

I have decided to follow Jesus!

**"Believers" in Jesus are many;
but "Followers" of Jesus are few.**

**Many come "to" Jesus;
but very few go "after" Him.**

**Believing on Jesus is to enjoy privileges;
but following Him is to assume responsibilities.**

**The author in this booklet deals with
the following 10 aspects of following Jesus.**

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|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Soulwinning | 6. My own way |
| 2. Holy Living | 7. Love |
| 3. Setting Priorities | 8. Fulltime Service |
| 4. Materialism | 9. Deviations |
| 5. Comforts | 10. Suffering |

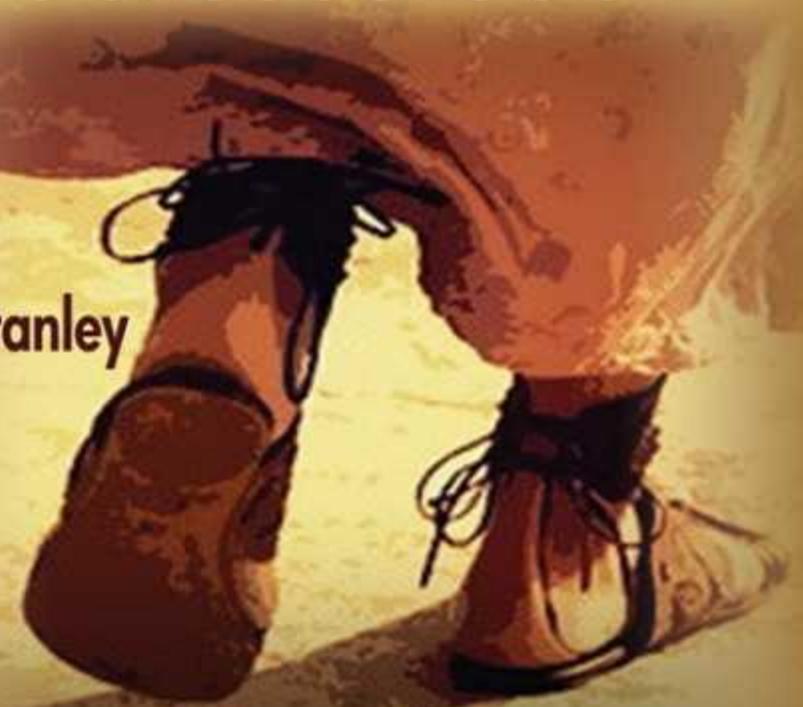


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I have decided to FOLLOW JESUS

**A Self-examination
for new disciples
and mature Christians**

R. Stanley



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for new disciples
and mature Christians

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*It costs
to follow Jesus;
but it costs more
not to follow Him!*

1

I have decided to follow Jesus!

“Believers” in Jesus are many; but “followers” of Jesus are few. In Christian life, birth is by faith on Jesus, but growth is by following Him. Many come “to” Jesus; but very few go “after” Him. The rate of backsliding is high among those who are saved because the second aspect is not sufficiently emphasized.

Believing on Jesus is to enjoy privileges; but following Him is to take up responsibilities. By coming to Jesus we will be blessed; by following Him we will be a blessing to others.

The passion of the Apostles was “to present every man mature in Christ Jesus.” This they did by “preaching” Him, “teaching” about Him, and “warning” the people against all deviations (Col 1:28). The Christian life is compared to a “race.” From its beginning to end, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Heb 12:1,2).

I searched the New Testament under the theme, “**Following** Jesus.” Ten self-

examination questions emerged from this study. Let’s search ourselves in the light of God’s Word to find out how close or how far we are following Jesus. This study is not meant for condemnation but for conviction and correction.

2

Do I follow Jesus in Soulwinning?

The first call of Jesus to “follow” Him is recorded in Matthew 4:19, “**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men!” This call was to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. Their obedience was immediate (v20).

We are Christians to make others Christians. We are saved to save others. We are blessed to bless others. The saintly Andrew Murray (1828-1917) said, “There are only two groups of Christians: Soulwinners or Backsliders!” Such a statement looks harsh but this is what exactly Jesus said: Mt 12:30, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” Though too difficult to understand or accept, according to Jesus, we are either bringing people into His fold or driving them away. This is radical discipleship. C.T. Studd (1862-1931), the famous cricketer turned mis-

sionary, would call Christians who are not active in soulwinning as “chocolate soldiers!”

Jesus called soulwinning as His very “food.” He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and finish His work” (Jn 4:34). He made this challenging statement in the context of winning that Samaritan woman for God’s Kingdom and then reaping a rich harvest of souls in the Samaritan village (vv35,39-41). Followers of Jesus must imbibe this spirit of compassion for the lost souls.

No one could be busier than how Jesus was in His lifetime. What He had to accomplish in about 40 months was colossal. Giving a blueprint for a worldwide mission and preparing the workers to take up this job was not easy. Multitudes were thronging Him to hear Him and to be healed of Him. People were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat (Mk 6:31). His sleeping hours were getting shortened because of His growing ministry. Yet He found time for earnest seekers like Nicodemus who chose to come to Him only by night because of the fear of the Jews (Jn 3:2; 19:39). Jesus was never too tired to win souls.

