

# Come Follow Me



LARRY DEASON

One Step Closer to Jesus Series

## About the Author

Larry Deason has been proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ for 40 years. He has served the Body of Christ as deacon, elder, preacher, missionary, counselor, teacher and writer.

Larry's seminars have been presented throughout the Northeastern United States, Texas, California and Florida. He has also presented seminars in Australia, New Zealand, Tonga and the Fiji Islands.

While doing mission work in New Zealand Larry co-founded and taught for four years at the *Tauranga Two-Year Bible School*. He also co-founded and directed the *Northeast School of Biblical Studies* where he taught for 12 years. He also consulted in the establishing of the *South Pacific Bible College* in New Zealand. Larry has been a guest lecturer each year for the past 23 years at the South Pacific Bible College.

Larry Deason has written more than 20 booklets, books and in-depth study guides. The books have been distributed in all the states in the USA and in more than 70 nations worldwide including China, Eastern Europe, and Russia.

Larry and his wife Helen have been married for 50 years. They have two daughters, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Larry Deason continues to do mission work, present his seminars and distribute his books worldwide.

To  
Jesus Christ  
My Personal  
Lord and Savior,  
Who is the  
Focus of my life.

My orientation in His Amazing Grace and  
His Love my motivation in loving all others.

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by

Larry Deason

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*Gospel of John*

***The Righteousness of God:***

*Romans*

***Set Free? Stay Free!***

*(The Fallacy and Failure of Legalism)*

**Come Follow Me**

*“Come follow me,” Jesus said,  
“and I will make you fishers of men.”*

*Mark 1:17*

*Then he said to them all:  
“If anyone would come after me,  
he must deny himself  
and take up his cross daily  
and follow me.”*

*Luke 9:23*

*Now if we are [God’s] children,  
then we are heirs—heirs of God  
and co-heirs with Christ,  
if indeed we share in his sufferings  
in order that we may also share in his glory.*

*Romans 8:17*

*Who are the truly blessed?*

**Blessed  
are**

**the poor in spirit,**

**those that mourn,**

**the meek,**

**those that hunger and thirst after  
righteousness,**

**the merciful,**

**the pure in heart,**

**the peacemakers,**

**those who are persecuted  
for righteousness' sake.**

*These are the truly blessed!*



## Come Follow Me

“Come follow Me,” says the Lord Jesus to all who would respond to His invitation. Following Jesus is the decisive call of discipleship. We cannot just call ourselves disciples of Christ because we have decided to become “born again Christians,” as so many popularly believe. Disciples are made by following the teachings of Jesus. When we are babes in Christ we all stand on common ground, at the foot of the cross. We are then to make disciples of ourselves in Jesus Christ through the grace of our Lord.

Disciple means “follower, one in training; trained on.” To be a disciple, one must be developing, growing, always following and learning. Being a “disciple,” as the term is used in Scripture, always involve a personal attachment of the learner to the teacher. It is a heart commitment. Jesus Christ is the teacher; He is the Master. We are His followers. But Jesus does not *compel* us to follow Him; He *invites* us to follow Him. God designed us to have the ability to choose. He invites us to follow Him and leaves it for us to choose.

The greatest danger in following Jesus Christ is in actually *not* following Him. In other words, we don't follow Him in the way He has decided or determined that we follow Him. That has been the

primary difference over the years between truly following Jesus *His* way and following Jesus *my own way*.

Until you and I seriously consider Jesus' call to discipleship, the world at large is going to go its way virtually uninterested in Jesus Christ, the man of Galilee, demonstrated and declared to be Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. How tremendous to think that this Christ, proven to be the Son of God, has visited us and has established a personal relationship with us! If we do not take this seriously, we will settle for something much less than that to which Jesus calls us. He calls us to genuineness; He calls us to realness; He calls us to life that's life indeed, without pretense or hypocrisy.

