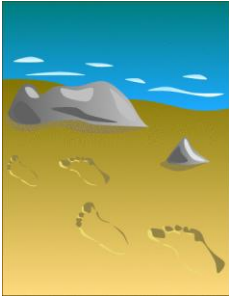


Following Jesus

By Mary Kane



Many years ago, when I was a little girl, we used to walk to our neighborhood school without a parent. Back in those days it was safe for children to walk a couple of blocks by themselves. Each morning, two of my sisters and I would set out the back door, cut through the neighbor's drive way and walk two blocks to school. I remember we'd make the walk more interesting by walking on top of a low concrete wall and then running our fingers along the chain link fence. Sometimes, we'd even walk home for lunch!

Our walk became a little more challenging in the winter months. Since we lived in Michigan, large snowstorms would often blanket the ground with inches of snow, while we slept. On those extra snowy mornings, our mother would instruct us to put on our long johns and she'd make cream of wheat or oatmeal for breakfast. Following breakfast, we'd don our snow pants, boots, coats, hats and gloves and head out the door for school. On snowy mornings however, we walked according to a certain pecking order; we lined up by age, oldest sister first and so on.

The oldest sister had the hardest job; she had to break the trail for the other sisters to follow. Our youngest sister, Carol, had the easiest walk. All she had to do was follow in the footsteps of those who went before her. As long as Carol stayed on the path, her path was easy. She did not need to waste energy making her own trail, or worry about where she was headed; all she had to do was follow.

Jesus does the same thing for us; He walks before us every step of the way, breaking the path with His infinite strength and wisdom. We don't need to waste energy making our own trail or worry about where we are headed; all we have to do is follow.

Please take a moment to ask your Savior to cleanse your heart from all unrighteousness and fill you afresh with the Holy Spirit.

Now, please read Luke 9:23-26

Please fill in the missing word from verse 23:

“If anyone _____ to come after me, let him deny himself...”

In the NKJV, the missing word is *desires*. From the Greek, *desires* transliterates as *thelo* which means “to will, to intend, to have in mind, to like to do a thing, to take pleasure in, to be resolved, determined, a deliberate intelligent choice, to wish.” Based on the definition of the word desire, the choice then to follow Jesus seems to involve both the mind and the heart.

How were both your mind and heart involved in your own decision to follow Christ?

Please look at verse 23 again.

The word *come* has an interesting meaning behind it as well. To *come* means “to go, to follow, *to come from one place to another* (emphasis mine)” When we decide to follow Jesus, we come from one place; the place of our own disastrous plans and ideas, to another; the place of God’s wondrous plans and ideas for our lives!

What are some of the wonderful plans that God has unfolded for your life since you became a Christian?

Since I decided to follow Jesus, God has given me a new job, a wonderful church family, new skills and talents that I never knew I had and very satisfying ministry work!

According to verse 23, what three things does Jesus ask a person to do if they desire to “come after Him”?

If we are serious about following Jesus, God calls us to:

- 1. Deny ourselves:** In the original language, *deny* means to “affirm that one has no acquaintance or connection with someone, to forget one’s self and one’s own interests.” When we decide to follow Jesus, life is no longer about self, but Jesus. Self is gone... it’s desires, it’s passions, it’s plans. Self is gone and Jesus has come. I’ve heard others say that sometimes when we want to walk closer to Christ, we may have to give up a few friends. I never considered until this moment that one of the friends that I may have to give up is my *self*!
- 2. Take up our cross daily:** In the Greek, *cross* transliterates from the base word *histemi* which means “to cause or make to stand, to make firm, fix establish, to stand immovable, steadfast in mind, one who does not hesitate or waiver.” The cross always means suffering; not suffering without purpose, but suffering for the joy set before you. Following Jesus on a daily basis is not for the faint of heart; it requires a steadfast commitment.
- 3. Follow Me:** When I looked up the meaning of the word *follow*, I was blessed by the insight I gained from the original language. The word used in this text for *follow* means “to follow one who precedes, to join Him as His attendant, accompany him, to side with his party.” Based on this definition, when we *follow* Jesus it doesn’t mean that we are following, by ourselves, a two thousand year old trail that He blazed hundreds of years ago. It means that He calls us to *join Him* as He leads us on the perfect path that He has for our lives! The path He leads me on will be different from the path that He leads you on! And He will personally walk before every one of us, each step of the way! Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He is with us—He always has been and always will be. What a wonderful comfort. Thank you Holy Father.

What ironic situation is presented in verse 24?

If I try to save my life for myself, I will lose it; I will accomplish the very thing I'm trying to avoid! If I reject Jesus, and live for myself, I will end up with eternal death. If I accept Jesus and die to self, I will end up with eternal life.

In reference to verse 24, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown state, "...the pith of this maxim depends on the double sense attached to the word "life," a lower and a higher, the natural and the spiritual, temporal and eternal. An entire sacrifice of the lower, or a willingness to make it, is indispensable to the preservation of the higher life; and he who cannot bring himself to surrender the one for the sake of the other shall eventually lose both."

