



simply follow



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by
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Introduction

Imagine if you were to simply follow Jesus. What would that look like? How would you do it? Who else would you want to take that journey with?

What if you could follow Jesus and not get bogged down or burdened with human-made religion? What if there were other people who wanted to explore with you what it means to follow Jesus?

This book is an introduction to what the Bible says about following Jesus. It is also a work in progress on how we can follow Jesus together, as the people in the New Testament did.

“The Short Version” is simple, functional and lists key concepts on one page. “The Expanded Version” provides sections from the Bible that relate to those key concepts.

Please read “Simply Follow” with an open mind and an open heart. Feel free to send comments, suggestions and real-life experiences that can make this book better.

think

believe

do

For the individual: The principles in this book – taken straight from the Bible – are essential elements for following Jesus. Asking God to show us what he wants us to “think, believe and do”, then living it, will produce spiritual health and growth.

For groups: Envision hungry people, interested people, the convinced and the curious, all of whom wonder what it would mean to simply follow Jesus... period. The principles on the following pages are intended to help interested people pursue Jesus’ mission for us to make disciples. When we come together we look to the Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide our interaction. In that process, we will discover how God wants us to live life together.

Enjoy the journey...

• Part 1: The Short Version •

The Mission

We want to discover what it means to simply follow Jesus, right here – right now, together. The foundational idea is to ask what God wants us to **think, believe** and **do** according to the Bible, then live it. Spiritual growth happens best when we are on a shared quest - seeking and learning together about being & making disciples.

Core Values

- Mutual Respect
- Integrity
- Love for God
- Love for people
- Progress, not perfection

Guiding Principles

Move forward. Here. Now.

For yourself

- Follow Jesus
- Walk, then talk
- Spiritual Disciplines
- Principles, not laws
- Truth above all

For interaction with others

- Go
- Make disciples
- Stay focused
- Travel light
- Stay connected

The Gathering

When the New Testament disciples met, they would:

Typically gather in someone's house	(Colossians 4.15; Romans 16.5)
Learn the apostles' teaching	(Acts 2.42; John 8.31,32)
Share a meal (with "communion")	(Acts 2.42; 1Corinthians 11.17-32)
Fellowship	(Acts 2.42; 1John 1.3)
Pray	(Acts 2.42; Acts 1.14)
Sing, teach, prophesy, etc. as the Holy Spirit led them	(1Corinthians 14.26,40; 1Corinthians 12.7-10)

The early disciples of Jesus made a real difference in their time. We would do well to learn how they lived for Jesus and do the same in our time.

Following Jesus is the **way of life** seen in the New Testament. It's not just meetings, it's how we live life together, as a spiritual extended family. (Acts 5.20; 1Peter 1.18; Ephesians 4.17-24)

• Part 2: The Slightly Expanded Version •

The full version of Simply Follow with Bible verses is at:

www.livewickmedia.com/simple_follow/

The Mission

We want to discover what it means to simply follow Jesus, right here – right now, together. The foundational idea is to ask what God wants us to **think, believe** and **do** according to the Bible, then live it. Spiritual growth happens best when we are on a shared quest - seeking and learning together about being & making disciples.

Core Values

Mutual Respect

- Extend respect to other people, expect respect in return.
- Disrespect is not tolerated.

Integrity

- We want to be unmixed in our commitment to follow Jesus.
- We want to become more consistent, as we endeavor to live truth-centered at all times.

Love for God

- God has forever moved toward us, in love, for our good.
- Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love toward us.
- We love Him because he first loved us.

Love for people

- We are loved by God, always. This love we have from God enables us to love others as Jesus loves.
- His love in us overflows to others.

Progress, not perfection

- Growth as a follower of Jesus is progressive, not instantaneous.

Guiding Principles

Our hands are used to illustrate these principles and make them easier to remember.

Move forward. Here. Now. (open hand – open to God, receptive to his lead)

- That's all you ever can do.
- Begin seeking truth, asking God to guide you.
- Don't sit and wait for a vision or some other custom-made provision for you.
- Seek and you will find.

For yourself (first hand)

Follow Jesus (index finger – pointing the way)

Follow Jesus –

- ... and others as they follow Jesus.
- No human should be given absolute authority in all areas of your life.
- Only Jesus is Lord; humans are brothers, sisters... even mentors or teachers. They are not Lord.

Follow Jesus –

- Following entails action; the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk only.
- Jesus leads us; his Word and Spirit guide our lives every day.
- We gladly invest our lives each day according to God's priorities, not our own best thinking.

