately taken to the orphanage. The director was sharing all kinds of medical information with us when it happened: a woman rounded the corner with a precious 10-month-old boy in her arms. Words can't describe the swell of emotion in that room as the woman handed him to us, and for the first time Caleb Platt looked into the eyes of a mom and a dad.

We stayed in Kazakhstan for four weeks, holding our son, feeding him, singing to him, laughing with him, and crawling on the floor with him. Finally, we stood in front of a judge and heard those wonderful words: "I grant this application of adoption, and this child now belongs to David and Heather Platt."

What words or images come to mind when you hear the word *adoption*?

The Right Pursuit

The parallels between Caleb's story and the gospel story are many, but I want to point out one that's particularly significant: adoption like this begins with a parent's initiative, not a child's idea. Our 10-month-old boy didn't invite us to come to Kazakhstan and bring him into our family, for he didn't even know to ask for such a thing. No, this orphaned child became our cherished son because of a love that was entirely beyond his imagination and completely outside his control.

Caleb didn't pursue us, for he was utterly unable to do so. Instead, we pursued him.

This is the heart of Christianity, and we're prone to miss it if we describe becoming a Christian as "inviting Jesus into your heart." We don't become followers of Christ by pursuing Christ or inviting Christ to do anything, for in our sin we're totally unable to do so. Instead, we become Christians when Christ pursues us and invites us to follow Him.

What's your reaction to the previous paragraph? Why?

Jesus made this clear when He spoke to His disciples at the last supper:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. John 15:16-17

What emotions do you experience when you read these verses? Why?

What does it mean that God “chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit”?

Sometimes I ask people, “How do you know you’re a Christian?” or “How do you know you’re saved from your sin?” The most common replies I hear from professing Christians are “Because I decided to trust in Jesus,” “Because I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart many years ago,” or even “Because I’ve given my life to Jesus.”

Notice how each reply begins with the words, “Because I . . .” Such responses aren’t wrong, and I assure you my aim is not to be the word police, but I do want to offer what I hope is a healthy reminder that you and I are not saved from our sin primarily because we decided to do something a certain number of years ago. Instead, we’re saved from our sin ultimately because *Jesus* decided to do something two thousand years ago. And based on His grace, His mercy, and His love in coming to us—sinners totally unable to save ourselves—we’ve been invited to follow Him.

In other words, the love of God in the life and death of Jesus Christ is the only foundation for authentic salvation.

In the past have you thought of your salvation in terms of something you did or something Jesus did? Why?

God's Shocking Grace

Maybe you're wondering whether these distinctions really matter: *Is it really important to specify that Christ chose us instead of the other way around? Does it really make a difference if we adjust our understanding in this way?*

The answer to those questions is yes. It matters that we understand what Christ has done for us. It's important. And the reason it's important is because of our sin.

What ideas or images come to your mind when you hear the word *sin*?

For too long we in the church have convinced one another that we're basically good people who occasionally make some bad decisions. Whether we've lied, cheated, stolen, or taken God's name in vain, we simply tell ourselves we've all made mistakes. And the solution is easy: just invite Jesus to come into your heart, and He will forgive you of all these things before you can say, "Amen."

This thinking is false. At our very core we're enemies of God with no real desire to know Him. We're utterly unable to call on Christ because we're totally consumed with running from the Father. That's what it means to be sinful. And if you think I'm overstating this a little bit, look at the testimony of God's Word:

- In our sin we've alienated ourselves from God and are hostile toward Him (see Col. 1:21).
- We're slaves to our sin (see John 8:34) and dominated by Satan (see 2 Tim. 2:26).
- We love darkness and hate light (see John 3:20; Eph. 4:18).
- We live in impurity and lawlessness (see Rom. 6:19).
- Our minds are depraved (see Rom. 1:28) and blinded to truth by the god of this world (see 2 Cor. 4:4).
- Our emotions are disordered, our hearts are sinful (see Rom. 1:26), and the wicked passions of our flesh wage war against our souls (see 1 Pet. 2:11).
- Our bodies are defiled (see Rom. 1:24); we are morally evil (see Gen. 8:21) and spiritually sick (see Matt. 9:12).

