

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Christianity: Being a Christian

Meeting with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/4/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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iFOLLOW

www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Being a Christian

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Learning Objectives

1. What are some problems with some of the traditional views of God?
2. In what ways did Jesus claim to represent God and God's way?
3. Can the cross be seen as a symbol for the Way, the Truth, and the Life?
4. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

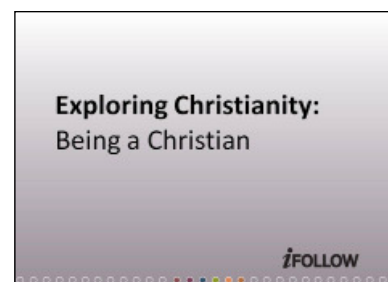
Content Outline

1. Introduction—God is watching
2. Jesus As The Revelation of God
3. The Significance of the Cross
4. Following Jesus
5. Conclusion

Background Material for the Presenter

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a parochial school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. A teacher made a note, and posted it on the apple tray, "Take only **one**. God is watching." Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One of the children wrote a note, "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

Interesting picture of God, isn't it! Sounds like the same picture many adults have; God is watching us and every little thing we do will come under judgment by God, so be very careful and be very obedient! It's amazing how often religious people use this kind of fear and guilt to motivate godly living.



iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

Exploring
Christianity:
Being a
Christian

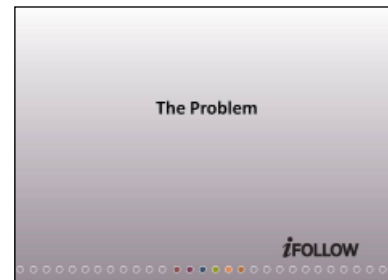
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The Problem

The problem is that this kind of religion leads to spiritual manipulation; looking for loopholes and ways to get around God which arise out of a pitifully small picture of God. The kids actually think they can outsmart God. “If we just keep God’s attention on the apples, He’ll forget about the cookies.” A fairly naïve and misguided belief.

No wonder nonreligious people have such a difficult time with religion. It appears so inauthentic, incongruent, negative, and at best, forced. They see religion as a human device to manipulate God or control God or create God into one’s own image. And on the flip side, they see religion as something powerful people use to manipulate and control other people in order to get their own way. Either option is distasteful and crude.

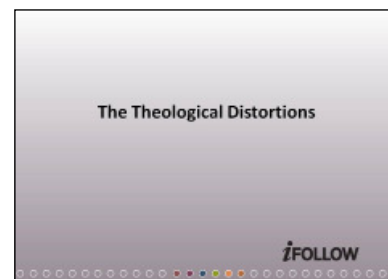
Ironically, this self-centered view of God has been used by Christians in talking about Jesus as the Savior and Son of God. Jesus is used as a form of manipulation with God. “Get God focused on Jesus and He’ll forget about us. Then we’ll stand a chance in the End.” The idea is, if God is watching the “apple” (Jesus) He can’t see the “cookies” (us). So just make sure you put the apple on God’s desk whenever you can (i.e. pray in Jesus’ name, use Jesus’ name as often as possible, believe that Jesus is your intercessor or advocate before God, that God doesn’t accept you unless you’re “in Jesus,” that when you come to God in Jesus’ name, God doesn’t see you, He sees only Jesus, so you’re acceptable to God that way, not on your own). Do whatever it takes to get God’s attention off you (if you want to stand a chance in the end). Or “wow” God with how good you are; get Him focused on your “Jesus-like” good works and performance so He doesn’t see the you inside, the “real” you. Either way, it’s all about using Jesus to distract God.



The Theological Distortions

There are several deep problems with this theology. One, Jesus is used as the manipulating “tool” for God’s acceptance. Two, Christian living degenerates into simply doing whatever is necessary to secure God’s acceptance and God’s gifts (namely, salvation and eternal life); Jesus is simply the tool to that end. Three, both views lead to a very self-centered way of living. It is all about us and getting “right” with God. That is the highest priority in life, which leaves the rest of life’s issues and needs to a secondary concern at best.

