

**F O L L O W I N G
J E S U S**

7 ESSENTIALS TO
FOLLOWING JESUS

SAMUEL DEUTH

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FOLLOWING JESUS

A NEW LIFE

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:

The old has gone, the new is here!

—2 Corinthians 5:17

Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

—James 4:8 (NLT)

The most important decision that you make in this life is deciding who you will follow. Who you follow determines the quality of life on earth and the life after. There is no greater life than the one lived following Jesus! It is a life where you lay down everything, only to find you have more than you ever had before.

One of the people who Jesus put in charge of the Church when it first began was a man named Paul. He had quite the impressive resume in life, but he didn't really experience fulfillment until he encountered Jesus and decided to follow him. This is what he said:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.

—Philippians 3:7-8

People are always looking for happiness and fulfillment, but only when we turn from our way to following Jesus will we walk in everything that he has for us! This is why the Bible is so specific about declaring Jesus as our Lord. It's not enough just to believe that he's real; you must choose to follow him.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As a follower of Jesus for many years now, I know firsthand the value of having someone help you learn to walk out your faith, which

is why we created this book—to help with the essential beginning steps after choosing to follow Jesus.

The Bible is the exhaustive book on following Jesus, and this book is designed to be a quick guide to your next seven essential steps in your walk with him. Each chapter will break down one of the key things you need to know and show you how to do it. At the end of each chapter you'll see additional verses you can use if you'd like to study the topic through further.

Before we get into those steps, I want to talk about a foundational truth regarding the heart and character of God that the entire Bible and your relationship with Jesus are built on.

*“GOD LOVES YOU AND WANTS
TO BE CLOSE TO YOU.”*

As you develop your relationship with God, it's important to know he isn't tolerating you, or putting up with you, or trying to get rid of you; he has done everything to be close to you. God loves us and wants to be with us. When we sinned, he couldn't stay away; he wants a relationship with us for all eternity. *He's not satisfied with a distant association; he wants to be close to us.*

From the beginning of time, God walked with the people that he loves, as he did when he spent time with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But, because God loved them, he also gave them a choice to love him back. Even in that perfect garden, they chose to disobey God and sin. After sin created a gap between God and humanity, God's plan to bring us back to himself was set into motion, which is embodied in this iconic verse:

*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

God could have stayed away, but instead he cut through everything to be with us. Before Jesus came, God's presence was experienced only by the High Priest when he went behind the veil into what was called the Most Holy Place. This veil represented a separation between humanity and God. As you can imagine, God wasn't about that! Let the full reality and emotion of the next verse

hit you as you realize God's heart to eliminate anything that would come between us:

*And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his
spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from
top to bottom.*
—Matthew 27:50-51

AT THAT MOMENT! How amazing is that? The first possible moment God had to be close to us, he took it. He made a strong statement to everyone—*all* were now welcome to come to him. Later, one of the great leaders of the Church wrote one of my favorite verses in the Bible:

Come close to God, and God will come close to you.
—James 4:8 (NLT)

Through Jesus, we now are able to come close to God again. The sin and brokenness that held us back and away from God are now taken care of by Jesus. The Bible says that the cost of sin is death. There is a price that has to be paid, and through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus that debt is satisfied.

The Bible says that Jesus was a “ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). I love the word *ransom*; it means to aggressively take back. Sin had found us held captive by the devil and a slave to his ways, but Jesus left heaven, came to earth, and with his death on the cross, he ransomed us; he took us back from the control of the enemy to be close to himself again.

In the final book of the Bible, we see another example of God's desire to be close to us with this open invitation by Jesus:

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my
voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person,
and they with me.*
—Revelation 3:20

As you follow Jesus, never forget how much he loves you and wants to be close to you. Jesus' invitation isn't based on our perfection

or our ability to do all the right things. It is because of the *grace* of Jesus that this invitation to come close was made available.

More than anything, I pray that this book will encourage you to come close to God!

HAVE YOU DECIDED?

Before continuing, I want to give you an opportunity to answer the question, “Who is the leader of your life?” If you’ve already declared Jesus as that leader, that is awesome! Get into the book! If not, then why wait? In Romans 10:9-10 it says that if we declare that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved. If you’re ready to go all in and follow Jesus, begin with this passionate prayer:

“Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for my sins, and rising from the dead to give me life. I repent of my sin and turn to you. Today I choose to follow you with all of my heart, for the rest of my life. I believe in you and declare that you are the leader and Lord of my life! Thank you for forgiving me and walking with me from this moment forward! Amen.”