Jesus was not just a Sender of missionaries, but He was a Goer Himself. After

commanding His twelve disciples to go proclaiming the message of the Kingdom, He Himself departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities (Mt 11:1). Luke’s record runs like this: “The Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (Lk 10:1). Whether it was 12 Apostles or 70 Evangelists, after sending them forth He Himself went! What a lesson for Mission executives! What the Church needs today is not more of missiologists but missionaries! Taking the easy option in the missionary slogans, “Go or Send” or “Go and Send,” many Christians are only supporters but not soulwinners. No wonder the world still remains unevangelized.

It’s necessary that we maintain our passion for souls aglow. Let’s light our candles from that of Jesus. Leaving one’s native place is not easy. This is a cost every crosscultural missionary has to pay. Jesus left Nazareth His hometown for Naphtali to bless the Gentiles in Galilee (Mt 4:13-15). This He did in order that those who sat in “darkness” might see a “great light” (v16). He was constantly carrying a burden for the “other towns” and the “other sheep” (Lk 4:42, 43; Jn 10:16). Am I following Jesus, or have I lost the passion for souls?

There was never an occasion when Jesus lost His vision for worldwide evangelisation. Most of His parables were about the Kingdom of God. When a woman anointed His feet with a costly perfume in a dinner party, the entire house was filled with the fragrance. His evangelistic mind immediately imagined the world getting saturated with the sweet-smelling Gospel (Mk 14:9). When our vision becomes dim, we lose purpose and direction in whatever we do. As one with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus kept passages like Isaiah 6:3 and Habakkuk 2:14 ever fresh in His mind. Holy and godly imaginations sharpen our vision.

Prayer and soulwinning must not be separated. Missions are born in prayer. A soulwinner stands before men for God. He must meet God before he faces men. In the overall daily schedule of Jesus, the night hours were for praying and the daytime was for preaching and teaching and healing (Lk 21:37,38). In His High Priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for the souls who would be won for the Kingdom through His disciples (Jn 17:20,21). His prayer ministry today in Heaven is chiefly for the newcomers to God (Heb 7:25). How much of our prayertime is allotted for the salvation of souls? (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Jesus' bold witness before Pilate is unparalleled (Jn 18:37). His statement should be the theme of every soulwinner's life: "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should witness for the truth!" Every soulwinner's confession should be, "For this cause I am born again, and for this cause I live in the world, that I should witness for the truth!" Can I say so? Apostle Paul urged young Timothy to keep Jesus as his role model for bold witnessing (1 Tim 6:14). No pain or problem can deter a soulwinner from his job. Jesus was a soulwinner even on the Cross! (Lk 23:42,43).

It's when we don't closely follow Jesus, we grow weak in witnessing. When Simon Peter followed Jesus afar off, he denied and cursed Him (Lk 22:54). We may not deny Jesus, but keeping our mouth shut before unbelievers without testifying for Him amounts to silent denial. Why be ashamed of Jesus and His words? Did He not die for us? Should we not at least live for Him? If we deny ourselves, carry the cross and follow Jesus, we will not be ashamed of Him and His words (Lk 9:23,26).

3

Do I follow Jesus for Holy Living?

There are two exciting references in the Book of Revelation for our theme of “following” Jesus. Rev 14:4,5, “These are the ones who **follow** the Lamb wherever He goes ... And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.” Rev 19:14, “The armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, **followed** Him on white horses.” What a picture for holy living and following Jesus!

Jesus made a reference to holy living in His very farewell address in Heaven to His Father before He entered the world. Heb 10:5,7, “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me ... Then I said, Behold, I have come ... to do Your will, O God.” This is a quote from Psalm 40:6-8. Jesus here establishes the truth that it is not religiosity but righteous living that pleases God. At incarnation, Jesus was called the “Holy One” (Lk 1:35). To walk in holiness should be the lifetime commitment of everyone who follows Jesus.

Jesus had no sin to repent of, and no sin to be cleansed from. But John’s baptism was for “repentance!” Why should then Jesus be baptised? The overarching reason Jesus presented before John was to fulfil “all righteousness” (Mt 3:15). It is told of Jesus that He “loved righteousness and hated lawlessness” (Heb 1:9). He loved righteousness with perfect love and hated unrighteousness with perfect hatred. If I am following Jesus, do I have this mindset?

The Father from Heaven says, “Be holy!” But it is the Son who shows us the pattern saying, “Be holy as I am holy!” Jesus is the perfect and practical example for all His followers to emulate. He was tempted like us “in all points,” yet He never once yielded to temptation (Heb 4:15). He knows how difficult it is to live holy in this unholy world. He knows how hard it is to overcome temptation in a world where the Tempter roams about freely. He knows what a struggle it is to overcome “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16). Following His 40 days of fasting the devil tempted Him intensely on these three areas (Lk 4:1-13). But Jesus stoutly overcame the enemy. With this experience He helps us sympathetically to resist all temptation if we run to Him at the Throne of Grace (Heb 4:15,16).

There's a striking statement concerning sanctification in the High Priestly prayer of Jesus to His Father: "For their sakes I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (Jn 17:19). Jesus as God is holy, holy and holy! He didn't lose His absolute holiness when He came as a man in flesh and blood. Then where does sanctification arise for Him? This speaks of the conscious effort He was constantly taking to keep Himself away from any defilement. Beloved, we can never afford to become slack. The devil is always looking for opportunities to strike us down. Our mind may be strong and our spirit willing, but we live with a weak flesh. In the hour of darkness Jesus reminded His disciples of this fact and exhorted them, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Mt 26:41). Another truth is evolved from Jesus' statement, "I sanctify Myself." On this side of eternity, we never reach sinless perfection. We go on from holiness to holiness, and righteousness to righteousness (Phil 3:12-15).

