

Follow Me

Follow Me series #1

by Chris Famisaran

Good morning, everybody. I pray you're feeling warm enough. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father in heaven, as we now begin a new series entitled, Follow Me, leading guidance, Lord, spark our minds, provoke us in our hearts and our minds to take the lessons that we can apply to our lives daily. In Jesus' name, amen.

I'd like to do a thought experiment that Sky Jathani. I think his name is Sky Jathani. Yeah. Shared in a book. He writes, there are two leaders that we can choose. Leader A or leader B. Leader A. For instance, leader A lifted an entire nation in his time of despair. He mobilized his people against unimaginable odds with a clear vision and an inspiring passion. He launched a movement that has impacted literally everyone alive even to today. And he set in motion an industrial and a scientific revolution that produced, helped to produce the first computer, the first jet airplane, began human exploration of space and unlock the mystery of nuclear energy. Almost every aspect of the modern world has in one way or another, been influenced by this man. By the time he died at the age of 56, Everyone on the planet for the most part knew who he was. In contrast, Leader B lived during the same era. In fact, he died just 21 days before Leader A died. But his life is very different. At the height of his influence, Leader B ran a school with just 100 students. He wrote a few books, but he wasn't widely or highly regarded. He was beloved by his friends and his family and had a reputation for being both intelligent and faithful. But at the time of his death, almost no one really knew who he was or his name. And most considered his life, including himself, his work, unfulfilled. So given the choice, would you A, would you rather, who would you rather look after and study? Would you would you prefer to attend a leadership conference for leader A, who gives a big, huge keynote address? Or maybe would you rather go with B? somebody may be in a quiet room, be able to ask questions, get answers. Would you rather go with leader A or B? How many want to go for A?

Some of you maybe know where this is going. How many of you want to go with B? All right, those of you who chose A, you chose Hitler. If you chose B, you chose Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Anybody know who Bonhoeffer is? Famous German theologian who actually opposed Hitler, tried to help get rid of Hitler, and was caught and put in a concentration camp and died just days before the camp was liberated. Tragic story. He was engaged. He was a good man. He was training pastors to do the Lord's work. But he realized that Hitler was somebody who could not he could not follow, could not get behind.

Leadership. Anywhere you go, there is leadership. Good leadership or bad leadership. In your own work. At home. Even at church, there is leadership and leadership influences. An organization is a reflection of the leadership. Now, when we think about leadership, what is leadership? What do people look for in a leader? Some may say boldness, power, authority. That might be something that they immediately think of. And is leadership earned and trusted, or is it just expected? The nuts and bolts of it is it's earned. It's built by trust. You can respect a person because of their position and maybe their assignment doesn't mean you like them. Doesn't mean you're gonna work hard for them. You could do the bare minimum. I've asked this question before, how many of you have worked for a difficult boss? You respect that boss, you do as they ask, but are you gonna give that? 100%, you'll do what's expected. But a good boss, a good leader, somebody that you would follow, you would do anything for them. See the difference? What do we look for in a leader? A good leader will have humility to know, to not press hard, to know when to stop, to be able to listen, but also has courage, defends, takes action. Obviously, things that we look forward and we can see in the life of Jesus. Was Jesus not humble? Was Jesus not caring? Was he not encouraging? Didn't he find, didn't he stand up to fight for what was right? Jesus, in many ways, was a shepherd. And so we find that we're going to go through some of these verses. We may not get to all of them, but I just want you to be able to, for those of you perhaps who are following along online, just take note of these if you want to stop and screenshot this.

But I'd like to go to Matthew chapter 4, 18 through 22. We find here that God sought and found the disciples. So Matthew chapter four, we're going to realize

that God sought and found the disciples. Okay, we all there? Chapter four? All right, let's go to verse 18.

And it says, this is when Jesus calls the first disciples. As Jesus was walking beside the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother, Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

"Come what? Come follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once, they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

Now on paper we can read this. Okay, Jesus goes and he calls Peter, Andrew, James and John. And they follow him. Cause they're supposed to, right? It's Jesus. What I, one of the things that I wonder though is What happened in their hearts and their minds that they could see that this was somebody that they needed to follow? Maybe they had already heard about Jesus when they heard about him. They said, okay, it's somebody that we should follow But think about especially James and John where they were at. What were they doing? They were tending what? To the nets and the boats of their father When Jesus comes along and he says come follow me And they leave their father behind What are they really saying? They're choosing to live a new life. As good faithful sons, they should have stayed with their father, help care for him. But something about Jesus was different. And Jesus says, hey, please, I want to come and teach you. Learn from me. And so Jesus was a leader, obviously, and he says, again, follow me. A big decision.

