

# The Opportunity to Follow

## The Problems We Face Today

The challenge many Christians face is the feeling that they are not living the life that God expects. For whatever reason, they are not living the standard Jesus Christ taught.

- We may have spiritual knowledge, but we are not able to consistently apply it to our lives. We often find ourselves being hearers of the Word but not doers.
- We struggle with knowing the will of God in our daily walk.
- We are frustrated, disappointed, discouraged, and often guilt-ridden over our seeming inability to live a holy and godly life as the Bible teaches.
- There seem to be too many changes needed, so we resign ourselves to the fact that we can never be what God says we must be.

The lessons in this series will help you learn how to get on track and stay on track with God's will for your life by following Jesus. You will learn how to let God be God in your life.

## Lesson Truth

God saved us to be His own and to live for Him only. His desire is that we follow His Son and become disciples so our lives can look like His life as we trust and obey Him.

## Lesson Goal Truth

To know and believe with certainty that God has given you the opportunity to follow Jesus as His disciple.

## Lesson Discussion

God saves us for one purpose—so that we can be His. He loves us and desires us to give ourselves to Him completely as His unique and loved possession.



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2 Peter 1:3 ESV “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,”

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Through the Holy Spirit, God enables us to do His will. His divine power supplies everything we need to live a holy and godly life.

God saved us so that we no longer have to be servants of sin, but servants of righteousness. We are now free to live holy and Godly lives as we follow Jesus as Lord.

We must give up the right to ourselves to Him completely in order to be completely His. We must understand and begin living like we are no longer our own. We must allow our lives to be completely at His disposal.



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1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ESV “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

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## Becoming God's Own

The problem today is that many receive God's salvation, but they continue to go their own way, thinking all the time that it's okay.

We become God's by giving up the right to ourselves to Jesus and let him be Lord of our lives. It is not an easy thing to do and it may be the hardest thing you ever do. But it is the only way to follow Jesus and do God's will.

Jesus' sole desire was to please the Father by doing exactly what the Father commanded Him. Jesus surrendered His life completely into the hands of the Father in order to do His will. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must do no less.



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John 14:31 ESV "...but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here."

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As Christians, our heart's desire must be to do exactly what the Father commands, no matter what. We can only do that as we follow Jesus in complete trust and obedience.

The Holy Spirit is our guide and our teacher. As we learn to obey the Holy Spirit by submitting our lives to Him, we can do God's will exactly.

Jesus is our example of what we are to do and how we are to live. But we cannot live as He lived unless we allow His life to live through us. We can only do that when we submit to His life in us.

Jesus put aside His own desires, wants, and needs, as well as the expectations of others, in order to carry out God's commands and thereby accomplish God's will.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must do the same and put aside our own desires, wants, and needs and the expectations of others, so we can do God's will.

Jesus never put the needs of Himself or people ahead of obedience to the Father. He kept His relationship with the Father as His priority above all else. Because He maintained His relationship with the Father in this way, He was able to meet the needs of those who came to Him.

Before we were saved we were slaves to sin. Because of Jesus sacrifice on the cross, we are now to be slaves of righteousness and servants of God. We must begin to act and live as if we are not our own but His.



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Romans 6:17-18 ESV "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard

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of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

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It is amazing that any born-again Christian would not want to submit to Jesus completely. He knows the beginning from the end and knows what is best for us far better than we can ever know.

### Jesus Invites You to Follow Him

The goal of this lesson is for you to know that God wants you to follow His Son, Jesus Christ. When you are born again, receive the Holy Spirit, and begin reading the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, you will see that He wants you to follow Him as His disciple. But remember, the invitation to follow Jesus comes with an "if" not a "must".



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Luke 9:23 ESV "And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.""

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Following Jesus is a choice. We consciously choose to allow Him complete lordship over our lives, so that we live to serve Him. This means we must relinquish control of our lives completely, allowing Him to direct each and every step.

Most people do not want to give up control of their lives to anyone—including Jesus. Yet this is what is required if God is to be God in your life. We are often unaware of the many things that dominate and control us. If God is not in control, something else will be.

God desires you to be His. This means giving up control of your life in complete trust and obedience to Him by learning how to let Jesus be Lord of your life.



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John 12:25-26 ESV "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world

will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

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We cannot serve Jesus apart from following Him. Many are serving in ministry or in various causes, but unless you are following Jesus you cannot serve him.

Following Jesus Christ is a choice. It is a choice to commit to Him, not to Christian work. The work comes as a result of our commitment, devotion, loyalty, and obedience to Him. There are professed believers who do not and will not follow Jesus. There are also many who have started out to follow Him but no longer are.