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CHAPTER CHALLENGE

STUDY IT THROUGH:

Here are several key verses that walk you through an overview of God’s Creation and the ultimate salvation of humanity.

God Created Us:

Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:13-14

God Loves Us:

Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; 1 John 3:1

Our Sin/Disobedience:

Genesis 3; Romans 3:23; 6:23

Jesus’ Sacrifice/Cross:

Luke 9:22; Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 3:18

Our Decision/Repentance:

Romans 10:9-13; Acts 16:29-31

His Grace/Forgiveness:

Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:1-2

Life in Christ; Following Jesus:

John 10:10; Romans 8:37-39; Matthew 5:16; Luke 9:23

His Kingdom; the Church:

Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Heaven; Eternity:

John 14:1-6; Hebrews 4:14; Philippians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 5:7-10

CHAPTER 1

PRAYER & WORSHIP

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*
—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The Christian life is not just about knowing and doing; it's about *being with Jesus*. Before we focus on any specific practices, habits, or spiritual routines, we must realize following Jesus begins simply by spending *time* with Jesus.

How much time? The answer cannot be reduced down to rules needing to be followed. For example, what if I tell a husband that the best way to get to know his wife is to spend time with her, and he asks, "How much time do I have to spend with her?" That response would be considered rude and too mechanical for a relationship.

Not only do we need to spend time with God to grow our relationship, but incredibly, that is what he desires as well! God wants to spend time with us.

Not only is spending time with Jesus the way we develop our relationship with him, but at our very core we are designed for relationship with our Father and Creator. Without him, we live a subpar life and will be constantly chasing other things for fulfillment.

We are designed to know, love, walk with, and worship God. While Jesus was on the earth, someone asked him, "What is the greatest commandment?" We read about this and his response in Matthew:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."
—Matthew 22:36-37

The greatest priority is to love God with all that we have. If God isn't the center of our life, our worship, and our work, nothing will make sense. Everything flows more effectively once we put Jesus as the primary focus of our lives. There's another story from the Bible that shows this primary importance of spending time with Jesus in Luke 10:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."
—Luke 10:38-42

It's important to notice that Jesus says only one thing is needed; he elevates spending time with him as our highest pursuit. This should be the priority and focus of our lives. Often, like Martha, we find ourselves distracted and pulled away, but the most important thing is to spend time with Jesus.

With that being said, how do we do this? What does it mean to "spend time with Jesus," since he is no longer physically walking the earth? We spend time with God through prayer, worship, Bible reading, and the Holy Spirit. In this chapter we will focus on prayer and worship.

PRAYER

One of the best ways to view prayer is to see it as talking with God. It's a conversation that goes both ways; you talk to God and God talks to you. Through prayer we have access to his presence and power. So many Christians settle for less than what God wants for them, because they don't take time to pray.

HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

One of the most important questions—and often the most common—is, “How do I hear God when he talks?” One of my favorite Scriptures that give us a clue how to do this is found in 1 Samuel:

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel.
—1 Samuel 3:1-4

You see in these few verses that Samuel positioned himself in a place where God could speak to him. Often we find ourselves like Eli in this story—distracted, busy, and away from God’s presence. Can God shout over the noise of our lives? Yes, but he usually asks us to quiet our lives and lean in to hear his voice.

I’ve found that the more time I spend talking and listening to God, the more I am able to discern if God is speaking to me or not. It’s similar to how we have the ability to pick out the voice of our parent or child from a distance. Because we’ve spent enough time with them, we recognize their voice over the other voices.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
—John 10:27

When you spend time with God, pray; talk to God, then take time to listen and write down what you feel like you hear him saying. God may choose to talk to you in an audible voice, but usually he speaks to us in our spirit. So, you don’t hear him with your ears, you hear him with your spirit. Sometimes he’ll want to give you specific instructions about something or he may just want to reaffirm his love for you!

Knowing what the Bible says is a huge clue to learning how to recognize when God is speaking to you. God will never say anything to you that contradicts his Word. In the beginning stages of following

Jesus, if you feel God is telling you to do something extreme, I highly recommend that you share it with a more mature Christian. They will be able to help you process it, so you don’t make a wrong move out of immaturity. But, if God is speaking to you, act on it quickly and fully!