How have you seen these realities expressed in your life?

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about our sinful condition.

Isaiah 64:6-7

Romans 3:9-18

Ephesians 3:1-2

Understand this: as members of the human race, we're filthy in our sinfulness. We're utterly repulsive to our perfect Creator. And yet our perfect Creator chose to save us anyway. Moreover, He *wants* us! He wants us to be His children!

Before being saved, all of us were dead in our transgressions. We had no signs of life and no hope of any blessing for eternity. And yet God moved heaven and earth to offer us eternal life. He gave His own life to rescue us, give us life, and make us His own. That's the message of the gospel.

Do you see why the idea of casually inviting Jesus to join our lives is contrary to the message of the gospel? And do you see why we must have a proper understanding of our situation to properly appreciate and worship our King?

What are more appropriate ways to describe salvation?

**Does your life reflect an appreciation for the shocking grace you've received?
Why or why not?**

Perhaps now you're wondering whether we as human beings have any part at all in the process of salvation: *Surely the searching love of God must be believed and received. God isn't the only one working in salvation. We must choose to accept or reject God's mercy in Christ, right?*

Absolutely. The mystery of God's mercy in no way negates a person's responsibility in salvation. This entire Bible study revolves around the decision each one of us makes to follow Jesus.

Ultimately, however, to be a Christian is to be loved by God, pursued by God, and found by God. To be a Christian is to realize that in your sin you were separated from God's presence and deserved nothing but God's wrath.

**YET DESPITE YOUR DARKNESS AND IN YOUR DEADNESS,
HIS LIGHT SHONE ON YOU, AND HIS VOICE
SPOKE TO YOU, INVITING YOU TO FOLLOW HIM.**

DAY 3

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

I have a friend—let’s call him John—whose first exposure to the concept of hell was during an episode of “Tom and Jerry” when he was young. During one particularly vivid scene, Tom was sent to hell for something bad he’d done to Jerry. What was intended to be a humorous cartoon ended up scaring John to death, and he later found himself at church talking with a man about what he’d seen.

The churchgoer looked at John and said, “Well, you don’t want to go to hell, do you?”

“No,” John responded.

“OK then,” the man said. “Pray this prayer after me. Dear Jesus ...”

John paused. After some awkward silence he realized he was supposed to repeat after the man. So he hesitantly responded, “Dear Jesus ...”

“I know I’m a sinner, and I know Jesus died on a cross for my sins,” the man said. John repeated his words.

“I ask You to come into my heart and save me from my sin,” the man said. Again, John echoed what he’d heard.

“Amen,” the man concluded. Then the man looked at John and said, “Son, you’re saved from your sins, and you don’t ever have to worry about hell again.”

What emotions did you experience when you read the previous conversation? Why?

Away from Me

Surely what that man told my friend in church that day wasn’t true. Surely this isn’t what it means to respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him—and yet these kinds of conversations are repeated year after year within the church.

Shouldn’t it alarm us that such simplistic pathways to Christianity are nowhere to be found in God’s Word? Shouldn’t we who follow Christ be concerned that the Scriptures contain no references to people asking Jesus into their hearts or reciting a prayer of salvation?

Yet this is exactly what multitudes of professing Christians have been encouraged to do. Worse, they've been assured that as long as they asked Jesus into their heart, invited Him into their life, prayed a prayer, raised their hand, signed a card, or walked an aisle, they're Christians, and their salvation is eternally secure.

It's a lie. With good intentions and a sincere desire to reach as many people as possible for Christ, we've subtly and deceptively minimized the magnitude of what it means to follow Jesus. As a result, multitudes of men and women at this moment think they're saved from their sins when they aren't. Scores of people around the world culturally identify themselves as Christians when biblically they aren't.

What's your reaction to the previous statements? Why?

What evidence have you encountered to support the idea that many people who claim to be Christians aren't actually following Jesus?