### Opportunity Equals Invitation

The opportunity to follow Jesus Christ is an invitation to a commitment. The commitment is to loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ above all else. It is the only way that His life can live through us to accomplish His purpose.

To have His life in us and not submit to that Life is a sure recipe for spiritual failure. The only way to be Christian is to submit to His life in us so we can be what He created us to be – holy.



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Matthew 11:28-30 ESV “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

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Jesus calls us to come to Him and lay down our weariness and heavy earthly burdens at His feet so we can find rest. He then offers us His yoke and burden, which is easy and light in comparison to the one we lay at His feet. We take up the yoke with Him and simply follow Him.



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John 15:5-6 ESV “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

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To follow Jesus is to remain in Him. If we do not remain in Him we cannot follow Him and we will stay under the domination of our own self will.

If we don't remain in Him, we can do nothing for Him. Our Christian-like activities become merely an empty form of religion. If we choose to follow him we will find simplicity of life and freedom from the domination of self.



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Romans 15:5-6 ESV “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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To follow Jesus means we simply come to Him and stay with Him. We put off our own yoke of self interest and take up His yoke of obedience. This is a wonderful opportunity. Why would anyone not want to follow Jesus?



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John 10:25-28 ESV Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.’

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There are many reasons why many who are saved choose not to follow Jesus Christ. One of

the biggest reasons is that their loyalty to the cares of life is greater than their love and desire for Jesus. Jobs, families, work for God, hobbies, and other interests take priority. There is little time for Him.

But God always has a small following of faithful disciples who are making other disciples. A person who is saved and not following Christ is in a very precarious spiritual state which can only result in a powerless faith and a fruitless spiritual life.



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Matthew 28:19-20 ESV “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

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Jesus’ last command was to go and make disciples. We cannot obey this command unless we ourselves become disciples. Only disciples can make other disciples.

### What is a Disciple?

When Jesus was on the earth, He called men to follow Him as His disciples. These disciples gave up everything to follow Him because they saw something in Jesus that was irresistible – they knew Jesus had the words of eternal life. From that point on the number of devoted and loyal disciples multiplied and they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel.

A disciple is simply a follower of Jesus Christ who is solely devoted and loyal to Him. A disciple is a student of the Master and learns His teachings and commands.

Discipleship is all about relationship with one Person, Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not a program, not a dogma, not a philosophy, not a methodology, and not a doctrine. Discipleship is simply choosing to follow Jesus by a conscious decision of the will to allow Him to be the Lord of your life.



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John 10:4 ESV “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

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Following Jesus means you give up the right to your self to Him and your life is no longer your own, but His to do with as He pleases. You choose to allow Jesus Christ to help Himself freely to your life as He chooses. Your one and only desire and reason for living are to do exactly what He commands.

Only then will we receive the life He wants to give, a life of peace, joy, meaning, and purpose; a life of righteousness, holiness, and freedom from the cares and burdens of this life.

Jesus submitted His life completely to the Father and we are to submit our lives completely to Jesus. That is the only way we can follow Him. It is the only way we can do God’s will.

### Are All Christians Disciples?

The early disciples followed Jesus and believed and obeyed His teachings. That is what it meant to be a Christian in the early church. Today the term Christian is used rather loosely and can be construed to mean anyone who believes in God.



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Acts 11:26 ESV “...And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”

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The Bible teaches very clearly that the term Christian was originally used to refer to Jesus’ disciples. If you were a Christian, you were a follower and disciple of Jesus Christ.

If I am following Jesus on my own terms and not according to His teachings, I am not His disciple. I am a disciple of my own self-will and I am picking and choosing what I will or will not believe or obey.

If we are to be disciples of Jesus, we must follow Him on His terms, not our own. Not following

Jesus on His terms is a subconscious rejection of His lordship in our lives. The result is a powerless spiritual life and the inability to live a holy and godly life that God says we must live.



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Matthew 5:48 ESV “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

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Jesus calls us to follow Him and we can choose to follow Him or not. Many professed Christians are dominated by the cares and affairs of this life and will not follow Jesus Christ. They have lost sight of their Shepherd, have left their first love, and have wandered off on their own.

To be a Christian as the Bible teaches means you are a follower of Jesus Christ. You cannot be a Christian and not follow Jesus Christ.



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Matthew 10:37-38 ESV "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

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### One Step for Living This Truth

The foundation of the *One Step* series you have been reading is to be able to live God's truth one truth at a time, one step at a time. Next we will suggest the specific action step you can take to allow the truth taught in this lesson to be lived in your own personal life.