This is the way many people see Christianity. Is it surprising that they are negative about the Christian faith? They see it



as abdicating both personal and social responsibility and thus being inauthentic, irrelevant and even detrimental to effective living in our contemporary context.

But is this an accurate picture of what it means to be a genuine follower of Jesus? Is this what the way of Jesus is all about, or is it an unfortunate distortion created by well-meaning but misguided Christians? What does it really mean to be a true Christian? Let's allow Jesus Himself to answer that question.

Jesus as the Revelation of God

Jesus made a number of “I am” statements during His life. These are self-descriptive phrases that refer to His identity and purpose. Here's one of the major ones: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you really have known me, you will know who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!” (John 14:6-7, NLT)

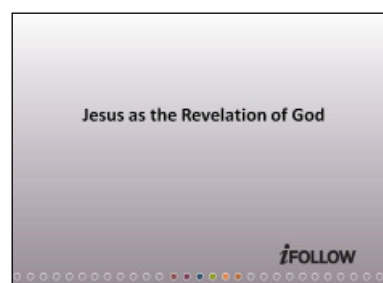
Notice the three ways Jesus describes himself: the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life**. What is He talking about? Is He saying that the only way to get to God is through Him? That there is only one way to God? Is this the kind of exclusivity that permeates the attitudes of so many Christians and turns off so many others?

If you read these two statements together, the idea Jesus is building is one of revelation and knowledge. Notice how He uses the word “know” several times. He's saying that one of His roles is to make God known, to reveal God and God's way of life, to show what the truth of life really is. The author who writes these words, John the disciple of Jesus, at the very beginning of this personal account of Jesus' life, calls Jesus “the Word of God” (John 1:1-3, 14). He's suggesting that Jesus' primary mission or purpose is to reveal God and what God is like. Jesus is the spoken words of God made flesh, the one who describes God as “grace and truth” (John 1:17). Jesus comes to live life God's way in order to show what that “way” is. “No one has ever seen God. But his only Son, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart; he has told us about him.” (John 1:18, NLT)

So Jesus is the human revelation of God. The question is, what did Jesus' life reveal God to be like? What is God's “way, truth, and life?”

Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life: John the disciple, writing his book about Jesus, remembers a radical and revealing scene involving Jesus and the twelve disciples. In Chapter 13 he describes it. The whole group has gathered together to celebrate the Jewish Passover in an upstairs room. (This is the evening before the day Jesus is

executed.) The normal practice is for a servant to enter the room and wash the guest's dirty feet before the meal. No servant shows up. The disciples look around the room un-



comfortable, wondering what to do. None of them moves toward the pitcher and basin. They each feel that is too demeaning.

John describes what happens next. “Then Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.” (John 13:5, NLT)

Imagine the shock waves reverberating through the room. The master, the Rabbi doing the washing! Unheard of. It’s a servant’s job, after all!

“After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, ‘Do you understand what I was doing? You call me “Teacher” and “Lord”, and you are right, because it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you ... You know these things; now do them! That is the way of blessing.” (John 13:12-17, NLT)

What is the “way” Jesus is both referring to and demonstrating? The way of unselfish service. The willingness to give yourself in meaningful ways to others. The path of humility and selflessness. Significantly, Jesus gave His life to others before He ever went to the cross. He lived a life of compassion and service to everyone, no matter what the condition of their lives or the status of their positions. Washing feet symbolized Jesus’ entire way of living.

And by doing life this way, He was making powerful statements about what God was really like, the truth about God. He once told the disciples: “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28, NLT)

Imagine how radical and revolutionary this view of divine and human interaction was. The Greeks viewed humans as placed on this earth to serve the gods. The Romans embraced a hierarchy of status in which the lower strata of population existed solely to serve the higher ones. But Jesus comes along and portrays the polar opposite. In God’s regime, God serves. God washes people’s feet. God acts in humble caring and compassion. God’s way is the path of selfless service. The truth about God is that God lives to love.