Walk, then talk (middle finger – the longest one; action, not just words)

- Living the truth is part of understanding the truth.
- Theological discussion should never be a substitute for obeying God's directions.
- Remember: we are focused on what we are to think, believe and do as we simply follow.

Spiritual Disciplines (ring finger – most important relationship; cultivating it)

- Spiritual disciplines are vital to growing in our relationship with the Lord.
 - Study • Meditation
 - Prayer • Action
 - Serving others

(other disciplines are learned as well)

Principles, not laws (little finger – may seem small, but it's important)

- For example, God wants us to pray. The amount of time, time of day, etc. are not mandated in Scripture.
- We avoid comparing ourselves with others to see if they measure up, and vice versa.

Truth above all (thumb – allows us to grasp and hold what matters)

- Remember there is a big, thick black line between truth and opinion.
- There is a lot of very clear scripture; focus there. See the less clear in light of the more clear.
- Understand that you will be learning and growing for your entire life.
- Being "vague" or "confused" are sometimes ways to hide fear or laziness.

For interaction with others (second hand)

Go (index finger – pointing out to the world)

- Jesus said "Go into all the world".
- Everyone has a sphere of influence to "go into" and take the gospel to people.

Make disciples (index & middle fingers held together - interactive growth)

- This is **the** mission that Jesus gave his followers - to make disciples.
- He sent them out two by two, not alone. Being and making disciples is not a solo effort.
- Where 2 or 3 gather in Jesus' name, he is there.

Stay focused (ring finger – stay true to Jesus and his mission for us)

- Jesus committed his life to us, we have committed ours to him.
- Stay mindful of our relationship with him and of the mission he has given us.

Travel light (little finger – can't carry a lot with it through life)

- Don't carry grudges, bitterness or other relational baggage.
- Don't love money or things. Don't be consumed with things that will one day burn.
- Life is a vapor. Invest it, don't just spend it.

Stay connected (thumb – touches all the other fingers; we need each other)

- God calls us to join his family, army, body... all of which have interconnected parts working together.
- We need each other to grow up healthy and strong as disciples of Jesus.

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The Gathering

What we do at the gathering

The bottom line for any gathering is: prayerfully make plans and be led by the Holy Spirit. "Plans" includes any ideas we have about what is going to happen when we meet. All of our time together is yielded to God for whatever he wants us to do.

In these gatherings you will find that we:

Typically gather in someone's house (Col 4.15; Rom 16.5)

You don't have to meet in a house (or apartment), but it's how the early disciples typically did it, it's free, feels like real life, includes a kitchen and refrigerator, and enables new gatherings to start easily.

Learn the apostles' teaching (Ac 2.42; John 8.31,32)

It's what the first believers embraced, believed and used to revolutionize the world around them!

Share a meal, with communion (Ac 2.42; 1Co 11.17-32)

We keep the meal simple and easily reproducible. The bread and wine or "communion" aspect keeps us connected to the body and blood of Jesus, which are central to the gospel.

Fellowship (Ac 2.42; 1John 1.3)

We share a common relationship with God, and each other. That is the basis of fellowship.

Pray (Ac 2.42; Acts 1.14)

We pray for each other and with each other.

Sing, teach, prophesy, etc. as the Holy Spirit leads us (1Co 14.26,40; 1Co 12.7-10)

The gathering is an important part of growing and developing spiritually. We welcome all the various ways the Holy Spirit has gifted people and ministers through us all at those times. However, following Jesus is the **way of life** seen in the New Testament. It's not just meetings, it's how we live life together, as a spiritual extended family. (Acts 5.20; 1Peter 1.18; Eph 4.17-24)

Some final thoughts...

On living life together – As important as the gatherings are, continuing to interact with one another outside of the gatherings is essential for integrating what we learn into our daily lives. So, in addition to the gathering already described - meet for coffee, work on a car, go camping, pray for each other, play music, etc. Life together is not just about receiving, it is about giving to others, being there for others and them being there for you. Being part of a focused gathering/meeting once, twice or even five times a week is valuable, but it's what we think, believe and do day by day that truly shapes us.

Some people have a group of friends they already live life with. They know each other well and are close. When someone in that group of friends begins to follow Jesus, or even to explore what it would mean to follow Jesus, their friends will probably know about it soon. Their conversations need to have the true gospel in them, not extraneous religious clutter! It is vital that people seeking truth hear and see the true gospel with no human-made distractions attached.