I realize these claims may be surprising for a lot of people, perhaps even offensive. You may be wondering: *Is it possible for a person to claim to be a Christian without actually knowing Christ? Could a large number of people really be completely ignorant of their own spiritual state?*

I assure you the answer to those questions is yes. You don't have to take my word for it. Instead, listen to the words of Jesus:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"
Matthew 7:21-23

How do these verses impact you? Why?

All people are prone to spiritual deception, including you and me. What we need to understand is that Jesus wasn't speaking about outsiders in Matthew 7. He wasn't talking about atheists, murderers, or people who've completely rebelled against the message of the gospel. No, He was talking about religious people. He was talking about good people who superficially associate themselves with Him and do good things—even to the point of driving out demons and performing miracles. But they don't know Jesus.

What kinds of activities does our culture typically associate with Christian behavior and practices?

It's possible to go through the motions of a Christian life without actually becoming a Christian—without experiencing salvation. That should scare us on a number of different levels.

Let's address this problem by focusing on a genuine relationship with Christ—on what happens when people really experience salvation. What does it look like when people die to themselves and find new life as followers of Jesus? What evidence follows that spiritual transaction?

We can answer those questions by examining the experiences of Jesus' first disciples. When we do, two words stand out: *repent* and *renounce*.

Repent

We've already seen the way Jesus called His first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. But if we back up to the previous verse, we see the first words of Jesus' public ministry on earth: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' " (Matt. 4:17).

It's interesting that the very first word out of Jesus' mouth during His public ministry was *repent*. The same was true of John the Baptist, and Peter preached a message of repentance during the first Christian sermon after being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word *repent*? Why?

Read the following passages and record what they teach about repentance.

Matthew 3:1-12

Acts 2:36-41

Repentance is a rich biblical term that signifies an elemental transformation in someone's mind, heart, and life. When people repent, they turn from walking in one direction to running in the opposite direction. From that point forward they think differently, believe differently, feel differently, love differently, and live differently.

How has your life changed as a result of following Jesus?

Have you consciously repented of your rebellion against God? Explain.

Fundamentally, repentance involves renouncing a former way of life in favor of a new way of life.

Renounce

Dictionary definitions of the word *renounce* include “to give up or put aside voluntarily” and “to repudiate; disown.”¹ To renounce something is to commit a strong, decisive action. The term carries the weight of finality. That’s precisely what Jesus wanted to communicate when He spoke these words to His disciples: “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33, ESV).

Contrary to what many believe today, Jesus wasn’t speaking metaphorically or exaggerating when He made that statement. He meant what He said: that in order to follow Him, we must voluntarily relinquish control over every aspect of our lives. That includes our possessions, our comfort, our careers, our family, our position, our sin, and even ourselves.

That’s what Jesus asked of His first disciples, and He asks the same of us today.

Look again at Matthew 4:18-22. Record three things Peter, Andrew, James, and John renounced in order to follow Jesus.

1.

2.

3.

Some people in the church are selling the notion that being a Christian means making a decision or praying a prayer and then retaining all of the details, priorities, and activities you've always known. Don't buy such a notion. Don't believe such a lie.

To become a Christian is to lose your life as you know it—to deny yourself, take up a cross, and follow Jesus. And to follow Jesus is to value what He values, go where He commands you to go, and do what He commands you to do. These are some of the most basic evidences of living as a disciple of Jesus.

Where do you see these basic forms of evidence reflected in your life?

What have you renounced as a result of following Jesus?

Tomorrow we'll look at an absolute must when it comes to following Jesus:

**SOMETHING I REFER TO AS
SUPERNATURAL REGENERATION.**

DAY 4

A NEW CREATION

On a recent trip to India, I had the opportunity to work with four different religious communities over a period of several days. It was an eye-opening experience, to say the least. I remember standing at the Ganges River, considered a holy body of water by Hindus. I watched as crowds of people washed themselves in the river to cleanse their sins. I observed individuals scattering the ashes of loved ones into the water, believing this ritual ensures instant salvation.

I remember listening in another region as Muslim calls to prayer resounded from loudspeakers five times each day. The people responded by filing into mosques and completing a series of prayers that involved bowing down with their hands on their knees, prostrating their faces to the ground, and then rising to stand.