So in God’s world, real life, real living, centers around giving and serving. Jesus once said, “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.” (John 10:10, NLT)

And He went on to describe the kind of life He gives. Using the metaphor of sheep and those who watch the sheep, He contrasted the hired hand and the shepherd

(John 10:11-15). The hired hand, while watching the sheep and suddenly faced with personal danger from an attacking wolf, runs away. He quickly leaves the sheep in order to

save himself. He's only a hired hand with no personal stake in the sheep.

The shepherd, on the other hand, reacts quite differently. The shepherd has a personal stake in every sheep. Each one he knows by name. Each one belongs to him. So when danger appears, he refuses to run. He stands his ground and if need be lays down his life to protect them.

"I am the good shepherd," Jesus commented. "I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:14-15, NLT).

So what kind of life does Jesus reveal? What is God's way of life? A life that gives and serves completely unselfishly, a life that involves giving life extravagantly and even wastefully. God gives in order for others to enjoy the abundant life. Antithetically, the thief takes life, deprives others of life, destroys life. That's why Dr. Scott Peck, the renown psychiatrist, in his book *People of the Life*, notes that the word "evil" spelled backwards is "live." Evil is the diminishing of life. The thief's way. But Jesus reveals that God's way is all about enhancing life, giving life, strengthening life and that unselfish serving, self-sacrificing love is at the heart of true living.

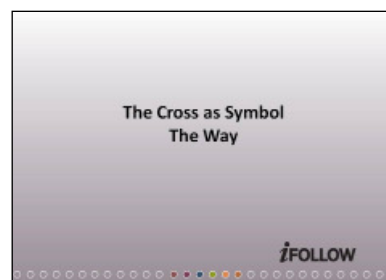
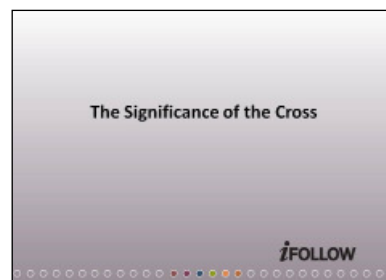
The Significance of the Cross

Through the centuries the cross has become one of the most recognized and used symbols in the world. People wear it around their necks, place it on churches, burn it in yards, sew it on flags and banners, kiss it, bow down to it, clutch it, hide from it, scorn it, worship it. Forms of the cross have symbolized everything from Jesus to the Nazis to the Ku Klux Klan. Crosses have been worn by people as diverse as Mother Theresa and Madonna. The banner of the cross was carried into bloody battle during the Crusades against the Muslims. No wonder there's so much misunderstanding of the cross and its true meaning. What does Jesus' cross really symbolize? What is its genuine significance?

Jesus said He was "the way, the truth, and the life." Let's see how those three identities are revealed in the Cross.

The Cross as Symbol—the Way

One of the most devoted and ardent followers of Jesus was Paul, a former fundamentalist Pharisee who was responsible for the imprisonment and deaths of many of the first Christians. After his miraculous conversion to Jesus,



Paul became one of the foremost spokesmen for the new movement often called “the way” of Jesus. He traveled the then-known world sharing the story of Jesus and teaching the way of Christ. He ultimately sacrificed his life for the cause. He was a truly passionate person.

In one of his most persuasive and systematic letters, sent to the Christian believers in Rome, he articulated the central meaning of Jesus’ death on the cross. Here’s one way he used to describe this significant symbol: “When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:6-8, NLT)

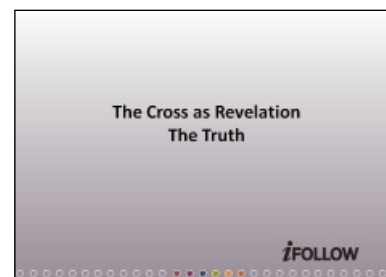
This perspective is a personal passion of Paul’s. His story centers on this meaning of the Cross; that God accepts us and embraces us, not because we’re so obedient and upright, but while we’re still stuck in self-centeredness and self-absorption, disinterested in God or even actively rebelling against God. The Cross is a symbol of that good news to Paul.