The Gospels record the three temptations Jesus faced immediately after His forty days of fasting at the beginning of His ministry. The devil did not leave Him forever. We read that when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him "until an opportune time!" (Lk 4:13). The devil was

after Jesus until He died. Jesus was able to testify towards the end of His life, "The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (Jn 14:30). There are two important lessons here. (a) Never underestimate the devil. Even after 50 or 60 years after the triumphant resurrection of Jesus, Apostle John wrote, "The world lies under the wicked one" (1 Jn 5:19). (b) Never do we become too old to be tempted. Jesus resisted the devil from beginning to the end of His life. We must beware of the middle-age and old-age relaxation.

When Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, He gave a profound teaching: "I am the light of the world. He who **follows** Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Walking in light means eschewing the works of darkness (Eph 5:8-11). If we follow Jesus the Light, we must take this deliberate step. Only then can we claim constant cleansing by Emmanuel's blood (1 Jn 1:7). If I follow Jesus, I must love what He loves, and hate what He hates. Otherwise where is the "fellowship" with Him?

Though the teaching of Jesus was opposed, no one could find fault with His life. He was above reproach. During His lifetime He challenged His opponents, "Which of you can point out a sin in Me?" (Jn 8:46a).

Just before His death, there were overwhelming testimonies of His holiness. Pilate said thrice, "I find no fault in this Man" (Lk 23:4,14,22). Pilate's wife referred to Him as that "just Man" (Mt 27:19). Herod asserted, "Nothing worthy of death has been done by Him" (Lk 23:15). One of the thieves crucified with Him said, "This Man has done nothing wrong" (Lk 23:41). The centurion who executed the crucifixion testified, "Certainly this was a righteous Man" (Lk 23:47). The world expects the same kind of life from the followers of Jesus. Are we not in the world as He was? (1 Jn 4:17b).

All the children of God are holy brothers and holy sisters, because we are made righteous by faith in Christ. We are given a lifetime assignment. That is to keep on considering or studying the life of Christ (Heb 3:1). This is specifically relating to His faithfulness to God (v2). Then comes a similar call to consider Jesus relating to His boldness before men. Heb 12:3,4, "Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." Maintaining holiness in this sin-sick and sin-toxic world means swimming against the tide all our life. Discouragement here can be overcome only by looking unto Jesus and follow-

ing Him. It is what we learn from Christ that keeps us from sinful lusts (Eph 4:20-24).

Following Jesus is to become like Him. Whatever God allows in our life works towards this "good" purpose (Rom 8:28,29). The leadership in the Church is to bring every member to the "full stature" of Christ (Eph 4:11-13).

4

Do I follow Jesus in setting priorities?

Jesus called one individual saying, "**Follow** Me." But he replied, "Lord, let me *first* go and bury my father." Jesus said to Him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9:59,60). Another person volunteered, "Lord, I will **follow** You, but let me *first* go and bid farewell to those at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9:61,62). In these two cases, one was for a funeral and the other was for farewell. Both are legitimate. "To bury my father" does not mean that his father was already dead. It could mean that he was in his last days. Similarly, farewell may take so many days for formalities. The lesson Jesus

teaches here is that in all situations the priority must be for His Kingdom if we are to truly follow Him.

Jesus had clearly set priorities in His life. Bible study was more important to Him than celebrating a festival or enjoying the company of His relatives (Lk 2:46-49). When the devil tempted Him relating to his hunger after forty days of fasting, He emphatically stated, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth!" (Mt 4:4). This was the experience of Patriarch Job also who said, "I have treasured the words of God's mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). Is the meditation of God's Word a top priority in our daily schedule? How often we become too busy to spend quality time with God's Word! Most of our Study Bibles are simply shelved.

Another priority in the life of Jesus was prayer. We read in Mark 1:35, "In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." There's nothing like spending the early hours of the day in prayer. This habit of our early days of spiritual life is forsaken by most of us. Let's meet God before we meet others. Increase of work was no excuse for Jesus to

spend time in prayer. When the number of those who wanted to hear Him and healed of Him kept swelling up, "He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed" (Lk 5:15,16). For Him, more work demanded more praying. Let's come back to our knees! That's the cure for all our spiritual ills.

The slogan of Jesus was, "First things first!" This is reflected in all His teaching. The "first" and the great commandment is to love God with our all and to love others as ourselves. We are to "first" wash the inside of a vessel. We must "first" reconcile with the wronged before making any offering to God. We are to "first" remove the beam from our own eye before trying to remove the speck from our brother's eye. Whichever house we enter, we must "first" say, Peace! In order to obey the Law of Moses, Jesus told the healed leper to "first" show himself to the priest. We are to "first" seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness instead of worrying over our physical needs. Amidst so many signs Jesus gave for the endtime, He said that the Gospel must "first" be preached as a witness to all nations. If I truly follow Jesus, the slogan in my life also should be, "First things first!"

Quoting 1 Timothy 3:4,5, we normally say that one should not sacrifice his family for spiritual activities. But my observation of

numerous cases tells me that God's work is sacrificed for family interests. What is rebuked in the above passage is the neglect of one's family. When a multitude was sitting around Jesus, He was told that His brothers and mother were standing outside to see Him. Look at His reply: "Who is My mother or My brother?" Looking at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Here are My mother and My brothers. Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother!" (Mk 3:31-35). Does it mean Jesus neglected His family? Did He not provide for His mother even while hanging on the cross? So many overseas missionaries could not take their families to the lands where living conditions were extremely poor. If they had stayed back, how many millions would have been denied of hearing the Gospel! These missionaries carried the cross of leaving their families and "followed" Jesus (Mt 10:37,38).