Having worked and studied with a small congregation, I reflected back over their growth in these matters. Having been immersed into Jesus, they gave their allegiance to Him as they surrendered to the truth of the gospel. I have joyfully seen a real hungering desire to develop a relationship of *realness* with Jesus Christ. When I teach in the South Pacific, I see a similar group gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ—growing in sincerity. These Christians really want to know God; I have seldom seen out-and-out hypocrisy or pretense. Granted, some in the body of Christ wear masks;

they are pretending. But generally, when engaging in group discussions and later talking one-to-one, I know the genuineness of heart is there.

Unfortunately, I have also seen, even with the sincere, a *casualness*. It manifests itself in a superficiality that prohibits and hinders us from entering into a profound relationship with God Almighty in following Jesus. The underlying cause of this problem in the body is that we are not taking seriously enough the call to follow Jesus. And even though we are sincere, we can easily be distracted by the cares of this world and the things of this life. This is not to say that the things of this world are not to be a part of our lives. There are many good things in God's beautiful creation that He has given for His people to enjoy. But we must have a balanced view of life circumstances and materials gains. We must follow Jesus first and live by His standards.

Once I was speaking to a group of young people about having fun after coming into Christ (as compared to having fun before). In order to continue having fun in Christ, I am ashamed to say, I played the part of a hypocrite. This was an attempt to have *my way* in life, to do what *I* (Larry) wanted to do. Living this way, I thought I would have happiness and fun.

I have lived long enough now to say, "With all the genuineness of my heart, as I experienced my life

living with Jesus Christ His way, living *His will* from day to day, and as I have developed and grown in His wonderful grace, I have never had so much fun in my life.” It is a real, outgoing fun with joy and peace. I don’t have the constant frustrations; I don’t have the continuous guilt of wrongdoing. If we refuse to put the cares of life before Jesus, the outside world will see Jesus in us. “Come follow Me,” He says. “Come follow *Me*. Come with an open mind and be willing to learn of Me.”

***Following Jesus:  
Too Difficult or Too Distracted?***

It takes true dedication to follow Jesus:

*When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”*

*Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”<sup>2</sup>*

*Still another man said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."*

*Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup>*

Jesus calls us to a decisive discipline of discipleship. He calls us to a realness of life beginning with a humble heart. He calls each of us to follow God's will, admitting that "I" cannot lead my life properly. We must first have the courage to admit our weaknesses, because the greatest obstacle is a refusal to glorify God "*as God.*" Every human being must confront this primary question: Who is Number One? We dare to assume that it could be ourselves.

In our development of a selfish egotism, we find ourselves attempting to occupy that place which belongs only to God. The world is not ours to control; it belongs only to the will of God. We must understand and come to grips with what Jesus meant when He asked, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"<sup>4</sup> And yet, we've even become willing to risk losing our lives for the sake of gaining, not the whole world, but just a tiny, tiny portion of it.

But the opposite of this way of life will set us free. For indeed, He says, "...the truth will set you free."<sup>5</sup> Here's the greatness of the teaching of Jesus Christ:

*"Whoever loses his life for me will find it."*<sup>6</sup>

*"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*<sup>7</sup>

This takes a subservient attitude. But we blindly pursue our wills and do not come to know the tremendous position for which God designed us. We hinder our own development as human beings with the potential nobility and dignity of those created in the image of God Almighty. We fail because in our selfish pursuits, we are deaf to the profound and powerful invitation of Jesus: *"Come follow Me. I'll give you life that is life indeed; I'll give you joy. I'll give you a way of life that is more abundant than anything you could imagine."*

We need to imprint indelibly in our minds that eternal life with Jesus Christ begins the moment we establish a true relationship with Him. This happens when we come to Him in obedience to "the truth of the gospel." Eternal life is here and now, right here in this very life in the world. Although the Christian life as a disciple of Jesus is not as grand as our anticipation of going to heaven

when we die, it can still be a rich and rewarding life—full of joy, rewards, and profound happiness when following Jesus.