Paul knows. It was in the middle of his violent crusade against Christ’s followers (his life mission as a God-warrior to force everyone to subscribe to his views of God) that God revealed Himself to Paul and brought enlightenment to him about what he was really doing. “Why are you persecuting me?” God confronted him that day (Acts 9:4, NLT). Then God proceeded to breathe into Paul’s heart forgiveness and acceptance and a new vision for his life. And Paul was never the same again. No wonder he declared so passionately, “So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.” (Romans 5:11, NLT)

The Cross is forever a symbol of God’s way of grace, God’s embrace of all people no matter what their background or lifestyle or failures or rebellion or delusions or illusions. Jesus’ death on the cross portrays this counter-intuitive way of life in stark contrast to a world based upon conditional acceptance and measured value. The cross is a radical symbol of this good news that God is friends with everyone no matter what their religious views or lack of religion.

The Cross as Revelation—the Truth

So what does the Cross, the truth that Jesus gave up His life, reveal about God? What is the core truth behind it? Let’s let Jesus tell us in His own words: “This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:12--13, NLT)



Why did Jesus go to the cross? Why did He have to die? Did God need someone's blood to appease Him and so Jesus decided to shed His? Was there some mysterious sacrificial atonement that needed to happen for God to feel good about humans? Did Jesus' blood have to flow in order for God to redirect His anger away from the rebellious world; Jesus gets God's anger so the world can get God's love? Doesn't this make God out to be a kind of bloodthirsty, vengeful Ruler who demands the death of someone to be appeased? Doesn't this picture place violence at the center of God's plan to save the world?

It's noteworthy that the person recording Jesus' words above was the disciple called John who at one point in his life was infamously known, along with his brother James, as "sons of thunder." The boys had tempers, short fuses, quick to anger and vengefulness.

In fact, at one point during their journey with Jesus, when a Samaritan village refused to extend hospitality to their circle, they thundered, "Lord, should we order down fire from heaven to burn them up?" (Luke 9:54) It is like saying, "Let's nuke 'em, Lord! If they don't want you and us, they can go to hell!"

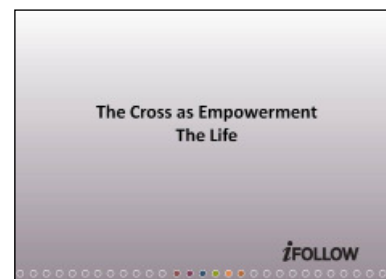
Jesus' immediate response to the sons of thunder was a rebuke (Luke 9:55). And some ancient manuscripts add Jesus saying, "You don't realize what your hearts are like. For the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Jesus is clear about His mission and the mission of the One He reveals: it's not about vengeance, revenge, coercion, anger or punishment. It is about life; saving life, giving life, building up life, even the lives of those who reject him.

So years later, when disciple John (the former son of thunder) is writing about Jesus and telling Jesus' story, he recalls Jesus' words: "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13, NLT). John now sees clearly that to Jesus, everyone is a friend because Jesus gave His life for anyone.

Jesus went to the cross to reveal the truth about God's love; that divine love knows no bounds, no limits, no conditions. God's kind of love gives unselfishly and sacrificially. No cost is too great for love.

The Cross as Empowerment—the Life

It's somewhat ironic that so many people choose to wear crosses on their bodies, especially considering both what the cross stands for and who the person wearing it is. In many cases it borders on the oxymoronic. Here's your quintessential rock star or Hollywood icon, decked out in so much "bling" they could single-handedly cancel third world debt. And yet dangling around their neck or tattooed on their arm is the cross. Somewhere along the way, the message gets blurred.



Is that what it means to be a Christian? Just show the cross somewhere on your body or use the right words? Or is it more than that, more core than that?

Here's the way John the disciple of Jesus describes it: "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us." (1 John 4:10--12, NLT)

This is a radical concept. The Cross is meant not only as a symbol and a revelation, it's also meant to be empowerment. Jesus' symbol and revelation of God's amazing embrace can end up being a life giver. The unselfish love God reveals through Jesus' death on the cross, in some mysterious way, is brought to life in us when we choose to immerse ourselves in that kind of Love.