I remember visiting a training center for Tibetan Buddhists where more than five hundred monks live together in the presence of two large temples. Everywhere I looked, I saw people bowing before statues of gold, walking in circles to recite mantras, and spinning prayer wheels.

I remember visiting a Sikh community during our final evening in India. Forbidden to cut their hair, men wore turbans of different colors, and women covered their heads. I watched as people entered their temple and bowed before the Sikh scriptures, known as the Guru Granth Sahib.

What experiences have you had with religious systems other than Christianity?

What do you think is the primary difference between Christianity and other religions?

Looking back on these four encounters with four major world religions, I realized they all shared one common denominator: in every religion a teacher (or a series of teachers) prescribes certain paths to follow in order to honor God (or different gods) and experience salvation (in whatever way that's defined).

In Hinduism ancient teachers have passed down Vedic traditions prescribing rites and rituals for Hindus to observe. In Islam Muhammad pointed to Five Pillars in the Qur'an for Muslims to practice. In Buddhism the Buddha's Eightfold Path is just one of Four Noble Truths he taught, alongside hundreds of other rules for Buddhists to follow. In Sikhism 10 gurus have pointed to one body of teaching as the way to truth and life.

Christianity is radically different from every other religious system in the world. And the root of that difference is a total rejection of superficial religion in the place of supernatural regeneration. We must understand this difference in order to be genuine disciples of Jesus Christ.

Superficial Religion

Christianity stands alone among world religions because when Jesus came on the scene of human history and began calling followers to Himself, He didn't say, "Follow certain rules. Observe specific regulations. Perform ritual duties. Pursue a particular path."

No. He said, "Follow Me."

With those two simple words Jesus made clear that His primary purpose wasn't to instruct His disciples in a prescribed religion. Rather, His purpose was to invite His disciples into a personal relationship. He wasn't saying, "Go this way to find truth and life." Instead, He was saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). The call of Jesus was "Come to *Me*. Find rest for your souls in *Me*. Find joy in your heart from *Me*. Find meaning in your life through *Me*."

This extremely shocking and utterly revolutionary call is the essence of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We aren't called to simply believe certain points or observe certain practices but to cling to the Person of Christ as life itself.

What's your reaction to the previous statements? Why?

Do you feel personally connected to Jesus? Why or why not?

I'm afraid the modern church has missed this distinction. In many ways and in many settings, we've relegated Christianity to just another choice in the cafeteria line of religions. Hindus bathe in the Ganges River; Christians get baptized in the church. Muslims go to worship on Friday; Christians go to worship on Sunday. Buddhists recite mantras; Christians sing choruses. Sikhs read their holy book and share with the needy; Christians read their Bibles and give to the poor.

Please don't misunderstand me: I'm definitely not saying Christians should avoid being baptized, singing in worship, reading our Bibles, or serving the poor. What I'm saying is that if we're not careful, any one of us could do all of these things completely apart from Jesus. Slowly and subtly we can allow Christianity to devolve into just another set of rules, regulations, practices, and principles—just another superficial religion.

How have you been led to follow rules and regulations as a church member?

Do you ever feel that your Christianity consists of nothing more than a list of truths to believe and things to do? Quiet times, prayer times, Bible study, small groups, service, evangelism—in the middle of it all, do you feel as if following Jesus is mostly duty with only a minimal amount of delight?

How do you answer the previous questions?

The curse of superficial religion is the constant pressure to do outward things apart from inward transformation, and it's exhausting. I know it's exhausting. More importantly, Jesus knows it's exhausting. And He invites us to something better:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

What emotions did you experience when you read these verses? Why?

We live in a world where every other religious teacher says, "Try harder, work harder, do more, become better." But not Jesus. He offers a burden that's light. He offers rest. But the only way we can receive that rest is to reject superficial religion and instead look to God for the work of supernatural regeneration.