About 15 years ago I began to seriously reflect upon the teachings of Christ in a way I had never done before. Prior to this time I studied as a preacher/teacher. Then I said to myself, “Larry, it’s time you studied as a student, a learner; not studying anymore merely to prepare a lesson, but studying to prepare yourself for a correct relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”

I was particularly interested in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>8</sup> As I began to read this spectacular teaching of Jesus—this business of following Him, denying self, crucifying self, losing self, and all this being contingent upon humility—questions came to my mind. The main one was, “Is this really the way?” One of the strongest periods of doubt in my life occurred at this time. As I was studying the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, I was also studying the Gospel of John. But even with the strongest of doubts, I stayed with Him, and as Habakkuk the prophet, I turned my questions and my doubts over to God’s Word. Therein I found the answer: *Come follow Me; I am the Lord.*

This business of discipleship may seem radical because of the intensity of Christ’s demands. It challenges us to deny self, to lose self, to humble ourselves, and to pour out our selfishness in order to

become the beautiful people God desires us to be. Let's make an important note here: *Jesus Christ is calling us to deny self and to follow Him, but He is not asking us to deny our personhood.* We will remain the persons that we are, but we will be beautifully enveloped in the image of Jesus Christ; we will be learning to put on the new man.

I said to myself, "This is heavy stuff. Is this too extreme? Is this too difficult? Is this impossible?" And many people think it is. But the answer to all these questions is, *no*. This concept of dying to self is feasible, and the truth of all this will set us free, free to live victoriously in the newness of Christ. We go around in chains, not realizing the freedom to which Jesus has called us. Isn't it because we have not yet taken seriously the call of discipleship: to die that we might live? Just follow the pattern of Jesus' life. Like Him, we must place ourselves last, that we might be first; we must be humbled, that we might be exalted; we must lose our lives, that we might find them.

But we must remember: this way of following Christ is a lifetime commitment, an every day devotion. This way of living that the Sermon on the Mount teaches is something we should never leave—sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing Him, sensitively, sincerely, and with depth of heart, allowing His teaching to penetrate far beneath the surface of the skin.



Let's not go *our way* any longer, but let's honestly, genuinely, and openly experience the depth and profundity of following Jesus Christ. No, it's not too complicated. We think it is too hard because we don't take seriously the teachings of Christ, and we go *our own way*. Oh yes, we may still "go to church," but it results in spiritual apathy; it results in a powerless life; it results in the ho-humness of religion, and even in self-righteousness. All of these ways of living are in contrast to what we can have: the power of the life of righteousness, living and growing and developing in Jesus Christ as Lord!

### ***Reaction: Negative or Positive?***

First, consider the negative reaction. After being informed about what this invitation means, one may decide that following Jesus is too hard, too complicated, or too extreme. Although these responses seem very definite, they can also cause us to hide behind a certain subtlety. We ignore that it is actually simple to follow Jesus (if we have a heartfelt desire); instead, we remain in a state of withdrawal.

It is easy to follow Jesus, but it is also both painful and powerful; perhaps this is what the negative response is trying to avoid. Following Him requires an examination of self and of the way we live or do not live in relationship to God.

Often this is where the pain comes in. Finding it difficult to abandon our selfishness, we are ready to give up, content to be indifferent, immature, and superficial. Although we say to ourselves, “I go to church every time the door opens, and I’m active in the church,” this is not nearly enough.

We can remain uncommitted to a personal life in Christ and stagnate in our immaturity in Christ-like attitudes. We can still live undisciplined lives. We can live what appears to be a dedicated life “in church,” but behind closed doors be very un-Christ-like in our thoughts, words, and actions. Living for Christ is an every day, every minute, every second proposition. This way of following Jesus makes a difference to the world.

On the positive side, we can make a commitment to follow Jesus as our *heart’s desire*. We can make it our moment to moment *aim* and *determination*. We can make it our *pledge*. This attitude and response causes one to submit to the lordship of Jesus, which causes one to develop a spiritual commitment, resulting in maturity in Christ. It is a step-by-step process, following the will of God.

