



FOLLOWING JESUS

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

- *Matthew 9:9*

Who is Jesus? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? If one says 'yes' to following, does anything change? Does a 'yes' impact individual lives? Communities? The world? Over the next six Sundays leading up to Easter, we are going to explore what the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – might teach us in response to these questions. With Jesus as our guide, we'll examine our own lives and the invitation each of us receives to be a follower.

This Lenten sermon series is designed for both Circle gatherings and for individual use as a daily Lenten devotional. As a Circle, when you gather you can walk through the daily readings or pick and choose readings and

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questions for your group conversations. As an individual, you'll find a Scripture, a devotional reflection, and a question for each day for your Lenten journey.

Following Jesus

FEB 21 RADICAL

MATTHEW 9:9

(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 18: Radical Discipleship)

In the first section of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches what it means to follow Him and give one's life to God. In what we know today as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers a way of living that challenges much of what we know and experience in the world, a *RADICAL* way. A couple of chapters later, Jesus invites Matthew, a tax collector, to follow him. Matthew sells all he owns and follows. Is this what it takes? Are we ready to follow the radical way of Jesus?

Followers of Jesus follow the radical way of Jesus.

DAILY QUESTIONS

FEB 22-27 RADICAL

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| Monday | Read Matthew 4:12-22. What does it mean to you to follow Jesus? |
| Tuesday | Read Matthew 5:1-20. How do the teachings of Jesus challenge the ways of the world and our worldviews? |
| Wednesday | Read Matthew 5:21-47. How do the teachings of Jesus deepen your understanding of faithful living? |
| Thursday | Read Matthew 5:48-7:6. What invitation or challenge do you hear or find in the teachings of Jesus? |
| Friday | Read Matthew 7:7-29. In what aspects of life do you find yourself on the narrow path of faithful living? In what aspects do you find yourself on the wide path of worldly living? |
| Saturday | Read Matthew 10:37-42. What is the difference between calling oneself a Christian and truly giving one's whole life to Jesus? |

FaithFit Lenten Challenge!

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Spend 15 minutes each day this week in prayer and Bible study. Read the daily Scripture and devotion, answer the question for the day, and pray how you can answer the invitation of Jesus to follow and grow as a follower of Jesus

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RADICAL

SERMON ON FEB 21, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- Who is someone you would follow anywhere, no matter what?
- What is a disciple?

MONDAY

Read Matthew 4:12-22.

The very first word that Jesus preaches, according the Gospel of Matthew, is *repent*. Jesus says to turn *away* from the ways of world and *toward* the way of God, because “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17 NIV). Next Jesus begins to call his followers, who are invited to drop everything they own and leave all they know to go where he leads them. And they do it – a *radical* response. So what does following Jesus mean today? Is the invitation we’ve experienced to follow Jesus one that invites us to give up everything to follow Him, or to fit Jesus around our current lives? Do we see the decision to follow Jesus as comfortable or radical?

- **What does it mean to you to *follow Jesus*?**

TUESDAY

Read Matthew 5:1-20.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...” “Blessed are those who mourn...” One cannot read the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel without noticing that Jesus is challenging the way the world seems to work. Several times later in Matthew Jesus will say, “The first will be last and the last will be first.” E. Stanley Jones, an American Methodist missionary in India in the early to mid 1900’s, wrote in his book *Christ on*

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the Mount (p.19), "The Sermon on the Mount seems dangerous. It challenges the whole underlying conception on which modern society is built. It would replace it by a new conception, animate it with a new motive, and turn it toward a new goal." Jones goes on to point out that the goal of the Christian life is to not to earn our way into heaven, but to emulate Jesus. And to emulate Jesus means to challenge every part of our lives that don't point toward Him.

- **How do the teachings of Jesus challenge the ways of the world and our worldviews?**

WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 5:21-47

"You have heard that it was said...but I tell you." This pattern of Jesus' teaching is repeated over and over as he quotes the law of Moses and then offers teaching that furthers the hearer's understanding. The disciples of Jesus knew the law, so he begins by telling them that he hasn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. And in order for them to understand more fully what this means, he begins to give examples. Faithful living is more than following the letter of the law, the exact literal meaning of words on a page. Faithful living is letting every action and every word be grounded in the love of God and neighbor by the teaching of God's word and the example of Jesus. The law says not to murder. Jesus says this teaching drives one to look deeper at the orientation of your heart. Even if you don't kill, if you carry anger and contempt deep in your soul, it will damage you and the world around you, leading to death.

- **How do the teachings of Jesus deepen your understanding of faithful living?**

THURSDAY

Following Jesus

Read Matthew 5:48-7:6.

Some scholars teach that the central teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and goal of the Christian life is in Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Does this mean we are perfect? No. Does it mean we have to be perfect to earn God's love? Absolutely not. It does mean that the goal of our lives is to be as much like God as humanly possible, and this "way" is modeled for us in the life and teaching of Jesus. To be like Jesus is perfection, not in the sense of never making a mistake, but in the way of our lives always pointing toward the love and grace of God. With this goal as the central teaching, the Sermon on the Mount shows us what such a life looks like, and what it doesn't. Matthew 6 and the beginning of Matthew 7 are full of these contrasts, and the teaching confronts those who claim to be God's people but are selfish and lead others astray. Rachel Held Evans, a Christian writer, expressed in her book *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, "I have come to regard with some suspicion those who claim that the Bible never troubles them. I can only assume this means they haven't actually read it." The Sermon on the Mount is meant to challenge as it calls followers of Jesus to be more like Him.

- **What invitation or challenge do you hear or find in the teachings of Jesus?**

FRIDAY

Read Matthew 7:7-29.

The Gospel of Matthew, scholars believe, was written for a Jewish audience. Matthew wanted to display to the hearers and readers of his account the salvation history of God's people that began with Abraham is now fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah. The Jewish audience would likely notice that the Gospel of Matthew is divided into five sections, to mimic the five books of the Torah. Each section begins with Jesus in action – leading, healing,

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serving. Then, each section continues with Jesus teaching, expounding upon or interpreting his action. In this first section, Matthew 1-7, the action of Jesus is calling his followers, and then his teaching expounds upon what it looks like to be a follower. As Jesus prepares to conclude the sermon (watch for “when he had finished saying these things” to mark the end of each section in Matthew), he says. “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12 NIV). Then Jesus gives a series of examples that distinguish between the narrow way of this fruitful, faithful living and the wide, destructive way of the false prophet, the follower who professes belief but does nothing, the foolish builder whose foundation of life easily washes away.

- **In what aspects of life do you find yourself on the narrow path of faithful living? In what aspects do you find yourself on the wide path of worldly living?**

SATURDAY

Read Matthew 10:37-42.

Dallas Willard, a theologian and philosopher, wrote a book about discipleship in 1998 called *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. In the book he challenged followers of Jesus today with this thought: “The idea of having faith in Jesus has come to be totally isolated from being his apprentice and learning how to do what he said.” The invitation Jesus gives to his followers isn’t simply to believe in him, or simply to follow a set of rules. The invitation we find in Jesus is to let our lives emulate his life, to embody the love and grace of God as Jesus did.

- **What is the difference between calling oneself a Christian and truly giving one’s whole life to Jesus?**