You only have to do this one step to master this lesson. Your focus and effort should be to make sure you consistently and persistently do the one step as directed. It is very important that you understand and believe that God wants you to

follow His Son if you claim that He is your Lord.

God chose you, saved you, and gives you the Holy Spirit so you can be His and fulfill His will for your life. His will for you is to relinquish your own will by following Jesus and submit to live your life exactly as He shows you.

As you do this one step each day, God will show you clearly that He wants you to give up the right to yourself to Jesus and follow Him as Lord. Once you understand, believe, and accept this truth, you will be ready to go on to the next lesson to learn how to hear the personal call of Jesus to you to follow Him.

### ACTION STEP

**Spend at least twenty minutes each day with God thanking Him that He has given you the opportunity to be His by following His Son.**

**Before concentrating on God, read the Scriptures in this lesson so you can know that God's desire for you is to follow Jesus.**

**Read this lesson again as often as necessary to remind you that God's will for you as a Christian is to follow Jesus.**

**As you concentrate on God, ask Him to show you clearly, beyond a shadow of a doubt that He wants you to follow His Son. Praise Him, love Him, and give thanks as you concentrate on Him.**

**Continue doing this each day until you come to the point in your life where you know in your heart beyond any doubt that you must follow Jesus as lord.**

As you spend time with God you can talk to Him as you would a friend whom you have a lot of respect and reverence for.

It is best to find a quiet place where you can focus on God and God alone. The key to mastering this step is to be persistent and not let anything rob you of this time with God. God loves you and desires to have time with you each day to show you how much He wants to be a part of your life.

It is helpful to quote the Scriptures verbally in this lesson and concentrate on them. You should also read at least one chapter a day in the gospels so you can know what Jesus taught.

When you find thoughts that are not God-focused trying to press in, thrust them out of your mind immediately.



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2 Corinthians 10:4-5 ESV “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”

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If you suddenly remember something you need to do later in the day, have pen and paper handy to write it down. Then immediately let it go and get back to concentrating on God.

If your mind seems to be overwhelmed with non-God focused thinking and nothing seems to be working, a little trick that works well for me is to constantly say “in the name of Jesus” over and over until your mind is free to concentrate on God and God only.

There is tremendous power in the name of Jesus Christ and just saying it can be very powerful in helping you get free from troublesome thinking, even if you have to do that for the entire ten minutes.

## Bumper Sticker Summary

The opportunity to follow Jesus comes with an “if”. “If you will follow me” The call to follow Him will be unmistakable and you will know you must follow Him. It is the opportunity of a life time but you can walk away from it. Grasp the opportunity with all your heart to pursue Him.



## Illustrations for Living the Truth

Dan had received Christ when he was in the Navy. He was very active in the military chapel program and enjoyed helping with the chapel services and the outreach program. He had helped several soldiers come to know Jesus Christ as Savior.

Dan sensed there was something missing in his Christian walk, but did not know what it was. Often he did not know what God’s will was for his life. He thought maybe he should go to seminary and become a missionary and this would give him what he felt he was missing in his spiritual life.

Dan began to read about the life of Jesus in the Gospels and about the disciples. He soon realized the truth that Jesus is calling individuals not just to be saved, but to belong to Him by following Him. As he continued to read the Word and spend time concentrating on God, he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Christianity was first and foremost about following Jesus. This was the turning point in his spiritual life as he began to learn what it means to step out in faith to follow Jesus.

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Mary was a new Christian and had joined a church that taught discipleship as a necessary step in being able to live the Christian life. Initially she was not sure that following Jesus Christ would work for her because of what she thought she would have to give up to follow Jesus. She thought that it was good for ministers and missionaries to follow Jesus Christ, but she wanted to keep her current job

and continue to stay very involved with her family.

When her pastor realized the reason for her hesitancy, he encouraged her to read the Gospels to get a better understanding of what following Jesus was really all about. He also told her that following Jesus is simply abandoning her life to Him in her present circumstances. She should not quit her job or change the way she relates to others. The Pastor told Mary that Jesus will initially want her to grow right where she is as He prepares her for His calling for her life. Her pastor told her that she needed to learn to be His disciple right where she is now and that God would take care of everything else.

Mary soon realized that she must follow Jesus and give up the right to herself to Him in her current situation and just trust God. Mary chose to let Jesus be Lord and follow Him. She was soon leading people at work into discipleship and found that it was making a real difference in her family relationships also.



### Other Scripture Verses

Mark 9:41 ESV “For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.”

John 8:47 ESV “whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

Romans 1:6 ESV “...including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,”

Romans 14:8 ESV “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.”

Galatians 3:28-29 ESV “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are

Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Galatians 5:24 ESV “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”