Can you imagine what would happen if the whole body of Christ made this positive response—if we took more seriously this business of self-renunciation and crucifixion of the old selfish ego, with all

its hideous, disgusting expressions of the life of one who puts self ahead of God and others? The world would see Jesus in us and the church would grow!

The greatest method of soul winning is a life lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ, *speaking* and *living* truth in love to all men. The world can see through “church going”; the world is not feeble-witted. But they can see the real you, and they will come to see the will of God and a life surrendered to Jesus Christ. We sing the songs: “Oh to be Like Thee,” “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus,” and “All to Jesus I Surrender.” More than ever, let’s mean those words from the *heart*.

What a joyful thing to see the power of God through His Word in the *lives* of people! If we respond in this way we will continue to grow and develop in the attitudes and ways of Jesus Christ, our Lord—and also influence others.

***Fundamental Concepts to Consider:***  
***“Count Me In” or “Just Kidding”***

Before considering these concepts I would emphasize that it takes “genuine” discipleship to receive them. I sometimes dislike using the word *genuine*, because it has become so commonplace; it gets worn and frazzled. Nevertheless, I like the word

because Jesus used its meaning throughout Scripture. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, He said, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>9</sup>

He is not telling us that we must have more of the same kind of righteousness the Pharisees had. They were pretenders; they were religious, but not righteousness. They thought themselves to be above all others. But Jesus makes a powerful statement to them:

*“I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”*<sup>10</sup>

Because of the arrogance, religious snobbery, and phoniness of these people, they would not enter the kingdom.

In contrast, Jesus began by pointing His disciples to the way to greatness, that they might be filled with the Spirit and the righteousness of God.

First of all, blessed are the poor in spirit. As the Lord said through Isaiah the prophet, “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit...”<sup>11</sup>

Selfish arrogance and pride will forever be the primary barrier to submission to God. The desire to be independent in a good sense is no problem, but an independence exclusive of the will of God is a serious problem. Did He not take a servant-stand against the worldly attitude of independence—“I can do it on my own; I’ll do it my own way”? Constantly throughout His life, no matter how difficult the situation may have been, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, always said, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Jesus Christ is the epitome of complete dependency upon God Almighty in every aspect of His life. When He lay down, when He awoke, when He went out, when He came in: it was a constant dependency upon the Father, from the difficult situations right down to the basics. And therein lies the secret of His success and ours. Talk about faith; talk about dependency; talk about following God’s will—in all of these, Jesus is our perfect example. “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” This is the key to a healthy dependency upon God.

Jesus was a revolutionary person. It is futile, it is stupid, it is idiotic to attempt to do the will of God without a revolutionary experience, starting with being born again of water and the Spirit. And this experience is not merely a mental exercise; it comes from the heart.

*“But thanks to be God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.”<sup>12</sup>*

“Wholeheartedly obeyed”—obedient from the heart; therein lies the revolutionary aspect of a new life in continuing to walk day by day in the light of His guidance. This is the revolutionary process God demands of us:

*Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”<sup>13</sup>*

Crosses are for crucifixions; crosses are for dying to the old selfish man, that the new man might live and follow Christ.

### ***The First Fundamental Concept in Following Christ***

Now that we have prepared ourselves for the first fundamental concept, let us explore it. It is: There *must* be a genuine, all-out, unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.<sup>14</sup> We are to sanctify in our hearts Christ as Lord, as the Scriptures say. What exactly does that mean? It means: He is the King, I am the servant; He is the Lord, I am the slave. Jesus Christ is calling us, by the use of the

word “slave” or “servant,” to have a master/slave relationship with Himself.

God calls us to this: a total submission of one’s life and being in all that he is and will be; in all that he has or ever will have. He confirms this out of the mouth of Jesus, His apostles, and all His genuine disciples. The Spirit of God speaks this one dynamic truth through everyone who has ever been used to call people to God.

