



"The Christian faith has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried."

—G.K. Chesterton

**13-Jun-14**

## Called to Follow

If there is one great principle of Christian living, it is walking in Christ's footsteps ([I John 2:6](#)). Sounds easy, but putting it into practice is one of the most difficult tasks of a Christian's life. If we succeed, however, we will be one of those to whom He says in the resurrection, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We will have not only lived as He did, we will have put on His character image, the great goal of the Christian life ([Romans 8:29](#)).

In [Matthew 4:18-22](#), Jesus begins to call His disciples, particularly the pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew and James and John:

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately, they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

The sparse prose of [the gospel](#) account makes it seem as if the four of them just dropped their nets, jumped off the boats, and never looked back!

Evidently, this was Jesus' first command to each of His disciples. Maybe He did not say these exact words to each one, but it seems that Matthew gives this account as an example of Jesus' pattern in calling them: He commanded them, "Follow Me." And they immediately left what they were doing and followed Him.

On the surface, "Follow Me" may appear to mean simply, "Go where I go," but there is far more to it. The disciples would learn over the next three and a half years that "Follow Me" meant a great deal more than just "Walk behind Me." It also means "Do what I do," "Live as I do," and "Experience what I experience." Ultimately, it also means "Suffer and die like Me." Yet, on the other hand, it also means "Share eternal life and My rewards, too." That simple command runs the entire gamut of Christian life and potential.

From a negative perspective, [Luke 9:57-62](#) considers the costs of being a follower of Christ:

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the [kingdom of God](#)." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of [God](#)."

Clearly, following Jesus is neither easy nor risk-free. Its sacrifices and hardships are sometimes severe. It involves a commitment that most people are just not willing to make because true discipleship involves absolute devotion and dedication to Christ Himself. Thus, Jesus said these things, testing these men, finding out what was really in their hearts—if they were willing to commit themselves to Him, to His way of life, and to His purposes.

In the final verse, He lets us know the bottom line of what is required: One who is fit for God's Kingdom is willing to give all. German clergyman Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who lived under the Nazi regime, wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it, he sums up the Christian calling with a now well-known quotation, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

In this passage, Luke records three instances in which someone gives an excuse to refuse Christ's calling to follow Him, illustrating three general areas in which people fail. The first reason is that the Christian life is one of discomfort. Jesus tells the man that He did not have a place to lay His head. In God's Word, [Christians](#) are often called "strangers" and "sojourners." We are travelers going through a land or residing only temporarily. In a spiritual sense, we are not citizens of the lands in which we live ([Philippians 3:20](#)). So, as travelers along the road of life toward the Kingdom of God, we cannot expect to have all the comforts of home.

We cannot allow the accoutrements of this world and of this life to hold us back in our devotion to Christ. Our homes, jobs, vacations, clothes, pastimes—none of these things compare to the importance of this Christian life. We must be willing to forsake all of these things if they inhibit our relationship with God. It may make life uncomfortable, but the rewards are wonderful.

The second reason some fail is because the Christian life is sacrificial. The man asks Jesus if he could first bury his father, but He answers, "No. You go and preach the Kingdom of God." We, because of our calling, must often forsake the customary duties, privileges, associations, and activities of normal life. The Christian's focus, Jesus says, is on the living, those whom God has called and given the truth, whose focus is also on God's work (see [John 6:29](#)).

When God calls a person, His will comes first. We may end up "missing out" on many of this world's activities. Some people miss them so much that they feel short-changed by God. Whether we pass or fail on this point depends on our priorities. If our ties to [the world](#) and its ways are too strong, we will be unwilling to sacrifice them to follow Christ. To be a true disciple, He says, we have to cut many or most of those ties.

The third reason people refuse Christ's call follows from the second: The Christian life demands new loyalties. The third man wanted to say farewell to his close friends and family. Jesus' reply is that once we commit to God's way, we cannot turn back, or we will be considered unfit. Many Christians are the only ones called from their particular families. They often find that, over time, they must forsake their own blood to a degree because they discover that they have little in common with them. Their ways of life are so dramatically divergent that separation becomes natural. In the church under a new and better way of life, they find a new identity, a new family, and a new purpose.

It is said that blood is thicker than water, but Jesus warns that our devotion to Him and God's way of life must be stronger. It requires an act of will to make our devotion to Him stronger than our blood ties. The Holy Spirit will not just infuse us to be totally committed to God. We have to set our wills to believe and follow through with making God our first priority in life, to go where He says to go. This is the new loyalty that Christ's calling demands.

In this way, we begin to live the life of Christ.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Knowing, Following, and Striving for Christ](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Christians are set apart from others because they believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead and that He is alive and actively interceding for us right now. Because of this, we must know, follow, and strive to conform to Christ's image. Our goal is to know Christ on a personal and intimate basis, knowing the power of His resurrection. This knowledge should be a practical understanding of His power and of the depths of His suffering, leading to a daily pattern of life that will become eternal. Only by knowing Christ can we possibly know the Father. Nothing is truly knowledge unless it is practiced in daily life, empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Part of knowing Christ is to

share His sufferings, enduring persecution. We should make every effort to diligently live for Christ, living among those who are spiritually dead. God had a purpose for calling us, an event which begins a new process of spiritual life, being conformed to the image of His Son. We have an obligation to follow Christ. Discipleship is personal. We should never base our Christian living on the circumstances of a brother or sister in Christ. Fighting and overcoming our carnal human nature is not easy, but the rewards for doing so are enormous. Nothing we give up in this life will compare with the trade-off in God's Kingdom. It is a total win-win proposition. We need to let go of the past, and press forward to the goal of conforming to the image of Jesus Christ.

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

### **'I'll Never Follow Another Man!'**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

This is an oft-repeated refrain in these days of distrust of the ministry. But is it a proper, Christian attitude? What does the Bible say about human leadership in God's church?

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