Priority means doing the right thing at the right time. God works with priority in His mind. We read about Him that "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl 3:11a). Everything in life seems to be "important" these days. Blessed is the man who has learnt to differentiate between what's "important" and what's "necessary!" Only such a man can truly follow Jesus.

5

Do I follow Jesus against materialism?

One young man came to Jesus with the question, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16). Jesus answered him, "Keep the commandments" (v17). When he in turn asked which commandments, Jesus listed some of the Ten Commandments (vv18,19). The young man said, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" (v20). Jesus pointedly answered him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, **follow** Me" (v21). The same incident is recorded in Mark and Luke also (Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22). This young ruler wanted to inherit "eternal" life, but he was not ready to part with his "earthly" possessions! This truth is hardly preached today while talking about "following" Jesus. This doesn't find a place in the syllabus of discipleship training programmes. No wonder we don't have radical followers of Jesus!

Jesus perfectly overcame the temptation to possess earthly glory. Following His forty day fast, "the devil took Him up on a high

mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him, All this authority I will give You, and their glory; ... If You will worship before me, all will be Yours” (Lk 4:5-7). Jesus rebuked him saying, “Get behind Me, Satan!” (v8). His reason was that God alone should be worshipped and not gold! If you want to follow Jesus, the earthly riches should not come between you and Him. Rather, they must be thrown behind. Get “behind” Me, Satan! Where are your earthly riches? Before you or behind you?

In following Jesus, we must decide at the earliest as to who would be our master: God or gold? In no uncertain terms Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; because either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches” (Mt 6:24). Am I mastered by God or money? Both are two different masters. They cannot be associates. The wisest and perhaps the richest man wrote, “The greed for gain takes away the life of its owners” (Prov 1:19). Love of money is suicidal (1 Tim 6:9,10). A searching question: Do I have money, or does money have me?

Jesus chided those who followed Him just for fish and chips (Jn 6:25-27). He made

some very strong statements about money-mindedness. He said, “Your heart will be where your treasure is” (Mt 6:21). He said that it would be easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for those who “trust” in riches to enter heaven (Mk 10:24,25). He called a landlord as “You fool!” and challenged him, “This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have saved?” (Lk 12:20). Jesus said that the “deceitfulness” of riches would “choke” the Word of God lest it bore fruit (Mt 13:22). The picture here is that of a wolf strangling the throat of a sheep! Terrible!

In the matter of giving, it is not how much we give but how much we keep that’s what God looks at. One day Jesus was sitting opposite the treasury and saw “how” the people put money into the treasury. Many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites. Jesus called His disciples (followers) and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury” (Mk 12:41-44). Tithing is an Old Testament teaching for beginners. As we grow in Christian life, it is the “proportion” of our giving that must increase. That will be the true sign of a Jesus’ follower. So much of God’s work suffers because most of us have not yet come out of

the childish tithe mentality. Unless we learn to live without we cannot bless the havenots. Jesus associated Himself mostly with the poor. In His very Messianic manifesto He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor” (Lk 4:18). He specifically referred to this point as the proof of His Messianic ministry: “The poor have the Gospel preached to them” (Lk 7:22). The Apostles who caught the spirit of their Master called the believers to “associate with the humble” (Rom 12:16). We all have feasts on various occasions, but which of us has taken seriously the words of Jesus to arrange feasts for the poor? (Lk 14:12-14). We cannot bring about a revolution in the society unless we follow such radical teachings of Jesus. Make friends of the downtrodden, the marginalised and the so-called untouchables.

The world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since 1945. Over 20 millions are awaiting starvation death. This is mostly in countries like Sudan. The Compassion International is ordered by the Indian government to close down their operations in India totally by 15 March 2017. It was taking care of 1,45,000 Indian children. Instead of mourning over the situation and blaming the Government, why not Indian Churches take

up the sponsorship of these children, districtwise and statewise? Don't we have enough money in the Indian Church for this? I call upon Indian Pastors to motivate families in their congregations to sponsor one child each by collecting informations from organisations. (For details, visit www.childsponsorshipconnect.com)

Materialism is a cankerworm in the Christian Church and ministry. If there's a true Paul, preachers and ministers like Demas would quit (2 Tim 4:10). The materialistic Gospel is a cancer in the Church. Apostle Paul called the materialistic preachers as the “enemies of the CROSS of Christ!” (Phil 3:18-21). No true follower of Jesus can embrace the health-and-wealth Gospel. According to the prosperity preachers, the Apostles were failures (1 Cor 4:11-16).

*I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back!*

*The Cross before me, the world behind me,
No turning back, no turning back!*

*You take the whole world, but give me Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back!*

6

Do I follow Jesus in sacrificing comforts?

Jesus did not entice anyone to “follow” Him. A Scribe told Jesus, “Teacher, I will **follow** You wherever You go!” (Mt 8:19). He was obviously attracted towards the teaching ministry of Jesus. Look at the reply of Jesus: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (v20). Jesus didn’t encourage emotional and sentimental following. He challenged the volunteers to count the cost. We hardly teach self-denial in our discipleship or leadership training programmes. We spend too much time teaching the methods and strategies. This is the secret of our ineffectiveness.