If this is so, let us forever lay to rest the idea that God is just calling us to give Him our weekends, our spare evenings, or our retirement years. No, He is looking for people (boys, girls, men, and women) to give their *lives* to Him and to enter into the joy of the life of the kingdom of God *right now*.

Jesus is calling a people who will deny themselves and give Him an undying allegiance.

*And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*<sup>15</sup>

It is these words that we should joyfully follow, knowing that we too will die and be raised again from the dead.

Jesus is also calling us to an unconditional surrender. Could anything less be a fitting response to Jesus' sacrifice for us? *Unconditional surrender*. There are no conditions that *we* lay down. The conditions are laid down by *Him*, and they are for our well-being. If we would only see that they are for our joy and happiness! We follow the beatitudes. They start with the word "blessed." This is a blessedness that does not come from situations, conditions or external events. It comes from within. If you desire real peace, real joy, the formula is to simply follow Jesus unconditionally. True discipleship is unconditional, total surrender to Jesus Christ.

### ***The Second Fundamental Concept in Following Jesus***

There *must* be a definite coming to grips with the requirements of the Lord. Jesus Christ the Lord makes some very stringent demands of those who would follow Him. That is why He warned us to count the cost before following Him. On one occasion, a rich young man went away sorrowful when Jesus laid down the terms of discipleship: total surrender. The man went away in this pitiful condition because he had many possessions; actually, his possessions had him!<sup>16</sup> Jesus saw some flaws in that young man: covetousness, selfishness, and greed. And Jesus said, "Total surrender is what I demand." Then the man turned away from Jesus



in a sorrowful state, but Jesus did not run after the man or say to John, “Quickly, go get him; I love that man.” (Mark did say, “Jesus looked at him and loved him.”)

There is something very sad about this rich young ruler. He came *running* to Jesus and asked the greatest question a person could ask: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Surrender!” Jesus said, and this he rejected as too great a demand. He loved the cares of this world more than anything or anyone. So he started to leave. “Go catch him, James, John!” No, Jesus did not respond in this way. He did not call back the would-be follower and give him a 50 percent discount on discipleship. There was no markdown. Jesus wants *all* of us, but the man was unwilling; he chose to walk away sorrowfully. Jesus Christ calls us to discipleship unconditionally. Yes, there are stringent demands that must be considered in following Jesus.

I don’t know why we stumble over this. When a citizen will lay down his life for his country, we think this is a noble thing. We honor a man who has such great courage, that he will leave everything behind for a cause or a country that he believes in. Yet when it comes to laying down our lives for the sake of Jesus’ kingdom we stumble, we falter.

Why do we find it difficult and even believe it impossible to fulfill the apostle's command to lay down our lives for one another? Is it because we have not first seriously considered laying our lives down for Jesus?

If we lay down our lives for *Him*, we will lay down our lives for *His*. However, it is difficult for most of us to grasp that following Jesus involves denial of self, crucifixion of self, and renunciation of self. We must have these qualities to be able to lay down our lives for Jesus and others.

In the past few years many books have been written on self-esteem, because people are finally recognizing it as a serious problem. We must clearly understand that the biblical teaching of Jesus Christ in no way degrades human dignity. Recognizing Jesus for who He is elevates human beings to their full potential.

We must see that human dignity can only find its potential of greatness and exaltation in Christ Jesus. Torn from that spot, away from the heart of God, human dignity degenerates into the obnoxious, arrogant, and repugnant spirit of a pride-filled egotist. But with Jesus at the center of our lives, as Paul says:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*<sup>17</sup>

We must give up the old self (whatever it may be) for the majestic, beautiful new self that we can be in Jesus. If this doesn't help your problem of self-esteem, I don't know what *permanently* will.

This is what Jesus calls us to: a life that is life indeed. This is life that can be lived in a world that has been ruined and wrecked by sin, and we can be the expression of beauty as we travel through this selfish world. We can be a blessing to all others who are created in the image of God, and that means everybody. That's what we all have in common as human beings—both Christians and non-Christians—that we are created in the image of God.