*“PRAYER IS THE GREATEST
PRIVILEGE OF HUMANITY.”*

God also calls us to pray on behalf of his will on earth. The first purpose of prayer is to grow our relationship with God, but that isn’t all. God calls us to devote ourselves to prayer. The Bible says that the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective. God chooses to work through his Spirit and our prayers.

In Ezekiel 22, God was looking for someone to stand in the gap on behalf of a city so that it could be saved, but sadly, it says he found no one.

I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.
—Ezekiel 22:30

God is looking for you and me to stand in the gap and pray for individuals, cities, and countries. The kingdom of God advances on the prayers of his people. Don’t assume that our prayers don’t matter or that they won’t do much. Actually, it’s the opposite; our prayers are powerful and essential for the work of God to move forward. When Jesus walked the earth, he first called twelve disciples to follow him. They once asked Jesus to teach them how to pray; here is what he said:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be

your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

—Matthew 6:5-13

There are many great studies on these few verses that Jesus gives us on prayer, but let me give a few thoughts to help us quickly take away what Jesus wants us to see.

Approach Is Important: (Our Father, You Are Holy)

When you pray, come to God in awe and reverence of his greatness and the fact that he is a loving Father. It is important to give him the honor that he deserves, because how you see God will determine your ability to have faith for him to respond. If you see God as small, you'll pray small; if you see him as the Almighty and All-Sufficient One, you'll pray bigger and expect more!

Put His Purpose First: (Your Will Be Done)

Many people come to God begging and only asking for what they want, rather than partnering with God in prayer for his will to be done on earth. If you pray for the advancement of God's will, you'll also find that God takes care of your needs and wants.

Make a Request: (Give Us Our Daily Bread)

Never be shy about asking God for what you need. He loves to provide and respond to our requests. Jesus says we don't have because we don't ask.

Forgive Us: (Forgive as We Forgive)

It is so important that we realize how much we've been forgiven, so that we continue to release forgiveness to others. Confess your own sins quickly and be quick to offer forgiveness to others when they wrong you.

Protect and Lead Us: (Lead Us, Deliver Us)

God wants to lead our lives, but he doesn't force his way in. He looks for us to lean in and ask. He wants us to pursue him and walk with him.

Your Father and Savior cannot wait for the next time you stop and spend time with him. Don't limit prayer to mealtimes and church buildings. God wants to hear from you every day. Your world desperately needs you to stand in the gap and pray for his will to be done on earth!

WORSHIP

One of my favorite ways to spend time with God is through worship. If you want to experience the presence of God, begin to worship. A key part of my prayer times usually includes listening to worship music, singing, and lifting up the name of Jesus! One of the greatest warriors and worshipers in the Bible was King David. I love his heart for worship:

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

—Psalm 100:1-5

Worship aligns our heart to his. It creates a landing pad for the presence of God in our life. Like a helicopter that looks for the H to land on, worship puts a neon target on our life that invites the presence and power of God to land.

In times of worship, we'll often have a heightened sense of the presence of God, but worship is not just a response to good feelings or only something we do when we feel like it. Worship is what we do regardless of circumstances or feelings. Often, taking a few moments in worship to lift up your hands and sing will greatly impact your life and the climate of your heart.

LEAD WITH WORSHIP

Alongside prayer, worship has a powerful dual nature to it. On one hand it creates the perfect atmosphere to connect with God, and on the other, it is also used as a way to fight against the work of the enemy.

After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

—2 Chronicles 20:21-22

No matter what you're facing, lead with worship! As the men in this passage worshipped, God began to work. In your life, when you're facing a difficult situation, stop, take time to worship God, and watch him begin to move in your situation. Worship is potent; it releases the power of God and it calms and quiets your heart so that you can hear God speak to you.

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

STUDY IT THROUGH:

What does the Bible say about prayer and thankfulness? 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

What does God ask us to pray for? Psalm 2:8

How should we pray? Luke 18:1-8

What does Jesus say about fasting? Matthew 6:16-18

Who are we to worship? Luke 4:8

What does Psalm 96:1-10 say that the Lord is worthy of?

WALK IT OUT:

- Set time aside daily to pray.
- Pray for 15 minutes at a time and slowly increase the length.
- Create a worship playlist and worship God outside of a church service.
- Pray for others and for God's grace on your city.