Jesus is the supreme model for self-denial. He sacrificed the heavenly joy and became a man of sorrows. He left the heavenly company and became the Friend of Sinners. He emptied Himself of eternal glory and became a rejected Stone. He who was served by angelic hosts in Heaven became a Servant and a Slave. The one who was constantly worshipped by angels became a laughing

stock. He lost His perfect beauty and became sin for us. From the Throne He came down for self-sacrifice on the altar. This spirit should characterise every follower of Jesus.

Self-denial is the basic condition for anyone who desires to “follow” Jesus. This is taught in all the four Gospels: Mt 10:38; 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 14:27; Jn 12:25. Why is it rarely preached today? When did you last hear a sermon on this? No wonder Christendom is filled with anaemic disciples! Because “the time is short,” the Apostles admonished the believers against overindulgence in legitimate pleasures (1 Cor 7:29-31). The Apostles presented themselves as patterns for self-denial. Take for example the passage in 1 Corinthians 9:3-6. They specifically refer to food, family and finance here. Thrice does Apostle Paul ask in this passage, “Don’t we have the right?”

Even though it was God who took Moses to the palace, we read in Hebrews 11:24,25, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin.” Faith preachers use Hebrews 11 only to encourage people to “gain” blessings, and not to “give up” blessings. Here lies the main cause of imbalance

in the prosperity message. For the heroes of faith, the world was not worthy. They left towers for tents (Heb 11:38).

The first two signs of the “perilous times” of the “last days” are that men will be “lovers of self” and “lovers of money” (2 Tim 3:1,2). We are admonished to “turn away from such” (v5). How serious! We know only about “ex-communication!” Who talks about “withdrawl?” We must loathe love of self and love of money as we would dread to touch a leper. Dear reader, what have you denied lately? Don’t wait for a calamity to strike you to force you to loosen your grip on materialistic and luxurious lifestyle. Die to status symbols. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) of China Inland Mission said, “God is looking for some wicks to burn; oil and fire are free!”

7

Do I follow Jesus when I am unable to have my way?

During one of His postresurrection appearances to His disciples, the Lord Jesus had a striking dialogue with Simon Peter. He told Peter, “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself

and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish” (Jn 21:18). On hearing this, Peter became inquisitive about his fellow disciple John. But Jesus answered Peter, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You **follow Me**” (v22).

Following Jesus when I have to do what I don’t like is truly a difficult experience. Here again we have Jesus as our Model. Look at Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane. His sorrow was excessive (Mt 26:38). He desired that this cup of suffering be removed from Him. He prayed, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (v39). He prayed the second time with slightly different words: “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (v42). In spite of the “exceeding sorrow,” He was moving away from His desire towards His Father’s will. His third prayer was only total surrender and yieldedness, following which “an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him” (Lk 22:43). Jesus was not delivered from agony but was strengthened to endure it (v44). Yieldedness to do what God wants us to do against our personal desire brings strength from Above! Note that Jesus in this thrice-repeated prayer addresses

the Father God with the endearing words, “My Father!” Even in His High Priestly prayer Jesus did not address the Father like this! It is in agony we better understand the person-ness of God. It is in yieldedness we receive a fresh supply of strength from Above. What a solemn experience it is to follow Jesus!

Clashes between our desires and God’s will are too common in our lives. To tell the truth, very often we are afraid of seeking God’s will. We simply want to “know” God’s will without a desire to “do” it! But according to Jesus, only when we will desire to “do” God’s will, we will “know” what it is (Jn 7:17). Knowledge comes thro’ obedience. Psalm 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who DO His commandments.” This is where our first parents failed. They preferred knowledge to obedience. A spirit of obedience makes following Jesus delightful.

*Trust and obey;
For there’s no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.*

Education is helpful. Experience will be handy. Weighing of pros and cons in decision-making is healthy. On the top of it all, we

need to obey the divine counsel in Proverbs 3:5,6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” This is rather difficult in an age of reasoning. But the knowledge that it is only God who knows “the end from the beginning” gives us the assurance that His direction is the best (Isa 46:10). Like a shepherd will He lead us! We are not horses or donkeys which can be led only by a “whip!” For us a “wink” should do. God’s promise is, “I will guide you with My eye” (Psa 32:8,9). Horses or donkeys must be harnessed with “bit and bridle!” But for us, the “Bible” will do! There are two classic examples, one for leading by “whip,” and the other for leading by “wink” — Jonah and David.

God loved Jonah too much to let him go his way. God put him inside the belly of a fish for three days. Think of that! How terrible it would have been for Jonah to feel the bowel movements of a large fish! But the 3-day stay within the fish was more than a 3-year course in a Bible College! Read the 2nd Chapter of Jonah to understand how much he learnt about prayer inside the belly of the fish. The fish vomitted him when Jonah graduated in learning the great theological truth: “Salvation is of the Lord!” (Jon 2:9).

King David is an example for God's guidance through a "wink." He enthusiastically gathered all that was necessary for the building of the Temple. Prophet Nathan casually told him, "Go and do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you" (2 Sam 7:3). But God revealed His perfect will to the prophet that night that it won't be David but his son Solomon who would build the Temple (vv12-14). David was not upset with God. The Biblical record says, "King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" (v18). David did not argue, "How is it Lord? Is it not I who gathered so much for building the Temple? Did not the Prophet in the first instance tell me to go ahead with my plans? He even assured that You are with me!"

