

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Following Jesus

KEY PASSAGE: Matthew 4:18-20 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Matthew 17:5; 28:19 | Mark 12:30 | Luke 6:12
John 3:3, 16; 8:12; 12:26 | Romans 6:23 | Philippians 1:29

► SUMMARY

Are you a follower of Jesus? When that question is asked, people generally give a wide variety of answers.

They may think it's synonymous with believing in God, attending church, participating in communion, giving to good causes, praying when in need, living a good life, or being religious. But none of these actually answer the question, nor do they prove that someone is following Jesus. Engaging in certain religious activities is not equivalent to following Jesus. Although these activities are generally practiced by Christians, not everyone who does them is a Christian. To determine if someone is truly following Jesus, we must use biblical guidelines.

► SERMON POINTS

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He called Simon Peter and Andrew to leave their occupation as fishermen and follow Him (Matt. 4:18-19). Their response demonstrates what following Jesus involves: "Immediately they left their nets and followed Him" (v. 20). This was a whole life commitment, not merely religious activity.

What characterizes a follower of Jesus?

In order to evaluate whether we too are following Jesus, we must understand what experiences are true of those who are genuine followers.

■ **Born Again.** "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This

is the first qualification to become a follower of Jesus. We must confess and repent of our sins, by faith receive God's forgiveness, surrender our lives to Christ as our Savior and Lord, and start walking in His ways. Being a Christian is not just becoming better or improving ourselves; it's an entirely new life born of the Spirit.

- **Prayer.** "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). If we follow Jesus, we will be a person of prayer just as He was. In fact, it will be a major part of our lives not just an occasional plea for help when we're in need. For prayer to become a priority, we must make it a daily habit to have a quiet time alone with God. Starting and finishing each day in prayer is a good way to make sure we are walking in Christ's footsteps.
- **Listening.** "While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" (Matt. 17:5). Too often many of us begin the morning with thoughts of everything we need to accomplish that day. Although fulfilling our responsibilities is important, it's more essential to spend time talking to the Father, asking Him to guide, protect, and enable us to be obedient to Him and sensitive to the needs of those around us who need the Savior. As the sovereign Lord and Master not only of the universe but of our individual lives, God requires our submission and obedience to His will. That's why we must take time to listen to Him as we read His Word and pray.
- **Belief.** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Just as

we trusted Christ for salvation, so we must continue to live by faith as we follow Him. If we don't believe Him, we'll live self-centered lives and won't do what He says or walk in His ways. But as genuine followers of Christ, we'll trust Him with our difficulties, pain, temptations, and needs, relying on Him to enable us to do whatever He says.

- **Obedience.** "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). Following requires obedience, and when this is the desire of our hearts, we recognize how foolish it is to go our own way. Sin always leads to loss and the death of something whether it's opportunities or blessings (Rom. 6:23). If we stubbornly refuse to obey God, He will send enough heartache and trouble into our lives to correct us. It is always good to obey Him because He is the source of every good thing.
- **Love.** "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and will all your strength" (Mark 12:30). We can't follow Christ with a divided heart—half in the world and half with God. The love we are to have for Christ involves our entire being. Therefore, we can't allow impure thoughts, images, and words into our minds and claim to love Him at the same time. Wholehearted love for Christ affects what we think and watch, what we do, and where we go.
- **Sharing.** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). This is Jesus' command, and if we are going to follow Him, we will share the truth of God's Word with others, regardless of whether they like us or not. In a world of hatred, bitterness, animosity, and death, Christ's followers are risking their lives to bring the gospel to people throughout the world. Each of us can surely say something to spark the interest of someone we know who is not following Jesus.
- **Service.** "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26). Jesus came as a servant, and as His followers, that's

what we should do as well. All of us have the capacity to serve the Lord in some fashion by serving others. Service comes in many different forms: helping, caring, encouraging, comforting, giving, teaching, or sharing God's Word.

- **Suffering.** "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). If we are following Jesus, we can expect to experience some form of suffering. We may be rejected, suffer financial loss, or even lose relationships because we make people feel uncomfortable and don't fit in with those who love the world. But this should not stop us from following Jesus and sharing the gospel.

Although we may be tempted to pick and choose which of these qualities we want to pursue, all these practices are essential elements of our walk with Jesus and should become an important part of our lives as we follow Him.

► RESPONSE

- Can you truthfully say that you are following Jesus? Why or why not?
- Which of these characteristics of a Christ follower are the most difficult for you to accept and practice? Would you be willing to ask God to work them into your life so you can follow Jesus more fully?

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