Supernatural Regeneration

If anyone understood the rigors and pressures of superficial religion, it was Nicodemus. Trained as a teacher of the law and a ruler among God's people, Nicodemus was like many professing Christians today: he possessed a measure of belief in and respect for Jesus while ordering his life around the commands of Scripture. He prayed and went to worship. He read and taught the Bible. He lived a good, decent, moral life.

For Nicodemus, everything was right on the outside, but something was wrong on the inside. Despite all the religious stuff he did, he had no spiritual life; he was empty. Fortunately, he came to Jesus seeking that spiritual life.

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus's questions was puzzling at first. He said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). Jesus elaborated a couple of verses later, saying, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (v. 5).

What images or ideas come to mind when you hear the phrase *born again*? Why?

That phrase "born of water and the Spirit" is key to understanding what Jesus was saying because it points back to an important passage from the Old Testament:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36:25-27

What images or phrases strike you as most interesting in these verses? Why?

How do these verses connect with Jesus' words to Nicodemus?

What Ezekiel wrote about is exactly what Jesus came to do. He came to cleanse us of our sin through His sacrifice on the cross; to wash us with “clean water” (v. 25). And in doing so, He gives us something infinitely more valuable: a new heart. We’re born again! He gives us His Spirit to live in us and change us from the inside out. This is what it means to experience supernatural regeneration.

That’s why Paul wrote these joyful, exuberant words in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

That’s also why the Bible teaches that faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to experience salvation from sin. Faith is the antiwork. It’s the realization that we can do nothing to help ourselves except trust in what Jesus has done for us through His life, death, and resurrection.

Have you experienced supernatural regeneration? How can you tell?

Spiritual regeneration is the heart of Jesus’ call to follow Him. When you become a Christian, you die, and Jesus becomes your life. To paraphrase Paul, “You have died with Christ, and you’re not even alive anymore. Instead, Christ is alive in you, and the only way you live is by faith in Him” (Gal. 2:20, author’s paraphrase). In other words, Jesus died for you so that He could live in you.

**JESUS DOESN'T MERELY IMPROVE YOUR OLD NATURE; HE
IMPARTS TO YOU AN ENTIRELY NEW NATURE—A SPIRITUAL
NATURE THAT'S COMPLETELY UNITED WITH HIS.**

DAY 5

MAKE DISCIPLES

Throughout this week we've explored what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We've looked at several pieces of evidence we can use to confirm whether we're truly following Jesus rather than going through the motions of cultural Christianity.

For example, we've seen that repentance is a vital first step for all Christians—leaving the path of rebellion against God and choosing instead to follow Christ. In addition, disciples of Jesus must renounce their comfort, careers, possessions, families, and even themselves. We've also seen that genuine Christians have experienced supernatural regeneration; they're changed from the inside out rather than settling for superficial beliefs and behaviors.

Today I want to explore the final proof of what it means to live as a genuine follower of Jesus: the reality that true disciples of Christ are supernaturally compelled to make more disciples of Christ.

Fishers of Men

Over the years I've been privileged to encounter many people in many places who've rejected the superficial religion of their culture and experienced supernatural regeneration through Christ. It's wonderful to hear their stories and see God's faithfulness win out over and over again.

For example, I often think of Abid, a doctor who lives on the most unevangelized island on earth. Abid came from a very wealthy, extremely devout Muslim family. He made a holy pilgrimage to Mecca seven different times as part of his attempts to find meaning in life through Islam. But by God's grace Abid encountered Christian missionaries who shared the gospel with him. As he heard about Christ, Abid experienced a peace that had eluded him throughout his entire life in Islam. Eventually he became a follower of Jesus.

The cost was steep. As soon as his family found out about his conversion, Abid was tied up and beaten. His wife left him, his kids abandoned him, he lost his medical practice, and today he lives under a constant threat of death from his extended family.

But those difficulties aren't what occupies Abid's mind. Instead, he thinks about helping others find the joy and purpose he's been blessed to receive. When he was saved, Abid asked God to use him to share the gospel with one thousand people during his first year as a Christian. At the end of that first year, God had given him the opportunity to share the good news of His grace in Christ with more than four thousand people.