In our day it seems a lot of people do not have many close friends. As followers of Jesus pray for others and look for ways to be kind and friendly, the Lord will provide opportunities to get to know some isolated, lonely people. When they learn that there is a group of people who are truly interested in authentic life together they may be drawn to that community, then to Jesus.

On leadership – In the New Testament, leadership is not imposed on people by force. Leadership is done by living as a disciple of Jesus, maturing and becoming willing to serve others by helping them grow. The words "elder", "overseer" and "shepherd" are used to describe leaders among the disciples of Jesus. In the Bible, there are specific qualifications for being an elder and most deal with what you do, not just what you know.

On service or ministry – People who are following Jesus should seek to share time, energy and money to take care of each others' needs. They can also work together to serve others who are not connected with them or may not be following Jesus. Some options include: painting a widow's house, helping a single mom or dad (with time to themselves, car and home maintenance), taking groceries to a family in need, collecting clothes for redistribution, prison/hospital/nursing home visitation... and the like.

Expending time, energy and even money to benefit someone else is service or ministry. Jesus and his followers in the New Testament loved God and loved the people they were around. They looked for opportunities to speak the truth, to care for widows and orphans, to feed the poor, to love each other, to be good citizens, to live at peace with others, to heal, to set captives free, to embrace the social outcast, to lead by living, to make the most of life every single day... all borne out of a real, vibrant relationship with Jesus. I'll take that any day.

On gatherings - Being led by the Holy Spirit is key to having your gatherings be full of truth and life. You have to learn to be led as you go - together. As with other aspects of life in Christ, everyone serving, learning and growing is encouraged and important.

For the entire time you are gathered, practice the Guiding Principles and Core Values. They apply in all of life, including gatherings.

Learning the "apostles teaching" - The following are recommended as general principles for the "apostles' teaching" portion of a gathering.

- The author is a strong proponent of verse-by-verse study through books of the Bible (especially the New Testament). This approach yields both understanding of the book, and of the verses in context. Try this approach for 2/3 of your gatherings for 6 months, then tell me what you think. Galatians is a good book to begin with.
- The Holy Spirit may lead the group into a multi-week, verse-by-verse study through a book of the New Testament or a topical study. Either approach allows people to bring related questions and comments to each gathering. Reading the same Scripture ahead of time aids discovery.
- The Holy Spirit may lead you to show up with no particular plan at times. It's good to have variety.
- Go around the room for final thoughts, so everyone has an opportunity to speak or to pass.
- No trying to show up other people's ignorance or otherwise disrespecting someone's attempt to learn.
- No deliberately distracting from the topic or text at hand. If you think God may want the conversation to go in another direction, submit that idea to the group.
- No convoluted discussions about Bible minutia; do those in another setting if you must do them at all.
- No comparative religion arguments (we aren't here to debate world religions).
- No rambling on and on about what this person or that book says. It's fine to briefly reference others, but please share your thoughts.
- How much teaching or discussion is enough? It all depends on whether life and truth are being spoken and absorbed, or not. Learn together when it's time to stop.
- Remember we are focused on making disciples, not just philosophers or Bible scholars.
- Always ask, "What are we to **think, believe** and **do** based on the scripture we have read?" This will help keep your interaction substantive, meaningful and relevant to life here and now.

Prayer for one another, personal ministry, singing, etc. – We seek to follow the Holy Spirit's leading whether in prayer, singing, words of wisdom, healing or

other gifts of God's Spirit as he wills. These times help us understand the reality of Christ living in us and through us.

Please, no:

- Putting anyone on the spot. All are welcome to speak, but never called on or required to.
- Using the gathering to recruit for this event or that cause.
- Using the gathering to recruit for business ventures.

These activities make people feel "pounced on" and reluctant to return. They don't reflect why we come together.

On bigger groups – From time to time, it's fine to have a lot of people involved in various communities come together. You could meet others from around your area, sing, eat, talk, play, etc. This 'cross pollination' can be helpful for meeting new people and getting insight into what God is doing in their lives. These events would be supplemental to all the other life activity that you share.

"Go and make disciples"

We must always grow those among us and go look for the spiritually hungry and interested who want to seek and find what it means to simply follow Jesus.

We are ever reaching and expanding, for them...

think

believe

do

Simply Follow is a book, a set of concepts, and a starting place for how to live as followers of Jesus.

Simply Follow is not a nonprofit organization and therefore cannot receive donations.

You are welcome to contact the author at Livewick@cox.net or via LivewickMedia.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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