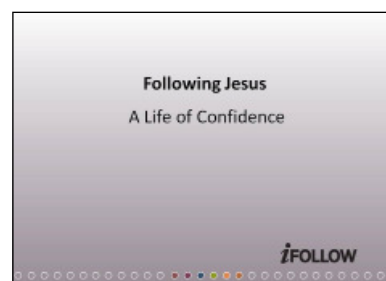
But maybe how that happens isn't so mysterious after all. A psychological truism states that what you think about, you become. Perhaps this is why Jesus goes to such great and sacrificial lengths with the cross. He knows that if people see it for what it is (an unprecedented demonstration of ultimate, selfless love from God) they will be drawn to God. Disciple John puts it this way: "We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love." (1 John 4:16, NLT)

What we are drawn to in our minds and hearts we become more like. Love gives birth to love. The more we're around real Love, the more we're drawn to that kind of love and the more we begin to live that kind of love. That's why Jesus wanted to show us such a powerful demonstration of God's love, so we could more easily trust God, knowing how God really feels about us and what God really wants for us. Love gives birth to love.

So the Cross ends up being more than just a symbol or a revelation. It can also empower what it symbolizes and reveals; unselfish and inclusive love. It both defines and facilitates the way to God's kind of life. If you wear the Cross, you're saying that you not only believe and value what It stands for, you're choosing to live it, too. The Way of the Cross is the Way of True Love and the Way of Real Life and the Way of Energy for that Life.

Following Jesus

So what does being a Jesus' follower look like? Herein there is much confusion and misunderstanding. After all, if all you knew about Jesus and God were what you saw in people who called themselves Christians, what picture would you have? Would it be positive, progressive, open-minded, inclusive, humble, and extravagantly compassionate? Or would it be exclusive, traditional, judgmental, critical, arrogant and self-absorbed? Or would it be a mix of the two?



What would you learn about Jesus and God by simply observing Christians?

Admittedly, no one, no matter what their views of life and religion, is perfect. No one lives in complete alignment with their cherished values. No one lives consistently in congruency. We all are challenged to “practice what we preach.” That seems to be a painful human reality. So we are hard put to have the audacity to judge others.

That said, however, how we live our lives does go a long way toward giving credibility (or not) to what we believe. And so it is significant that Christianity embraces much more than simply what a person believes and values about Jesus and God. Christianity (being a follower of Jesus) involves not only cherishing Jesus but especially cherishing Jesus’ way of living. Central to following Jesus is placing His values and what He came to reveal about God as the pattern for contemporary living.

So what should that look like? Let’s summarize it in two ways.

1. A Life of Confidence: One of the intriguing descriptions the disciple John (author of at least five books in the Bible) gives to himself is the disciple who often is leaning up close to Jesus, his head either on Jesus’ chest or shoulder (John 13:22-25). “The disciple Jesus loved” is his designation. Apparently, John was especially close to Jesus and therefore boldly loyal.

The night Jesus was arrested and sent to His execution, John is the one disciple who refuses to run away in fear and instead follows as closely as possible to Jesus. And years later, when John has been banished by the Roman authorities to a little island off the coast of Turkey, he documents (in the Bible document called “Revelation”) his visions of Jesus returning to earth at the end of time as the triumphant liberator.

In all his letters John writes with boldness and confidence, brimming with a sense of security from knowing Jesus, deeply experiencing His love and eagerly anticipating Jesus’ return. Here is one of those passages: “And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.” (1 John 4:17--18, NLT)

John writes these words facing a very uncertain future since the Roman authorities are actively persecuting Christians. And yet his words exude great confidence and lack of fear. He’s completely secure in his connection with God, unafraid of the future. He’s being empowered by his love with Jesus. He’s living in that love and the more he acknowledges it, relishes it and lives in it, the deeper and more complete that love becomes. And with every deepening comes greater confidence. He calls it “perfect love.”