Abid still experiences persecution, but he presses forward. Indeed, it seems as though nothing can stop him from making disciples.

Summarize your experiences with evangelism and discipleship in recent years.

Have those experiences been primarily positive or negative? Why?

Abid's experiences are a continuation of Jesus' call to His first disciples in Matthew 4. This is true not simply because Abid is working to make disciples but because his work is a result of being profoundly changed by Jesus Christ.

Look again at Jesus' words to those first disciples: " 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and *I will make you* fishers of men' " (Matt. 4:19, emphasis added). Notice Jesus didn't say He would *call* them to be fishers of men; He didn't say He would instruct the disciples in techniques for evangelism or serve as a role model. No, He said He would *cause* them to be fishers of men. The commands He would give *to* them could be accomplished only by the work He would do *in* them.

And that's what happened. In the years that followed, Jesus transformed everything about the disciples' lives: their thoughts, their desires, their wills, their relationships, and ultimately their very purpose for living. Not surprisingly, the Book of Matthew ends with Jesus' command for His disciples to make more disciples—what we know as the Great Commission:

Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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

What are your initial reactions to Jesus' words in these verses?

Do Jesus' commands in these verses apply to you? Why or why not?

Moving Forward?

Considering Jesus' call makes me wonder what we're missing now. When I look at the church today, it seems that we've taken the costly command of Christ to go, baptize, and teach all nations and mutated it into a comfortable call for people to come, be baptized, and sit in one location. Many Christians seem to have exempted themselves from any personal responsibility to fish for men, and I'm convinced the majority of Christians wouldn't identify making disciples of all nations as their primary purpose in life.

What's your reaction to the previous statements?

Is making disciples of all nations the primary goal for your life? What evidence supports your answer?

If you feel offended or shamed by these ideas, please stay with me. Those of us in the church must understand that biblically speaking, every disciple of Jesus is intended to make more disciples of Jesus. From the very beginning of Christianity, following Jesus has always involved fishing for men.

What's more, those early disciples didn't have to be coaxed into making more disciples. They didn't evangelize from a sense of guilt or duty. Instead, they were supernaturally compelled. Not even the threat of death could stop them from obeying Jesus' command.

Think of Peter and John in the days after the launch of the church at Pentecost. In a seemingly random encounter they healed a crippled beggar at a temple gate (see Acts 3:1-10). When that action created a stir throughout Jerusalem, the religious leaders arrested and interrogated Peter and John (see Acts 4:1-7).

Read Acts 4:8-20 to see what happened next. What words would you use to summarize Peter's actions and proclamations?

Has there been a time when you couldn't help speaking about what you'd seen and heard about Jesus? Explain.

So what's keeping us from obeying that command today? Not the church as a whole but every individual Christian. Why are so many of us sitting on the sidelines instead of wholeheartedly, passionately, sacrificially, and joyfully giving our lives to make disciples of all nations?

What's preventing you from giving more of your life to make disciples of all nations?

I think the answer is tied to what we discussed yesterday: superficial religion. If our Christianity is nothing more than a list of principles to believe and practices to observe—many of which are similar to the principles and practices of other religions—then we'll always view making disciples as a duty. It will always be a chore, and we'll have little or no motivation to step out of our comfort zones, alter our priorities, sacrifice our possessions, and potentially even lose our lives to share Christ with others. As Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24).

If we've experienced supernatural regeneration, on the other hand—if the God of the universe has stretched His hand of mercy into the depths of our souls, forgiven all our sin, and filled us with His Spirit—then such a spectator mentality is spiritually impossible. For people whose hearts, minds, wills, and relationships have been radically turned upside down by the Person of Christ, the purpose of Christ will reign supreme.

What about you? Are you engulfed in superficial religion, or have you experienced supernatural regeneration? Are you concentrating on Christian principles and practices in your life, or are you clinging to Christ as your very life? Are you confident that you've been forgiven of your sin? Is it clear that you're filled with His Spirit?

Ultimately, have you been born again?

How do you answer the previous question?