Now, if we go to Matthew chapter 16 verses 24 through 26, Matthew chapter 16 verses 24 through 26. Jesus kind of shares a little bit more about what's to be expected if you're going to follow me. 24 through 26. And he says, then Jesus said to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple must what? Deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange

for their soul? And so when Jesus says to deny themselves and take up their cross? Was this was a symbol of the cross a good thing in Jesus' time? No, because what did it mean? It meant death. It meant a burden to carry this and to deny themselves, to no longer live for themselves. That goes across the grain, especially in today's culture. We're supposed to take care of ourselves. Live for me. Make as much money and do whatever I want. To take on the life of a servant goes against the grain of what we've been taught. Amen.

So to follow Jesus is not just to follow Him, but to give everything. But I love this because much like a shepherd, God sought, found, and is caring and sharing along the way how to care for them, teach them new things to grow. But to follow God requires everything of us.

Another example we can find in Luke 5, verses 27 through 28. Luke 5, chapters, chapter five, 27 through 28. We see another individual that Jesus calls into the ministry. Verse 27, we find after this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector of the name of Levi sitting at his booth. Now, Levi, is that a good Jewish name? It is. But why is a good Jewish man collecting taxes? He was either conscripted, I mean, he was voluntold that you're going to work for us. How was he viewed and received by his fellow Jewish folk? More than likely, he wasn't well treated. He was probably looked with contempt because he may have been given a small salary, but it wasn't enough to live on. How would he like Zacchaeus have to make money? Maybe have to upcharge them a little bit. And here we see maybe a former, you know, you could say a former church member has gone. to the Gentiles. He's disregarded. He's given up everything he knows. And Jesus says, hey, come follow me. And it says, Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, he left what? Everything and followed him.

So to follow God requires everything of us. There's a story told by Daniel Nayeri in his book. It's actually about his mother in the book called, Everything Sad is Untrue. And he shares a story of how his mother, who is from Iran, who became a Christian. And in that time, of course, Iran is predominantly a Muslim nation. And she grew up in a very, very devout and prestigious Muslim family. She was a doctor. She had wealth. She had esteem. Everything going for her. But somewhere along the way, somebody shared the gospel with her and she realized, I have to

follow this. And she gave literally everything up. She will forsake everything that she had to follow Jesus. Can you be a Christian in Iran right now? Could you in the past 30, 40 years? Kind of a sketchy situation if you did, right? So she was forced to flee for her life from Iran and eventually settling in the US as a refugee. And people would ask her, you know, as she looks them in the eye with the begging hope of they'll hear her and she says, because it's true. Jesus is true. Why else would she believe it? It's true and more than valuable than the \$7 million she had in her bank account. Worth more than the land that she had, the thousands of acres, the education to become a doctor, all of the respect and love of your family, maybe even your own life. His mom did not regret her decision. And if you believe it's true that there is a God and wants you to believe in Him and He sent His Son to die for you, then it has to take over your whole life as He continues to write. It has to be more than everything else because heaven's waiting. on the other side. That or my mom's insane. There's no middle ground. You can't say it's a quirky thing she thinks because she went all the way with it. If it's not true, she made a giant mistake because she didn't think so. So again, she had all of this wealth. She had all of the people in the clinic that she would help. She had all of the land. She was a faithful, devout Muslim. And now she's poor. And probably at times, maybe people will look and glare at her on buses, maybe spit on her. She's a refugee in a place where sometimes people, they hate refugees. And yet she says it was worth it because Jesus is better, is true. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. This whole story hinges on it. What a testimony. Would you be willing to leave everything behind? because you discovered who Jesus is? Many people have to rethink this.

Now, to continue on this theme, following Jesus, what does this mean? Let's jump over a couple of chapters to Luke 9. Luke chapter 9. Now the narrative is going to change, not so much to Jesus saying, follow me, but now there are people who are saying, I'm going to follow you.

So Luke chapter 9 verse 57. Verse 57. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus asked him questions for him. Say, are you really sure you want to do that? He said, I'll follow you wherever you go. And Jesus replies, foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his what? His head.