The disciple known as “the one Jesus loved” ... the disciple who was often leaning up against Jesus’ chest so closely he could hear Jesus’ heart beat ... the disciple who, when Jesus was hanging on the cross with life violently being ripped away, stood at the foot of

the cross and heard Jesus say about his executioners, “Father, forgive them because they don’t know what they’re doing” ... the disciple who watched Jesus during the moments of his greatest suffering remember to provide for his mother by giving her to John and giving John to her ... this disciple experienced so intimately the unselfish and extravagant love of Jesus that he described it as “perfect love.” And it empowered him with absolute confidence and assurance.

Have you noticed the difference between people who are fearful and insecure and those who are confident? Who would you rather be around? Jesus’ followers are genuinely confident people, not because they have life all together, not because they’re perfect, not because they know it all, not even because everything always goes smoothly. They’re not arrogant. They’re not presumptuous. They aren’t intimidated by what others think of them or think they should be. They’re not insecure with having mystery and the unexplainable. They’re not afraid of differences of opinion. They’re not threatened by diversity. But they are secure: they know who they are and to whom they belong. They have complete confidence and assurance in God’s love for them and their love for God and their ultimate destiny.

Consequently, they can live with boldness, like the One they follow. They can serve others freely no matter what the cost, like Jesus. They can love sacrificially because they hold everything with an open hand. They don’t grasp tightly, they give extravagantly. Only free, confident, secure people can live like that; Jesus’ way of living!

Disciple John remembers clearly that night in the upper room when Jesus, Rabbi and Lord, took off his robe, put on the servant’s towel, picked up the pitcher and basin, and washed the disciples’ dirty feet. John got it when he later reflected on the scene and described how Jesus could do such a radical act of service and love:

“Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet.” (John 13:3-5, NLT)

Jesus revealed the key to serving boldly and unselfishly: being confident and secure in who you are and where you’re going and how God feels about you. Only the truly confident, who know they are completely embraced by God unconditionally, can unashamedly and courageously serve and love extravagantly.

2. A Life of Compassion: So what does it look like when followers of Christ serve and love like Jesus? Does it involve bombing abortion clinics in order to demonstrate the human sanctity of life? Does it involve gay bashing and violent protests against gay marriage in order to demonstrate the sanctity of marriage? Does it involve kicking people out of the church who have failed in order to demonstrate the purity of the church? Does it involve consigning people who don’t accept “the Truth” to eternal judgment in order to demonstrate the significance of correct doctrine? Does it involve fearing to befriend

people who don't believe like you in order to protect the safety of the church? Does it involve condemning AIDS as God's judgment on sin in order to demonstrate the holiness of God? What does it look like when Christ followers serve and love like Jesus?

Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu leader who created a global movement of social transformation through nonviolence, once said, "I love your Christ. It's Christians I can't stand." Isn't he actually describing what should be considered an oxymoron? How can there be a disconnect between Jesus and the followers of Jesus? Aren't they supposed to be one and the same in character, principle and behavior? Shouldn't the Gandhis of the world be able to love Christ's followers because they in turn love Christ and live like Him? Loving one is loving the other.

The disciple John understood this perfectly. So he challenged the believers of his day, "We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions." (1 John 3:16--18, NLT)

The Marks of a Jesus Follower

What kind of behavior do followers of Jesus exhibit? How do people act who are truly following Jesus?

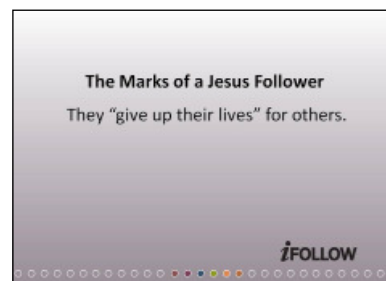
1. They "give up their lives" for others. What does that mean? Must you literally die to give your life for a person? No. John is describing Jesus' way of life, a willingness to live out the fullness of Himself by unselfish giving. Long before Jesus hung on the cross He had already given up His life for people.

He willingly crossed national, religious, ethnic and social barriers to bring healing and help to powerless, hurting, and marginalized people.

He willingly stained his reputation by associating with "sinners," people considered to be under God's judgment because of their lifestyle or failures.

He ate meals with anybody who was interested, high and low, "in" and "out," famous and infamous, the successful and the losers.

