

THE LIFE OF A **JESUS**
FOLLOWER

*STOP LIVING FOR JESUS
SO JESUS CAN
LIVE THROUGH YOU*

VANCE PITMAN

*LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee*

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ISBN 978-1-5359-6083-0 • Item 005815993

Dewey decimal classification: 248.84

Subject headings: DISCIPLESHIP / JESUS CHRIST / CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Printed in the United States of America

Groups Ministry Publishing • LifeWay Resources • One LifeWay Plaza • Nashville, TN 37234 -

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



VANCE PITMAN responded to God's call to Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2000, as a church plant from First Baptist Church in Woodstock, Georgia.

With a passion for God's kingdom, he had a vision to launch a church focused on joining in God's activity locally and globally. Thus, Hope Church was born in the fall of 2001. From a small group of eighteen adults meeting in a living room, Hope's fellowship has grown to more than 4000 people in small groups desiring to connect people to live the life of a Jesus follower. Vance has led Hope to understand that what God is doing is bigger than one church. Since its launch in 2001, Hope Church has sent hundreds out on mission, invested millions of dollars in God's global activity, and has commissioned dozens of new churches in the Western United States.

As a seasoned pastor and church planter, Vance speaks across the country and all over the world from the passion of his apostolic heart to inspire people to join in God's eternal, redemptive mission of making disciples and multiplying the church among every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

Vance holds a Bachelor's Degree with a major in History and a minor in Business Management from the University of North Alabama, and a Master's Degree in Divinity from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. He resides in Henderson, Nevada with his wife Kristie. He and Kristie are the proud parents of four children and two grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

For years of my Christian journey, there were verses in the Bible that made no sense to me. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free,” but I didn’t feel free. Jesus said, “Come to me . . . and I will give you rest,” but I had no rest. For me, words like “freedom” and “rest” weren’t part of my experience of following Jesus. I was trying hard to keep all the rules and regulations. The list of do’s and don’ts seemed to grow daily. I was overwhelmed at how living for Jesus was just plain hard work, determination, and drudgery. Then I came to the greatest discovery of my life—Jesus didn’t want me to live for Him; He desired to live His life through me. And His life is radically different!

As I began to pursue the life of Christ in the Gospels, I came to a conclusion. Jesus’ life on earth revolved around three relationships. First, He walked in intimate fellowship with the Father. Everything He did, He did out of the overflow of intimacy with the Father. Second, He lived His life in community with His disciples. Sharing life with others was the outflow of His relationship with the Father. And third, He lived His life engaging and cultivating relationships with people who didn’t know God at all. The kingdom expanded on the rails of relationships.

The more I consumed the pages of the Gospels, the more I realized every story in them could be dropped into one of three file drawers—Jesus and His relationship with the Father, Jesus and His relationship with the disciples, or Jesus and His relationship with unbelievers. Now if that’s what His life looked like on earth, and my life is simply to be His life lived through me, what is my life to look like today? (1) A daily, intimate relationship with the Father, (2) a relationship of connecting in community with other believers, and (3) a cultivation of relationships with others who don’t know Jesus to share Christ with them.

All believers should be able to lay this paradigm of following Jesus over their lives and examine to see if they’re truly allowing His life to be manifest in them, or if they have settled for the cheap counterfeit of religion. The life of a Jesus follower revolves around three words: ABIDE, CONNECT, and SHARE. Abiding in Christ personally and daily, connecting in community in large groups and small groups, and sharing in the mission locally and globally, characterize the life of a Jesus follower.

As you begin this journey of walking through this Bible study exploring the simplicity of following Jesus, my prayer is that you’ll find the same freedom and rest I’ve experienced in my own walk with the Lord as you learn to simply abide, connect, and share!

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible-study book includes eight weeks of content for group and personal study.

GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members with God's Word and with the video teaching from pastor Vance Pitman

START. This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video teaching.

WATCH. This page provides space to take notes on the video teaching.

DISCUSS. This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to Vance's teaching and explore relevant Bible passages.