But to accept and express Jesus in our lives in discipleship we must further deal with the ideas of denial of self, crucifixion of self, and self-renunciation. These are the requirements of the Lord in following Him.

*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."<sup>18</sup>*

Supreme, unrivaled love for Jesus must be given. This passage has been sorely distorted over the years. Jesus said, “*Unless* you do this, you cannot be My disciple.” “Now Lord, let’s see— ‘cannot’ —could ‘cannot’ mean ‘might not’?” No, we have no permission to water down that expression. Jesus said, “*Unless* (you do so and so) you cannot be My disciple.” This expression is repeatedly found throughout the ministry of Jesus. You “cannot” be *unless* “this” is realized.

What can we make of this passage? What did Jesus mean? The Greek word for “hate” means “to love less.” But that does not do justice to the meaning of what Jesus is saying here. To love less could leave the door open to this idea: I’ll love Jesus, but in some inferior way, I’m going to love my parents. Nowhere does biblical love—the love of God— express itself in an inferior way. For whoever is to be loved is to be loved to the maximum with the love of God.

Now, the love of God is supreme in its expression for family. It lends itself supremely to family. But Jesus Christ is greater than family, and we must offer Him supreme, absolute, and *unrivaled* love. But when we understand biblical love for God, we learn to love our parents even more than we ever did, even if they are not in Christ!

That has been a flaw in some of our thinking. Instead of building up our relationships with our family

we find ourselves contributing to the forging of a sword that Jesus said could come into family situations. The Christian is not going to build a wall, but instead, he is going to pour love into every relationship he has and concentrate on developing relationships. This is loving the way that God loves.

We must concentrate on and explain this *unrivaled* love that is peculiarly and specially for Jesus, our Lord. Let us use the example of the love of God that we have for family to further explain this passage.

I have a love for my wife that is exclusively hers. I don't love my family any less, but in a different way. I love my children in a special way, but that relationship cannot change the unique love that I reserve for my wife. These two loves are different.

In the same way no other love should rival the special love I have for Jesus, even though I don't love others any less. I have much love for my sisters in the Lord, as sisters; but they cannot be loved in the same way that I love my wife. And the love I have for my wife, as special and strong as it is, should not rival the love I have for Jesus. This is what Luke meant here, that the love we have for Jesus is to be special and unrivaled; nothing should deter us from this.

The latter part of the passage cited involves carrying one's cross. This means dying to self; it means the *crucifixion of self*. As we stated before: crosses are for dying. We make the initial decision to sign the death warrant with Jesus Christ. This is one of the things that following Jesus requires:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

*If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*<sup>19</sup>

We need to understand that we are baptized into the *death* of Jesus. What did Jesus do in death? He died. What are we to do when we are baptized? We need to see that we die, too. That is, we die to sin; our sins have been forgiven, and we have changed our hearts to follow *the ways of Jesus*, not our own.

We not only die, but we arise to walk in newness of life. The new life has a new mind. Paul reminds us in Romans 12 that we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This entails steps of growth—a developing process which comes only by following the teachings of Jesus. With time and maturing you begin to see the new man emerge in thoughts, words, and actions; you also experience the disappearance of the old man, because you are putting him off daily. We *renounce self*; we relinquish the old temptations and habits.

Let me share with you how I deal with these temptations, these instructions upon my life with Christ. I have no apologies for the indignation that I have for unrighteous temptations that come my way. Although temptation itself is not a sin, we can easily let the “old man” feed upon it, and that leads to sin. So, I, without mercy, take the temptation that arises out of the selfishness and rebellion of the old man, and “nail it to the cross.” Temptation begins in the mind; now, whenever I am tempted, I won’t even permit an evil thought to come and reside for a moment. I put on the new man and renounce the old.

***Seven Specifics to Consider:  
Is it Worth it?***

1. *A supreme and unrivaled love for Jesus*<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *A denial of self*<sup>21</sup>

*Self-denial* is not to be confused with *denial of self*. *Self-denial* may mean denying oneself certain pleasures or things. This is not at all *denial of self*; it can be a very subtle deception that we are giving up the old self to develop the new self in Jesus Christ.