He said to another man, follow me. But he replied, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Now, if we're looking at this at face value, this seems kind of harsh, right? His father has just died. He should go and bury him. And yet Jesus says, nah, leave him. It's OK. You go and preach the kingdom of God.

Got to institute this word. Have you ever heard the term hyperbole? OK. Kids, have your parents ever asked you to take out the trash? And when you don't do it on time, the first time or the second or the third, they're gonna invoke the, I've told you a million times. Now, are they being literal? No, but what's the emphasis? Go and take out the trash.

Now Jesus here is using a little hyperbole. And then as you continue on in verse 61, another said, I will follow you Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family. In verse 62, no one puts a hand in the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. Again, hyperbole, what is Jesus really saying though? If you choose to follow me, it means your whole life is going to change and dedicate it to me.

Oh, to take up the cross? This doesn't look very promising, but what have you got to lose? So the other thing too is a reminder that sometimes following the Lord is both joyful and can be uncomfortable. There are many good things that God can instill in our hearts. As we're singing, it's awesome. We have this emotional feeling and this connection, the mountaintop experience, praise the Lord.

But is faith always gonna be up top? Or are you gonna go down into the valley at times? And when you get into the valley, it's uncomfortable, it's painful. And yet as Jesus says, as the Psalmist says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because what? You are with me.

Now, when I look through the Bible and I think of what are some stories where we can see where God calls people and they faithfully follow him. There's plenty of stories, but the two that really stick out to me are the stories of Abraham and Moses. If you look through Genesis chapter 12, you find that God goes to

Abraham and Abraham hears his voice, that he has known up to this point, to leave his family behind, to take only his wife, his loved ones. And those were of his immediate family and those who were his responsibility in all of his household, all of his sheep, all of his belongings, to go somewhere where a voice tells him to go. Because there's a promise, right?

And what does Abraham do? He gets up and he goes. Now, those of you who know the story of Abraham, is Abraham and Sarai, eventually to be called Sarah, do they always do everything perfectly and succinctly as God said so? No. Although you were chuckling inside. An example of what not to do in several cases, right? Maybe they have along the way, they felt like, you know, God needs some help in my own decision making. I'm just as smart as God. This is what we should do.

And all it says, and as you can see, as it plays out, it doesn't end very well or gets very uncomfortable. For instance, Sarah thought, well, he's supposed to have a lot of kids, but I'm a stumbling block at this point. to Abraham, her servant Hagar. She has a kid. And is Sarah happy about that? No. Eventually she has her own kid. And the two cannot coexist. And so they throw Hagar out and her son into the desert.

You can see the story. There's a lot. And eventually we'll come back to this and really look at some of the family dynamics. Bill already actually did a pretty good job of that last week. But then you also have the story of Moses, who he's, you know, the famous story of he's born and his mom puts him in a basket, goes down the river and the princess finds him. He's raised up in Egypt, known for, he's educated.

And eventually he realizes, wait, these are not my people. I've got to go back to my own people. But do his people readily embrace him? Not really. And eventually he kills a man because... He had to protect himself, is what he thought. And he flees for many years out in the desert, learning how to care for sheep that would translate to how to care for people.

One day, he's out and about watching the sheep in this burning bush appears. And it's God telling him, you're to go back and bring the people out of Egypt. Now,

when you're given an uncomfortable assignment, what do we try to do? We try to think of excuses like, I don't speak well, Lord. I can't do this. I can't do that.

But what does God do? He gives him excuses that he can't. In fact, he says, take your staff and throw it on the ground. And what does it turn into? A snake. And he says, pick it up. So he picks it up. He says, put your hand in your garment. And when he pulls it out, what's his hand? Leprous. So he puts it back and it's fine. Then the last thing is if there's any water, you know, you throw it on the ground, it turns into what? Blood.

And of course, the last thing is, I can't speak well. Your brother in Egypt will help you. And so sometimes isn't it really frustrating when God takes away all of your excuses? It's very frustrating. But here's where I want to draw this all together. Okay, the last verse and I didn't write this down, but Let's go to John chapter 10 verses 14 through 16. John chapter 10 verses 14 through 16.

Talking about how does this all apply? And if you were here for Sabbath school, you'll have a better understanding. So if you didn't get Sabbath school, go back to our YouTube page. Gustavo did a really great job in sharing how the Lord is our shepherd. This is just a little snippet of what we talked about.