PERSONAL STUDY

Each week provides five days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions. The personal study revisits stories, Scriptures, and themes introduced in the video teaching, so participants can understand and apply them on a personal level. The days are numbered 1–5 to provide personal reading and activities for each day of the week, leaving two days off to worship with your church family and to meet as a small group. If your group meets on the same day as your worship gathering, use the extra day to reflect on what God is teaching you and to practice putting the biblical principles into action.

Each personal study includes the following three sections.

READ. This section lists the passages of Scripture you'll be studying that day. Take the time to read them slowly and prayerfully.

INTERACT. This section provides space for you to interact with what you just read using two questions. **1) What does the Bible say?** Many of us read the Bible so quickly we fail to recognize what the Bible is actually saying. This question is meant to help you gain understanding for what the Bible is communicating. **2) What do these passages teach me about following Jesus?** The whole Bible is a book about Jesus, so every passage teaches us about what it means to know and follow Him. This question is meant to help you begin to apply the Scriptures to your life.

REFLECT. This section contains a brief devotional thought along with a few questions to help you further understand, process, and apply the truths from the Bible.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

EBOOK. In addition to the print book, this book is also available as an ebook, which is immediately available after purchase in your LifeWay Reader library.

ENHANCED EBOOK In addition to the ebook, an enhanced ebook featuring integrated video assets such as a promotional video and session previews is also available after purchase in your LifeWay Reader library.

VIDEO SESSIONS. All eight video teaching sessions are available to rent or purchase as individual, downloadable sessions. Additionally, you'll find a group use bundle that gives your church a license to share digital video content with multiple groups in your church.

For these resources and more, visit LifeWay.com/JesusFollower

HOW DO I BEGIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

At the very heart of this study is an intimate, growing relationship with God. Perhaps you're coming to this study asking, "How do I begin this relationship with God?" If that's you, take a moment and consider the following verses from the Bible carefully.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he can't see the kingdom of God."

John 3:3

According to the words of Jesus, there must be a point when a transformation takes place. In this passage, Jesus called it a new birth. In other words, every person must be spiritually made new on the inside by the power of God.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

This new birth is necessary because of our sin. All have sinned. Every person ever born has sinned before God.

The wages of sin is death...

Romans 6:23a

The consequence of our sin (wage) is separation from God. Our sin makes a relationship impossible because of His holiness.

But the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23b

God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

We were hopelessly separated from God by our sin. BUT because of His great love Jesus Christ took our sin debt upon Himself and died in our place.

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

1 Peter 2:24

Jesus took our sins and died for us in order to make it possible to enter into a relationship with God.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

John 1:12

Jesus died and made a relationship with God possible for everyone. But this relationship for each individual begins with a surrendered heart (deny self) and receiving of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:13

When a person realizes their great need for a Savior and trusts Jesus alone to be that Savior, then the relationship begins by simply calling upon Him. That is done by prayer. Simply cry out to God for forgiveness, and receive Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life.

You can do that right now wherever you're. Stop and talk to God. Be honest with Him. Tell Him the desire of your heart, and trust Him to keep His promise. God knows your heart and isn't so concerned with the words as He is the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I need you. I realize I'm a sinner and separated from a relationship with You. I believe you died on a cross to pay my sin debt. I believe you rose from the dead after three days. I ask you to forgive me of my sin and I surrender the control of my life to you. Take control of my life, and make me the kind of person you want me to be.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If so, pray to God right now and trust Him to change your life forever.

If you've made this wonderful decision, tell someone. Tell your small group leader, a Christian friend, or a pastor. They will rejoice with you and help you know what is best. Now you're truly a Jesus follower.



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WEEK 1

BURDENED

Start

Welcome to week 1 of *The Life of a Jesus Follower*. Over the next eight sessions we're going to consider what it means to faithfully follow Jesus. Whether you've been following Jesus for decades, started following Him yesterday, or don't follow Jesus at all, you likely have some idea about what it means to follow Jesus, so let's begin by talking about those ideas.

How would you describe someone who follows Jesus? What should their life look like?

What would you say is the goal of the Christian life?

All of us have ideas about what it means to follow Jesus. We develop these ideas in a variety of ways—our family and friends, societal norms, and our church culture. The goal of this study is to help us cut through a cultural understanding of what it means to be a Christian and recover a biblical vision for what it means to follow Jesus.