*Denial of self* is the absolute and complete submission to the lordship of Jesus. Self abdicates the throne. Christ reigns. I am no longer going to be lord of my life, doing things my way, having things the way *I* want them to be. No, I will instead follow the ways of Jesus, in *every* area of my life.

## 3. *A definite, deliberate choosing of the cross*

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*<sup>22</sup>

One's cross is not some physical, emotional, or mental anguish or sickness that people see as a burden they carry for Christ. This is a popular misbelief.

*The way of the cross is His way*, which involves a dying to self. But it also involves identifying with what Jesus experienced here on earth; shame, reproach, and suffering for His sake and the gospel's.



His way is often the difficult way. In Jesus Christ, you may be humiliated; you may be slandered; you may be reproached; you may have to bear all these things.

Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”<sup>23</sup> In one place He said, “for the gospel’s sake”; in another, “for the kingdom’s sake.” Deliberately choosing the cross means choosing all of this as we follow Him. Following Jesus is also a way filled with the new experience of joy and peace, and it results in eternal life with Him!

#### 4. *A lifetime of daily following Christ*

*To follow Christ is to become what He is and to do what He does.* To do this we must learn Jesus’ ways. The best way to do this is to read and study His word, although we do learn of Jesus through others—by seeing Jesus’ ways in them. But in studying the Bible we sometimes need help, and that’s why attending Bible classes or setting up personal studies is so important. We need to read Scriptures daily, and not be too proud to ask for help in understanding when we need it.

I would also challenge those of us in the body of Christ to seriously consider the biblical responsibility of family heads. This responsibility holds

true even for the single parent or the parent who is the only Christian in the family, no matter how difficult it may be. We must restore the concept of the parent or parents teaching children the way of the Lord. As good as Bible classes or Christian schools may be, they will never take the place of that 24-hour learning opportunity in the home. We need to follow the Lord in this capacity.

We need to follow Christ in a life of daily, unselfish service for others. In this busy time in which we live, I pray that we would take more time—*much* more time—to meet the needs of others. This is loving service for others.<sup>24</sup> I believe this can be done if we give careful, serious consideration to it. If we really want to meet the needs of our people under God, we will take the time to provide *daily* opportunity for encouragement in Christ. He certainly encouraged others, as did His disciples.

Our Sunday gatherings are vitally important, as are our midweek services. Midweek Bible class and fellowship are wonderful opportunities to nourish ourselves, that we might “make it to the next assembly.” However, they are *not* going to meet the need for biblical teachings and other vital needs of people.

The Bible many times states that we should encourage one another and meet the needs of others on a *daily* basis: not just twice a week but *daily—daily*

cross-bearing, *daily* fellowship. It can be done and is being done in some places. Let's consider this and make a more conscious effort to do so. It's vital to the growth of the body!

5. *A genuine fervent love for all who belong to Him*

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”<sup>25</sup>*

In order to follow Jesus, we must have a genuine, fervent love for all our brothers and sisters.

What has divided the body of Jesus over the years? A lack of love for those whom Jesus loves! We actually sin against Jesus if we do not receive and accept those whom He has received and accepted<sup>26</sup> He loves each on in His body, and He accepts us as we are. He gives us the time, however long it takes, for shedding sinful habits and learning to develop and grow in His ways. To overcome those habits which have taken a lifetime to build up, we need time and help and support.

Self-rejection poses a greater barrier to living like Jesus than does rejection by other brothers and sisters. We need to be strong and determined, but

if we stumble, we need to understand that God is still there loving and accepting us. He gives more grace; we must then get up and go on. Stumbling can also be an opportunity to grow, if we'll look at it that way and learn from it.

Yes, there must be a genuine fervent love for *all* who belong to Him. When God's people lack this love, the "follow Jesus" with deadness and coldness. God's word is clear: if I don't love my brothers and sisters, I truthfully don't love God!<sup>27</sup> Loving a brother means accepting him, receiving him as he is. *This* is following Jesus.