In obedience to Christ's Great Commission the Apostles were moving from place to place systematically. But when they wanted to go to Asia, a very needy Continent, they were "forbidden" by the Holy Spirit to preach there (Acts 16:6). Then when they tried to go to Bithynia, the Spirit did not "permit" them there also. That finally landed them in Macedonia where they had their first European convert Lydia (vv7-15). Blessed are

the flexible; for they shall not be broken! If we sincerely follow Jesus, our disappointments will become God's appointment!

God's "no" would mean a period of waiting for our own maturity. This is well illustrated in the story of Hagar. When she ran away from Abraham's house, being unable to withstand Sarah's torturous treatment, what Hagar did was perfectly understandable and quite reasonable (Gen 16:6). But the Lord stopped her, saying, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand" (v9). After a while, God Himself told Abraham to send Hagar away (21:10-12). It was in this painful experience Hagar received one of the profoundest revelations concerning Jehovah God: "God who sees me!" (16:13). She also received mighty promises from God (16:11,12; 21:18).

Jesus is "gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29). When we follow Him, we will be free from any arrogance or boasting concerning our future (Js 4:13-17). Before undertaking any work or project, we would humbly confess, "If the Lord wills and if I am alive ..." Because of our stubborn nature, God leads us more by closed doors than open doors.

The hymnologist has so beautifully captured this truth —

*Down in the valley with my Saviour I would go,
Where the flowers are blooming
and the sweet waters flow;
Everywhere He leads me I would follow,
follow on,
Walking in His footsteps till the crown be won.*

*Follow! Follow! I would follow Jesus!
Anywhere, everywhere, I would follow on!
Follow! Follow! I would follow Jesus!
Everywhere He leads me I would follow on!*

8

Do I follow Jesus in love and forgiveness?

On two specific occasions Jesus told His disciples to love one another “as He loved them.” Jn 13:34,35, “A new Commandment I give to you, that you love one another, **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples (= followers), if you have love for one another.” Loving others as Jesus loves us is our identity! The next text is John 15:9,12, “As the Father loved Me, I have also loved you ... This is My commandment, that

you love one another **as I have loved you.**” It’s like a chain. Jesus loved us as the Father loved Him. We are to love others as Jesus loved us. The Son reflects the Father, and we are to reflect the Son. Peter Scholtes’ hymn is so meaningful —

*They’ll know we are Christians
By our love, by our love!*

Apostle Paul presents the same argument in Ephesians 5:1,2, “Be **followers** of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us.” This is one of the rarest passages in the New Testament where we are called to “**follow** God!” The context is love!

Jesus demonstrated His love for His disciples through footwashing. Only slaves, not even servants, would normally do this job. After washing their feet, He sat down to teach them the object lesson: Jn 13:12-15, “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an **example**, that you should do as I have done to you.” Footwashing has become more of a ceremonial act before the Lord’s Supper in some denominations. Our feet are the bottommost in our body. This teaches us as to what level we should go down to express our love for one another. This is not possible

without a spirit of meekness, lowliness and humility. This is what exactly Jesus calls us to “learn” from Him (Mt 11:28-30). The “burden” people carry in their hearts and minds will be unloaded when we love them with a spirit of humility.

We are called to build people, not break them. We are called to quicken people, not quench them. This is the prophetic description about Jesus our Master: Isa 42:1-4, “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect in whom My soul delights ... A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench!” This is quoted in the New Testament when Jesus warned the people not to make Him popular (Mt 12:15-21). What a lesson! Building people is a silent work. There’s no place for self-projection or self-promotion. God who sees us in secret will reward us openly. Such efforts may not bring instant results. Patience is the key to build those who are “broken” and “bruised!” Jesus works on us until there’s “victory” (v20). Who will not “trust” such a person (v21)?

As followers of God, we are to be the initiators of love. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). It’s human to love someone “because

of” what a person is and what we get from him. But it’s divine to love someone “in spite of” what he is or what he does. Christ died for us while we were “still sinners!” Jesus loved His disciples in spite of their repeated failures and His disappointments with them. It’s told about Him, “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1).

Jesus showed His Father to this world. He challenged Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, show us the Father?” (Jn 14:9). In the same way, we must show Jesus to the world. Folks must see in us a miniature Jesus. Let’s look at a few more passages to prove that God’s love is always “in spite of” and not “because of.” Moses told the people of Israel, “The Lord did not set His love on you nor chose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you!” (Dt 7:7,8). The only reason why God loved Israel was that He loved them! Jesus pointed out this character of the Father in His Sermon on the Mount: Mt 5:45, “Your Father in Heaven makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Having said this Jesus concluded, “Be perfect just as your Father

in Heaven is perfect” (v48). Here lies the mark of perfection for the followers of Jesus.

Personally I struggle so much in this area. God in His mercy has used me as a leader in His work for nearly 40 years. I have always believed and taught that a “leader” should be a “ladder.” He must do all that’s possible to bring people up. To my dismay and disappointment, several of those who climbed on me a ladder kicked it off after reaching the top. They were even unmindful of the future climbers. Only those who go through such a hurting experience will understand how deep the pain would be. But can I afford to hold grudge and bitterness? What was the experience of Jesus? Only 10% of His beneficiaries remained grateful (Lk 17:17). As a follower of Jesus, can I expect anything more? Apostle Paul as a model follower of Jesus handled such situations gracefully. In his ministry he literally poured himself in the lives of people in building and bringing them up (Phil 2:17). It was not always reciprocated well. He wrote to the Corinthian believers, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (2 Cor 12:15). I feel ashamed before Paul.