Are you currently compelled to make disciples of Jesus Christ? Are you succeeding?

" 'Follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men' " (Matt. 4:19). This isn't a gentle solicitation to tread a path of superficial religion. It's a call to taste a pleasure that can be found only in a supernatural relationship with Christ.

WILL YOU FOLLOW?

1. "Renounce," *Dictionary.com* [online, cited 28 November 2012]. Available from the Internet: www.dictionary.reference.com.

WEEK 2

BE TRANSFORMED

Welcome back to this group discussion of *Follow Me*.

Last week's application activity involved praying daily for the salvation of five specific people. If you're comfortable, share ways those prayers affected the rest of your daily routine.

Describe what you liked best about the study material in week 1. What questions do you have?

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear words like *Lord* and *King*? Why?

How have you changed since becoming a follower of Jesus? Record three of the biggest changes you've personally experienced since choosing to follow Christ.

1.

2.

3.

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud John 15:5-8:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

WATCH

Complete the viewer guide below as you watch DVD session 2.

As a disciple of Christ, you are _____ with Christ.

As a Christian, Christ is _____ you.

You are in _____.

Christ is _____ you.

You are with _____.

When you _____ Jesus as Lord,
He changes everything in your life.

As we abide in His Word, we bear
_____ in this world.

God's Word _____ us.

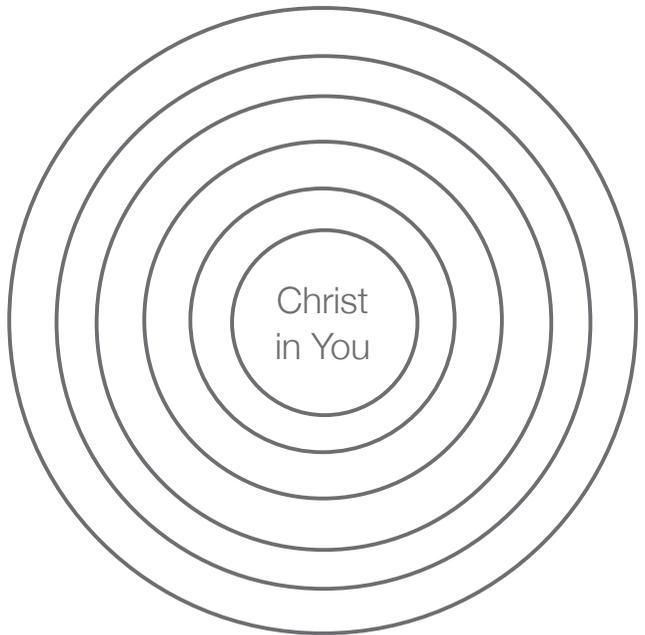
God's Word _____ us.

God's Word _____ us.

God's Word _____ us.

As disciples of Jesus, we believe His Word no matter how much it _____ us.

As disciples of Jesus, we proclaim His Word no matter how much it _____ us.



Video sessions available for purchase at www.lifeway.com/followme

RESPOND

Discuss the DVD segment with your group, using the questions below.

What did you like best from David's teaching? Why?

Review the three ways you've changed since becoming a follower of Christ, which you listed earlier in this group session. Where do those changes fit into the concentric-circles diagram shown on the left?

Why is it important that Jesus transforms us from the inside out?

Respond to David's statement: "This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus: it means that He is in you, Jesus is in you, and you are in Him. He is with you every moment of every day, forever, and you are with Him in His life and His death and His resurrection and His reign."

How has your purpose in life changed as a result of following Jesus?

Describe your level of satisfaction with your efforts to study God's Word. What obstacles currently hinder you from a deeper study of the Scriptures?

What are some appropriate ways to proclaim the truths of God's Word in today's culture?

Application: Identify one of your favorite chapters from the Bible and commit to read it every day this week. Suggestions include Matthew 5; Romans 8; Romans 12; and James 3. Conclude each reading by asking yourself, *Does the way I live my life indicate that I believe what these verses say?*

Scripture: Memorize John 15:5 this week.

Read week 2 and complete the activities before the next group experience.