He showed the value and worth of women, children, the chronically ill, the disabled, and ethnic minorities.



He regularly interrupted his busy and strategic schedule to pay attention to people in need.

He refused to kick off of his leadership team those whom he knew would fail him miserably.

Jesus “gave up his life” boldly, creatively and extravagantly over and over again long before he went to the cross. That, too, writes John the disciple, is what Jesus’ followers do.

2. Using whatever resources you have to show compassion to those who are suffering and in need is exhibiting Christ-like action for that person.

Jesus’ story of the good Samaritan illustrates this kind of compassion (Luke 10:30-38). When a Samaritan traveler on business happens upon a severely wounded Jew who’s been robbed and beaten up, the Samaritan immediately uses all his resources to show compassion: he risks personal safety to stop and help, he uses his personal supplies to clean the wounds and bandage the man up, he puts the wounded man on his donkey and takes him to the closest

Inn, he pays for the man’s room in the Inn for as long as needed and any potential medical care, and then he returns later to check on him. And to do all this, the Samaritan has to willingly cross multiple boundaries and taboos, risking his entire reputation with the folks back home. Not a great business plan! But he does this because he’s motivated, as Jesus specifically states, by “compassion.” Whether this man knew Christ or not, he was, by definition, a follower of the way of Christ. Today’s Christ followers offer intentional and bold compassion with whatever they possess, too.

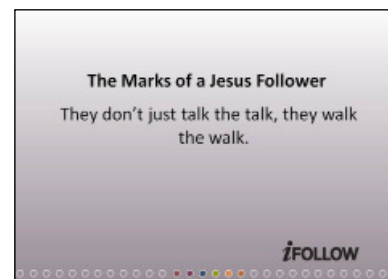


3. They don’t just talk the talk, they walk the walk. Love in action. Here’s the kind of practical and unselfish love Jesus describes his followers enthusiastically giving:

“I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.”

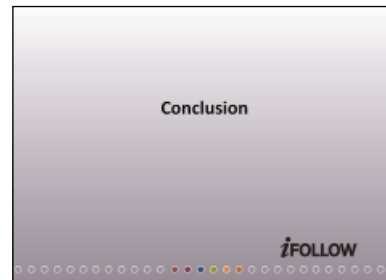
Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’” (Matthew 25:35-40, NLT)



Conclusion

Imagine what the world would be like if people lived as Jesus did? Followers of Jesus, motivated by their personal experience of God's love, insist on pressing selfless and extravagant love into the darkest, most broken places of the world, no matter what the cost, no matter what the obstacles, no matter what the man-made boundaries. They do it compassionately, boldly, creatively, and persistently because it's what Jesus did and they follow him. His love compels them and empowers them. That's what it means to be a Christian.



Remember the opening story about the children lined up for lunch in the cafeteria of their religious school? Imagine the atmosphere created among the kids if the sign above the bowl full of apples read, "Take as many as you want. God is watching." And then at the end of the line, above the tray of cookies, another sign said, "Take as many as you want. God is watching these, too." And at each station, the teachers were there smiling and laughing as they gave an abundance of apples and cookies to every student. What picture of God would these children begin to develop? What example of living would the teachers (the God followers) be exhibiting?

Would that be the kind of environment you'd enjoy spending time in? Would those be the kind of people you'd like to hang around and maybe even help serve with?

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant's Notes
2. The Cross as Symbol of the Way, the Truth and the Life



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Additional Resources

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Discussion Questions

1. Share some of the different pictures of God that you've heard or seen from people. God is like ... Do you agree or disagree with these ideas?
2. What kind of life did Jesus come to reveal? Or how was God's way of life described by Jesus? Did his actions match his words?
3. Share the meaning you have understood to be attached to the symbol of the cross, in the past. Has it been a generally positive or negative symbol for you?
4. If you live around Christians, what would you want them to be like? Describe the qualities and characteristics you would prefer them to possess.