Casteism kills the spirit of love. Through the work of the Cross in our lives we must

overcome racial pride. If two diametrically opposite groups like Jews and non-Jews could be brought together, which two communities cannot maintain love and harmony in Christ? (Eph 2:13,14). The Jews did not consider non-Jews even as a people! (Dt 32:21b; Rom 10:19). But Jesus deliberately appreciated the non-Jews. He praised the Centurion’s faith that such a faith was not found even in Israel. He patiently spent time with the Samaritan woman and had a rich harvest in the Samaritan village. It was a Samaritan, and not the Jewish priest or Levite, who helped the wounded man. One of the ten healed lepers who returned to give thanks was not a Jew. Jesus quoted how prophets Elijah and Elisha were sent to widows among non-Israelites for hospitality. The list goes on!

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peace-makers!” He became a Peace-maker between Pilate and Herod who were longtime enemies (Lk 23:12). His very first cry from the Cross was, “Father, forgive them!” Immediately after admonishing the Ephesian believers to “be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave them,” Apostle Paul challenged them, “Be **followers of God** as dear children” (Eph 4:32; 5:1). Unless we imitate Jesus, we cannot forgive frequent offenders.

9

Do I follow Jesus in obeying the call for fulltime service?

There are several noteworthy examples of those who instantly obeyed the call of Jesus to serve Him fulltime. Peter and Andrew come first. Jesus said to them, “**Follow** Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt 4:19). They immediately left their nets and followed Him (v20). Then come James and John. “And going on from there, Jesus saw two other brothers, James and John, in the boat with their father, mending their nets. And He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and **followed** Him” (Mt 4:21,22). The first two brothers left their profession (“net”), and the next two not only their profession but also their family (“father”). Think of two sons leaving two families to obey the call of Jesus! These days it has become rare even for one of the children leaving, or sent forth, for God’s fulltime service. Matthew left his tax office when Jesus said to him, “**Follow** Me” (Mt 9:9). Matthew became a writer. Thank God for the first Gospel which superbly links the Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament fulfilment in Jesus!

Before Jesus called others to follow Him in fulltime service, He Himself volunteered to go. In Prophet Isaiah’s call I see a shade of Jesus volunteering to come to the earth to save people. I imagine the Trinitarian God asking, Who will go for “US?” (Isa 6:8). And Jesus volunteers saying, “Here am I; send Me!” Mine is not a wild imagination because Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9,10 with reference to His teaching in parables (Mt 13:13-15). Jesus in prophecy confirms this interpretation in Isaiah 48:16, “From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.” The writer of the Book of Hebrews amplifies it: “When Jesus came into the world, He said: Behold I have come — In the volume of book it is written of Me — To do Your will, O God!” (Heb 10:5-7; Psa 40:6-8). Jesus is the greatest volunteer in all history. We don’t even obey God’s “call;” but Jesus made a “choice” to obey God! The pioneer Missionaries of the past, like David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson and Mary Slessor, “volunteered” to go making a “choice.” Unfortunately in Missions we talk so much about missionary “call,” but very little about missionary “choice!” No wonder the quality of missionary candidates has sadly come down. There’s also a slump in the missionary applicants from the well-educated. When I left my Engineering

profession in 1975 to serve God fulltime, it was more a “choice” than a “call.”

Here’s my question to the fat-salaried Christians: “Why not at least a voluntary retirement after earning enough? How much is enough?” Anyday God wants “us” more than “ours!” (2 Cor 8:5). Why spend all the best part of your life for earning money? “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6). If you think that spending all your time in God’s service does not appeal to you, why not become a fulltime “earner” for God’s work? After having a reasonable saving for your future and for your children to get started, you can decide before God that you would spend the rest of your career years to earn exclusively for God. Did not Jesus honour the poor widow who gave her all, and Mary who poured her purchase of a lifetime saving on His feet? Be a Joannah! Be a Susannah! (Lk 8:1-3). What I write here may upset you, but if you respond positively you will have no regrets in eternity (Mt 6:19-21). If Indian Christians would take this seriously, we will have no need for dollars and euros for God’s work in this country. In fact we can send money from India to poorer nations! (2 Cor 8:13-15). Let’s become radical followers of our Master who gave all of Himself to enrich us! (v9).

I have another question: How much do we honour the fulltime servants of God? Jesus expects us to let them enjoy our homes, our vehicles, our belongings and our blessings as theirs (Mk 10:28-30)! We must become parents and brothers and sisters to the fulltimers. A “cup of cold water” is only an illustration; we must not stop with it (Mt 10:40-42). Apostle Paul wrote that faithful servants of God deserve “double honour,” especially those who teach the Word of God and sound doctrine (1 Tim 5:17). “Double honour” does not mean saying “Praise the Lord” twice! It refers to material contribution (v18).

10

Do I follow Jesus in checking deviations?

There’s no better figure of speech for our relationship with Jesus than the one between the Shepherd and the sheep. The 23rd Psalm in the Old Testament and the 10th Chapter of John in the New Testament are the most beloved passages in the Bible for God’s people. One of our favorite hymns on this theme is by Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1799-1847, which she wrote for young people —

*Saviour, like a shepherd, lead us;
Much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us;
For our use Thy folds prepare.*

*Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
Thou has bought us, Thine we are;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
Thou has bought us, Thine we are!*

We look at John 10:3-5 for our subject under study. “To the shepherd the door-keeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep **follow** him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will **flee** from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” Only to the extent we closely follow Jesus, we can escape deviations in life. “Strange voices” are enticing. They are deceptive. Jesus gives the spirit of discernment only to those who closely follow Him.