Verse twenty four makes clear what following Jesus means; it means choosing to carry our cross daily and giving up our own plans for our lives. Jesus experienced physical death, one time, in order to enable us to live with Him and for Him. We either choose to live to please our flesh or we chose to live to please Christ. One is empty, destructive and insatiable; the other is full, abundant and deeply satisfying.

Can you remember a single time that you were completely happy and satisfied when living for your flesh?

I can't. It was a very empty, hopeless, existence. Living for the flesh is a living death. Jesus lived His life to die, personally, for me. It is only right then, that I should live my life, to live personally, for Him!

What will the pursuit of the world lead to?

We cannot seek both, the world and the Kingdom of Heaven at the same time. We must make a choice. Gathering things of the world will only fit us to live on earth. But gathering treasures of Heaven will fit us to live on earth and in heaven. If all of the treasures of the world were gathered into one giant warehouse; all the gold, silver, riches, jewels,

sports cars, mansions, clothing, exotic perfumes, fame, popularity, influence etc. they would not buy one single soul a moment in Heaven. And in the end, all of those things will be burnt up as hay, straw and stubble.

When I hear people say that they do not want to follow Christ because they do not wish to suffer on this earth, I am surprised. I well remember my life before Christ, and the suffering I endured as an unbeliever was far worse than anything I have ever experienced as a Christian. Suffering for Christ is one thing; suffering without hope is another.

What warning is given in verse 26?

Whoever is ashamed of Jesus and His Words, Jesus shall be ashamed of him when He comes to earth in His Glory. Jesus' first advent was similar to the TV show, *Undercover Boss*. The first time the Boss of the Universe came to earth, He came disguised. He didn't arrive in royal robes, with a jeweled crown, declaring to everyone who He was. He came dressed as one of us, the regular workers; wrapped in flesh like the rest of humanity. Are you ashamed to walk with Jesus because of the humble estate of His first advent? Then He will be ashamed of you when He comes in GLORY at His second advent! There will be no mistake who He is when He comes the second time, because every eye shall see, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Matthew 10:38 say about those who will not deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus?

It says that we are not worthy of Him. There is no other way...leading a *good* life...being a *good* person...just believing that there is a God, all of these things are not enough. Actually, leading a good life and being a good person have nothing to do with Jesus; these are things people try to do without Jesus.

So how can we know if we are truly following Jesus?

- 1. By examining the focus of your life.** If you are following Jesus, you do not live to please yourself; it's about serving Jesus and ministering to others. When you really start to follow Jesus, you'll want others to have what you have.
- 2. By examining the path of your life.** For me, when I decided to start following Jesus everything changed; career, church—even the school my children attended. All of these changes came with challenges and struggles and all of them were worth every ounce of effort I put forth to accomplish them. Following Jesus will ultimately bring great satisfaction and joy.
- 3. By examining the depth of your character.** If you are following Jesus, you should be a different person than you were last year. Growing in Christ can be a painful process! In order to bring about change, God must reveal to you, your faults and sins. Rest assured that God never reveals our shortcomings to us to condemn us; He reveals them to us to bring healing and greater depths of relationship with Him.
- 4. By examining your relationship with Christ.** When you become serious about following Christ, just "church on Sunday" will no longer be enough. You will find yourself slipping away more often for time alone with God. You may even forgo your favorite TV program just to spend time with Jesus!
- 5. By examining your walk of faith.** When you're following Jesus, your steps of faith will not always make sense to the world, to your friends, or to your family members, but you'll have a deep abiding peace that they are pleasing to God.
- 6. By examining the amount of time you spend in His Word.** As you follow Jesus, you will begin to hunger and long for His Word. Certain verses will jump off the pages of Scripture and burn into your heart. You'll hear a certain scripture at church, on the radio and in your own quiet time. You'll even begin to carry scripture cards in your pockets and post them on the refrigerator or the bathroom mirror!

For me, my decision to truly follow Jesus was a separate decision from my salvation experience. When I got saved, at that moment I accepted Christ as my Savior, but I did not give Him my life. I continued to live to please myself and my flesh. My decision to *follow* Jesus did come until years later.

How about you? Have you truly decided to follow Jesus?

How has your life changed since you decided to follow Him?

To recap, Jesus calls us to *follow* Him, not cut our own trail, or make our own path. We need to keep our eyes on our leader and He will personally show us the way. When I was little and afraid to do something I loved it when one of my older sisters would “go first” in order to show me that it was possible to accomplish whatever task lay before me. Jesus did that for us also. He showed us that it is possible to live as an on fire Christian in a dark oppressive world; that it’s possible to face grave temptations and come out victorious and that it is possible for the worst of sinners (of whom I am the chief) to become followers of Christ.

By Mary Kane

All rights reserved

Copyright 2011