6. *An unswerving continuance in His word and will*

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*<sup>28</sup>

To start well is commendable, but we must endure daily—to the end. "If you hold to my teaching" has also been translated, "except you abide in my word." The word "abide" in Greek is related to the word which means to "dwell in," "to abide where one lives." Christ's word is supposed to be the Christian's dwelling place—not just what he reads or studies, but *where he lives*.

The Word, then becomes our necessary food. This is what Jesus did when He lived on the earth. He relied on the word and will of God for His life and living. Above all, we must not get caught in the trap of subjectivism and avoid the objective word and will of God. This definitely robs one of his position in Christ.

### *7. A forsaking of all to follow Him*

Again, the Lord says, "...any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."<sup>29</sup> Jesus said this to emphasize that *anything* standing in the way of following Him wholeheartedly must be given up. But there has also been some misrepresentation of this verse. The fact is, it's up to you. You must not let things stand in your way of putting Jesus first and following Him.

The truth is that we should first and foremost use the things that God has given us for the sake of the kingdom, and He will in turn care for us and bless us 30, 60, or 100-fold. This is what occurs if we are willing to truly forsake all to follow Him.

### ***Unconditional Surrender or Excuses?***

To truly follow Jesus, one must avoid several deceptions:

*I'll follow You anywhere; that is, if it's comfortable and convenient.*

We have touched on these verses before. Remember this?

*...and a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."<sup>30</sup>*

The Christian life makes difficult demands on us, if we are to sincerely follow Jesus. If necessary, we must be ready to deny comfort and convenience.

*I'll follow You, but it cannot interfere with my priorities.*

Well, Jesus is the first priority, and we must know this and learn it well in order to avoid being deceived.<sup>31</sup>

*I'll follow You, if it does not interfere with earthly ties.*

*Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."<sup>32</sup>*

When Jesus calls us, His call is *now*; we must choose to follow or walk away.

Genuinely going with Jesus means following Him regardless of obstacles. We must not suppress God's truth forever because we don't take Him seriously as He calls us to follow Him. A good start is *realizing* that Jesus' call makes a claim on His followers.

Let us then unconditionally *surrender* and follow Him courageously, honorably, and faithfully. We must begin *now* and *continue* each day for the rest of our lives.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Matt 8:18-20.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. 8:21-22.

<sup>3</sup>Luke 9:61-62.

<sup>4</sup>Mark 8:36.

<sup>5</sup>John 8:32.

<sup>6</sup>Matt. 16:25.

<sup>7</sup>Matt. 20:16.

<sup>8</sup>See Matt. 5:1-7:29.

<sup>9</sup>Matt. 5:20.

<sup>10</sup>Matt. 21:32.

<sup>11</sup>Isa. 66:2.

<sup>12</sup>Rom. 6:17.

<sup>13</sup>Luke 9:23.

<sup>14</sup>See Matt. 23:10; Rom. 10:10; 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>15</sup>2 Cor. 5:15.

<sup>16</sup>See Mark 10:17-31.

<sup>17</sup>Gal. 2:20.

<sup>18</sup>Luke 14:25-27.

<sup>19</sup>Rom. 6:3-7.

<sup>20</sup>See Luke 14:26.

<sup>21</sup>See Matt. 16:24.

<sup>22</sup>Luke 9:23.

<sup>23</sup>Matt. 5:11.

<sup>24</sup>Read John 13:1-17.

<sup>25</sup>John 13:34-35.

<sup>26</sup>See 1 Cor. 8:12; Matt. 25:40, 45.

<sup>27</sup>Read carefully 1 John 4:7-21.

<sup>28</sup>John 8:31-32.

<sup>29</sup>Luke 14:33.

<sup>30</sup>Luke 9:57-58.

<sup>31</sup>See Luke 9:59-60.

<sup>32</sup>Luke 9:61-62.

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