

LIVING LIKE JESUS

by Phillip Eichman



21ST CENTURY
CHRISTIAN

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Introduction

The followers of Jesus are called by various names in the New Testament—disciples, believers, even saints, but the most important one is Christian. We are not entirely certain how the name originated, only that it identifies us with Christ and shows our allegiance to Him.

To be a Christian is simply to be like Jesus. It is to be His follower and to be like Him in the way that we think, act, and live. In this study we will look at some different aspects of Jesus' life and ministry and also how we can develop these same characteristics in our own lives as we become more like Him.

About the Author

Phillip Eichman has been a teacher most of his adult life. He holds master's and doctoral degrees in biology and was a biology professor for more than thirty years. He also completed master's degrees in Bible and ministry at Harding University and has taught Bible courses in Christian schools and served as a Bible class teacher and part-time minister. He is now retired and lives with his wife, Nancy, in South Carolina where he enjoys spending time studying and writing. Phillip is also the author of *The Gospel of John (Part 1)*, *The Gospel of John (Part 2)*, and *Letters from Paul: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* in the FLEX Adult Bible Study series.



Lesson 1

Living a New Life

Matthew 4:12–17; Matthew 4:18–22;
John 3:1–15; John 10:7–10

Key Verse:

**I came that they may have life and have it abundantly
(John 10:10b).**



WARM UP

I remember a young man who described to me how he became a Christian. “I knew that I had to change my life,” he explained. “I had to quit drinking and being around certain people. It all seems a little strange. I used to go out for a few beers. Now I just have coffee with my friends.”

As this young man understood, if we are going to live like Jesus, then we are going to need to change our lives. This will not be a minor adjustment either, but rather a major change in the way that we think, act, and live.



WORK OUT

A change of heart (Matthew 4:12–17)

In this passage we see the earliest example of Jesus’ teaching:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v. 17). There are two important points in his message. The first is that something new is coming.

The Jewish people had practiced their religion for centuries and believed that they were God’s true kingdom. Both Jesus and John the Baptist before him (Matthew 3:1–2), however, taught that this was about to change. There was something new about God’s kingdom that was about to happen. John the Baptist prepared the way and Jesus’ life and ministry made the changes a reality.

The second important point in Jesus’ teaching is the emphasis upon repentance. This had also been a part of John the Baptist’s teaching, and here we see that Jesus also preached repentance.

Repentance is more than just being sorry for doing wrong. Repentance involves a change of heart, a new life, and a new way of living. It is turning away from sin and toward God. It is leaving the old way of living and beginning a new way of life. The translation of verse 17 in the Easy-to-Read Version makes this clear: “Change your hearts and lives, because God’s kingdom is now very near.”

Follow me (Matthew 4:18–22)

Among Jesus’ earliest disciples were two pairs of brothers: Peter and Andrew and James and John. One day Jesus said to them, “Follow me” (v.19). As Jesus spoke, each one dropped everything and walked away, turning his back on his job, his family, his friends, and his home, to follow this traveling carpenter turned teacher.

Jesus was not inviting them for a leisurely walk along the lake-shore, but rather to become His disciples. These men had probably heard Jesus teaching previously, but still they knew little about Him at this point. They did know enough about Him to realize that Jesus’ call was not something to be taken lightly. Until then they had worked as fishermen; after this they were followers of Jesus. Each one left behind things that had previously been of value. There is no

indication of hesitation or second thoughts. They simply put their entire trust in this relatively unknown individual, and in doing so, they have left us with an example of faith in action.

What faith it must have taken to walk away from those nets. Does Jesus ask any less of us today? I think not. It would probably not be practical for all of us to give up our jobs and homes, but the commitment required to follow Jesus is no less. Like those first disciples, we must be willing to give up whatever it takes to put Jesus first in our lives. Later in His teaching, Jesus used a graphic image to illustrate this commitment: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).

Today, we may use the expression "carry a cross" as a figure of speech to refer to a difficult or unpleasant experience. The original listeners of Jesus would have fully understood His meaning. The cross was the means of Roman execution and the one who carried the cross was the condemned prisoner. It was a one-way trip with no turning back. Jesus was using the expression here in a somewhat figurative sense, but His meaning was serious. To take up a cross means to be totally committed and to give up whatever is necessary to follow Jesus (Luke 14:33).

A new birth (John 3:1–15)

Nicodemus was a leader in the community, and normally, people would have looked up to him as an example of religious commitment. So it must have come as a shock when Jesus told him that he had it all wrong and needed to start over. What Jesus actually told him was that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3).

As you might expect, Nicodemus did not have a clue what Jesus was talking about. Explaining further, Jesus said that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (v. 5).

A new birth, a new beginning, a new life—all of these are appealing, especially to those who have messed up their lives. That includes all of us. Some have made bigger mistakes than others, but we have all messed up in one way or another.

Living like Jesus begins with this new birth. Some people try to avoid seeing baptism in this passage, but it isn't possible. John the Baptist had come baptizing people. Jesus also taught the need for baptism and was baptized Himself as an example. Shortly after Jesus' return to heaven, His disciples began to teach the need for baptism.

In baptism we receive forgiveness of sins and a hope of eternal life. Baptism is also symbolic of the new birth that Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus. In baptism we are identified as a follower of Jesus and can begin at that point to live a life like His.

An abundant life (John 10:7–10)

Not only did Jesus promise a new birth and a new life, He also promised life that is full or abundant. What did Jesus mean here? What is life to the “fullest” as some versions translate this word?

The Christian life is a rich and full life, but Jesus was speaking more of life to come than our present existence. It is true that Christians enjoy fellowship with other Christians, forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt, and hope in the hereafter, but Jesus was not guaranteeing that those who follow Him would necessarily receive an abundance of material blessings. We live in an affluent society, but that is not always true for all followers of Jesus. Past history and what we know of our world today shows us that Christians often do not live in material abundance.

Jesus more frequently used the word *life* to refer to the life to come rather than physical earthly life. So when Jesus spoke of an abundant life, He was referring primarily to eternal life rather than blessings in this present life. In that sense, the word *abundant* describes a life that is eternal or never ending.



Living like Jesus is never easy. It is, in fact, the most difficult thing that you will ever do. Perhaps that is because to *live* like Jesus, you must live *for* Jesus and not for yourself. In one of His most paradoxical sayings, Jesus put it this way: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). Finding and losing, losing and finding— isn’t Jesus a little mixed up here? It certainly may seem that way at first. In reality, however, those who have whatever they want and live only for themselves will never need Jesus. And if you don’t need Jesus, then you will never find Him. It is only in losing yourself in serving Jesus and living like Him that you will find true meaning in your life and the happiness that is so hard to find.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you explain *repentance* in your own words? Why is this so important if we are trying to live like Jesus?
2. How could the “kingdom of heaven” be near while the Jewish people were already in God’s kingdom? In what ways did Jesus change this?
3. Does Jesus require any less of us than He did His first disciples? What are some things that we may need to leave behind in following Jesus?
4. How could someone fail to see baptism as a part of the “new birth”?
5. Read Romans 6:1–12. How does Paul’s explanation of baptism relate to living a new life?

6. We often think of the “abundant life” that Jesus promised as eternal life. In what ways is the present Christian life also abundant?