Hebrews 13:8 is a favorite Bible text: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” Have you ever noticed what follows immediately after this statement? “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines!” (v9). There are simply too many strange doctrines blowing like a storm to deceive God’s people and stunt their growth

to the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13,14). Beware! The Chief Shepherd leads us today through under-shepherds in the Church who are “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” (vv11,12). The true followers of Jesus will not be excited over novelties. Beware of the substitutes for “green pastures” and “still waters” (Psa 23:1,2)!

It is when we don’t hold on to the Head, even Jesus, we get defrauded into falsehood (Col 2:18,19). In the Gospel of John, Jesus contrasts Himself in various instances from the false. He is the “true” Light against the works of darkness (Jn 8:12; 1:7-9). He is the only Door; but thieves break through windows (10:1,7-10). He is the “true” Vine as against the fruitless vine of Israel (15:1; Hos 10:1). He is the “good” Shepherd as against the selfish leaders (Jn 10:11-13). He is the Bread of “life” unto eternal life compared to the earthly food (6:48,58). What more do we need? Why should we get sidetracked?

Jesus perfectly discerned deviations during His earthly life and ministry. When His close disciple Simon Peter, out of sheer love for Him, went to the extent of “rebuking” Him for His predictions about His torturous death, Jesus in turn rebuked Peter saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not

mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Mk 8:31-33). Then He immediately went on to teach that **following** Him meant self-denial and cross-bearing (v34). Over-occupation with earthly blessings, that is, the “things of men,” makes us the enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18,19). Unfortunately this is the most popular trend today and the sinister challenge to the followers of Jesus.

Distractions in the Christian race will be detrimental. That’s why we are admonished not to take our eyes off Jesus (Heb 12:2). Here again the “cross” figures out. The Crossless Christianity is the subtle attraction and multitudes of Christians are distracted by it. Beware! Distractions will kill your “first love” and “virgin faith” (Rev 2:4; 1 Tim 5:12). Deception and falling away from faith are pointedly predicted (2 Thess 2:3). Read this entire Chapter of 2 Thessalonians and be forearmed.

Dear fellow-follower of Jesus, let’s make Psalm 86:11 our daily prayer: “Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name!”

11

Do I follow Jesus in suffering and persecution?

Even though the call to follow Jesus occurs several times in the New Testament, the call to follow “His steps” comes only once. It’s the call given by Apostle Peter: 1 Pet 2:21, “To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should **follow** His steps.” The context is suffering. Though this subject is not popular, a follower of Jesus cannot escape suffering. The good news is that when we yield to enlist in suffering, God enables us to endure.

There are simply too many admirers of Jesus, but they stop there. We Christians must also beware of this danger. Some Greeks came to Philip and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:20,21). Greeks are known for their wisdom and culture. The request was made known to Jesus. The answer of Jesus was quite unexpected. The Gospel record begins verse 23 with the word, “But ...” “But Jesus answered them, saying, the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of

wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world would keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him **follow** Me” (vv23-26). Then Jesus went on to say, “My soul is troubled” (v27). The philosophy that Jesus presented here was, “There’s no glorification without suffering, and no life without death.” Are we simply the admirers of Jesus, or are we ready to identify with Him in His suffering? Fans or Followers?

True followers of Jesus would be ready to go with Him anywhere, whether it would mean life or death, blessing or suffering. Nothing will separate them from their love for their Master (Rom 8:35-39). Jesus was not crucified in Jerusalem but outside the city, “outside the gate” (Heb 13:12)! This historical event gives us a spiritual call: “Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (v13). The logic is that “we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (v14). If we follow Jesus, we will be growing in eternal-mindedness as against earthly-mindedness. This is the acid test.

The cup of suffering will be passed on to us sometime or other in our life. Our natural response would be, “Should I drink this cup?” But if we follow Jesus, our answer like Him

should be, “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” (Jn 18:11). I must not employ carnal methods like Peter to avoid suffering (v10). Turning bitter towards folks when the cup of bitterness is passed on to us will only work against God’s will and purpose. We must remember this everytime we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

There’s an erroneous teaching that’s more popular than any other in Christendom today. It dupes the ignorant saying, “Jesus suffered for us, so we need not suffer.” It’s against such a teaching, Jesus challenged, “If they do these things in the green tree, what will be done on the dry wood?” (Lk 23:31). Fellowship with Jesus is not just for blessings. We are called to “fellowship in His sufferings” also (Phil 3:10). Look at Apostle Paul’s testimony: Col 1:24, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.” Each of us has a part to fulfil in this. I cannot be a faithful follower of Christ without this mindset. Let’s not forget that the root meaning of the word “witnesses” in Acts 1:8 is “martyrs.” Suffering is the detergent that whitens our garments (Rev 7:13,14). The Shepherd Himself becomes a Lamb to totally identify Himself with us the sheep! He will lead all His followers to “living fountains of waters” (v17). “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!”

12

Conclusion

The chorus that's usually sung around baptismal tanks is, *"I have decided to follow Jesus!"* The Tamil version is rendered as, "I have **dared** to follow Jesus!" Yes, following Jesus is adventurous but not risky!

The followers of Jesus must raise followers for Jesus, as Paul said, "Follow (imitate) me, just as I also follow Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Elsewhere he wrote, "I urge you, Imitate me" (4:16). He presents Timothy as his son in faith who has learnt Paul's "ways in Christ" (v17). Let this be our commitment: "To follow Jesus, and to raise followers for Him!"

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