But John chapter 10 verses 14 through 16 says, I am the good what? The shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the who? The sheep. I have other sheep that are not of the sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

"Now, one of the things we talked about earlier today is, what happens when you bring two or three groups of sheep together and they all get mixed up into one pile? How do you break that apart? The shepherd has to call them out. Because why? The sheep know the voice of the shepherd. A good shepherd will care for the sheep. He will look out for them. He'll make sure that they have good food, that they have water, a safe place where they can sleep at night and feel secure. A good shepherd will look out, will encourage. And sometimes if they're, you know,

sheep are kind of stubborn at times, the shepherd will reprove the sheep to learn and to follow all by hearing the voice of the shepherd."

"Now we can look to Jesus as the ultimate shepherd. Amen. There's many, if you go through the book of Psalms, there's so many allusions to Jesus being the shepherd. And it takes time. If we truly want to follow God. What are the nuts and bolts of following God? Is we have to get to know God. If you want to get to know who God is, you have to know who God is. You have to be able to study. You have to be able to pray. And above all, you need to reflect."

"So it's something that we teach regularly. Get to know God by reading the scriptures because God will reveal God's self in the scriptures. And if you have questions, what should you do? You should ask them. Ask other people, whether it's myself or one of our leaders or a friend or whoever, don't be afraid to ask questions. But you have to spend time in getting to know somebody by talking to them. When you first met your spouse, did you just not say anything? Maybe for a while if you're really scared, right? But to get to, from meeting them to getting to married, what do you have to do? You have to get to know each other. And as you get to know each other, you'll realize, I love this person because of this or that, right? You have to communicate with one another and we have to communicate with God the same way."

"We can always pray to God, but let's not wait for that 11th hour prayer. Let's talk at the beginning of the day and throughout the day and not 1159 when the clock's on the line. Amen. and take time to reflect. Reflect on what you feel God is imparting upon your heart. What you're learning, what you're growing, maybe even write these things out. I'm sorry we're a few minutes over, but this is important because it's gonna bear fruit for the rest of this series. Can't know God if you don't talk to God. And the communication isn't one way, it's both ways. Meaning we have to take time to listen. Try to hear what God is trying to tell us."

"How many times have you tried to tell your kids to go do this and that, right? And then it just goes in one ear and goes out the other. Ladies, how many times have you tried to tell your husband something and it goes in one out the air? Nobody's saying anything. That's all right. I get it. Don't worry. I'm guilty of this. My wife can

vouch for that. All right The truth is We have to be able to listen with intent One of the things that I love to do in our premarital counseling that I do with couples is we call this thing called Active listening where you're actively trying to To listen and hear what they're saying and why they are saying it because it makes a difference in their lives When you tell the person what you want, but then how it makes them feel and why it's important to you. And they're able to be able to articulate that and share, because they know at least what you want. Does that not make you feel better? How much more when we know the things that God is placing in our lives, how much more confident we can go forth."

"So my friends, this week, as you ponder, I want you to reflect. Sorry, you gotta know who God is. What holds you back from seeking Jesus, from following Jesus? What scares you? I'm not gonna lie, there were times in my life where I've been fearful, like, what does it mean? Least of all, oh, God's calling me to be a pastor. That's not something I wanted, truthfully, because I knew what that meant. But if I hadn't followed that call, then I probably would have been miserable. If I hadn't at least tried. And I'm not going to lie, there have been some really bad days. But then there have been also days in my life that I still consider some of the best days of my life. Following God is challenging. But it's also a joy. And we don't follow God just because we have to, but because we love God. I don't want to encourage those of you who are kind of still on the fence. I'm not sure about this. What have you got to lose? Try it."

"So this week, faithfully seek God daily through prayer, scripture and reflection. Pastor, we're supposed to do that all the time. Yes, let's do that. Let's continue to do that. And if you ever have any questions, please do not be afraid to seek us out. Next week, we're going to talk about how can we pump up our faith like Arnold's. Get you strong. Let us grow in faith.

Father in heaven. Today is another day, but it's not just any other day. It's another day that we can look to you and say, God, I wanna place my life into your care. Please come into my heart. Teach me, mold me, shape me. And Lord, some of us may be scared. So calm our hearts and our minds. Give us conviction, show us the path. And above all, Lord, may you reign supreme. Help us to daily take time. to

seek you in prayer. Show us what you want us to learn. And above all, may we be faithful stewards for you. In Jesus' name, everybody said, amen.

Grace and peace, everyone.