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Group Activities

Activity No. 1

Purpose: To consider more deeply the idea of the cross as symbolizing “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Preparation: Collect several celebrity magazines such as *People*, as well as some publications with pictures which show people acting out compassion, such as magazines and newsletters from ministries and charities of all kinds. Put these on tables with scissors, glue, and large sheets of paper or poster board, one or two sheets for each table.

On the board or flipchart put the following quotes from the presentation:

1. The cross is forever a **symbol** of God’s **way** of grace, God’s embrace of all people no matter what their background or lifestyle or failures or rebellions or delusions or illusions.
2. The cross is the **revelation** of the **truth** that divine love knows no bounds, no limits, no conditions; God’s kind of love gives unselfishly and sacrificially. No cost is too great for love.
3. The cross is an **empowerment of life** in that the unselfish love God reveals through Jesus’ death on the cross, in some mysterious way, is brought to life in us when we choose to immerse ourselves in that kind of Love.

Assignment: Divide the group among tables. They are to use the materials on the table to create the shape of a cross using a collage of pictures of people that illustrate the three statements that are posted.

Debrief: Let each table share their completed poster. Spend some time discussing feelings and reactions.

Time: Allow at least 30 minutes for the groups working at the tables to make their crosses. Allow about 30 minutes for sharing and discussion.

Handout 1

What it Means to be a Christian

Participant Notes

1. God is Watching

What are the theological problems inherent in the view that “we’d better be good, or God will get us!”

2. Jesus’ Role in Revealing God

A. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you really have known me, you will know who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!” (John 14:6-7, NLT)

B. Jesus is the _____.

3. Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life

A. “After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, ‘Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ [Rabbi] and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you ... You know these things, now do them! That is the way of blessing.” (John 13:12-17, NLT)

B. What is the Way Jesus is talking about? _____

C. “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28, NLT)

D. Contrast the picture of God of the Greeks, the Romans, and Jesus.

- E. “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.” (John 10:10, NLT)

4. The Cross as Symbol of the Way

A. “When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:6-8, NLT)

B. Paul’s story

C. The Meaning: _____

5. The Cross as Revelation of the Truth

A. “This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:12-13, NLT)

B. John’s story

C. The Meaning: _____

6. The Cross as Empowerment for Life

A. “This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.” (1 John 4:10-12, NLT)

B. Love _____.

C. “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.” (1 John 4:16, NLT)

D. The Meaning: _____

7. What it Means to Follow Jesus

A. A Life of _____

“And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.” (1 John 4:17-18, NLT)

Jesus’ example: “Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet.” (John 13:3-5, NLT)

What gave Jesus his confidence? _____

B. A Life of _____

“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.” (1 John 3:16-18, NLT)

C. Principles of Following Jesus:

“I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.”

“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’” (The words of Jesus in Matthew 25:35-40, NLT)

Handout 2

The Cross as Symbol of the Way, Truth, and Life

The Cross as Symbol—“the Way”

The Cross is forever a symbol of God’s way of grace, God’s embrace of all people no matter what their background or lifestyle or failures or rebellions or delusions or illusions. Jesus’ death on the cross portrays this counter-intuitive Way of life in stark contrast to a world based upon conditional acceptance and measured value. The Cross is a radical symbol of this good news that God is friends with everyone no matter what their religious views or lack of religion.

The Cross as Revelation—“the Truth”

Jesus went to the cross to reveal the truth about God’s love—that divine love knows no bounds, no limits, no conditions—God’s kind of love gives unselfishly and sacrificially. No cost is too great for love.

The Cross as Empowerment—“the Life”

Love gives birth to love. The more we’re around real Love, the more we’re drawn to that kind of love and the more we begin to live that kind of love. That’s why Jesus wanted to show us such a powerful demonstration of God’s love – so we could more easily trust God, knowing how God really feels about us and what God really wants for us. Love gives birth to love.

So the Cross ends up being more than just a symbol or a revelation. It can also empower what it symbolizes and reveals, unselfish and inclusive love. It both defines and facilitates the way to God’s kind of life. If you wear the Cross, you’re saying that you not only believe and value what It stands for, you’re choosing to live it, too. The Way of the Cross is the Way of True Love and the Way of Real Life and the Way of Energy for that Life.

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