To pursue that goal we're going to join Jesus in the Scriptures and learn from Him what it means to know and follow Him. So let's pause for a moment to pray and ask Jesus to bless our time as we pursue a deeper relationship with Him.

Ask someone to pray, then watch the video teaching.

Watch

Use this section to take notes as you watch video session 1.

Discuss

Use the following questions to facilitate a conversation with your group.

Vance began by saying we all have the tendency to make following Jesus about what we do or what we know. Why do we equate faithfulness with knowing and doing? Which tendency do you err towards most often?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:3. How do we miss the simplicity and purity of a relationship with Jesus when we reduce following Him to doing things for Him or knowing things about Him?

Following Jesus is about walking in the three relationships Jesus walked in (see John 15:5,12 and 17:18). What are these relationships, and where do we see them in the life of Jesus?

What can we learn about Jesus through relationships that we could never gain through knowing or doing?

Read John 13:34-35. How are the three relationships Jesus walked in interdependent?

What is the difference between living for Jesus and allowing Jesus to live in and through us?

We opened this session asking what it looks like to follow Jesus. How has your original answer changed in light of the video teaching?

Pause for a moment and pray together.

- *Praise God for who He is.*
- *Take hold of the freedom that comes from a relationship with Jesus.*
- *Expect the Spirit to work through the Scriptures and this study to grow your faith.*

After praying, remind the group to complete the five personal studies.

DAY 1

A JESUS FOLLOWER EMBRACES RELATIONSHIPS

READ

Read the following passages slowly and carefully.

2 Corinthians 11:3

Deuteronomy 6:5–9

Matthew 22:36–40

INTERACT

Answer the following questions:

What does the Bible say?

What do these passages teach me about following Jesus?

REFLECT

Apply the teaching of Scripture to your life.

How did Jesus summarize the commands of God in Matthew 22?

We know the book of 2 Corinthians was originally a letter written from the apostle Paul to the church in the ancient city of Corinth. The church Paul had helped plant in that city was constantly under threat from internal struggles and strife. The Corinthians viewed information as their spiritual target, and they kept bickering with one another and creating division in their efforts to settle on the “correct” set of doctrines that would lead them to be faithful followers of Jesus.

In the middle of that immorality and strife, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians as a spiritual parent concerned for his children. And in that letter, he used a phrase that is both profoundly wise and incredibly relevant for Christians in our culture. Paul urged them to return to the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Consider what Paul said. Do those words describe your relationship with Jesus? Simple and pure? If not, why not?

We often prefer a superficial system of religion over a genuine relationship with Jesus because the superficial system is easier to control. We have a built-in desire to measure our performance whenever possible—not really because we want to excel, but because it makes it easy for us to say, “I may not be perfect, but I’m doing much better than those people.” We’ve piled all these things on top of the simplicity and purity of simple devotion to Him.

That’s a big problem. But thankfully, there’s a solution. Love God and love others inside and outside of the church. Those two, straightforward, relationship driven commands are where we’re going to spend the rest of our week.

Where do you feel you've lost the simplicity and purity of what it means to follow Jesus and turned your relationship into a list of dos and don'ts?

DAY 2

A JESUS FOLLOWER **ABIDES IN CHRIST**

READ

Read the following passages slowly and carefully.

John 8:28-29

John 14:10-11

John 15:5,19

John 17:3

INTERACT

Answer the following questions:

What does the Bible say?

What do these passages teach me about following Jesus?

REFLECT

Apply the teaching of Scripture to your life.

The Gospels are filled with stories about Jesus and His relationship with God the Father. In this study, we'll use the word ABIDE to describe this relationship.

When you read through the Gospels, it's clear Jesus placed the priority of spending time with the Father above all else. In fact, it's important for us to understand that everything Jesus accomplished flowed from His intimate fellowship with the Father.

When the people of Jesus' day saw Him perform some great miracle, it was because of the Father working in and through Him. When they heard Jesus speak, it was the Father speaking through His Son. Jesus went so far as to say that He can don'thing without the father (John 5:19). Everything about Jesus' life was produced by the power of the Holy Spirit, which was born from His intimacy with the Father and overflowed into the world.

Jesus demonstrated what it looks like to live in moment-by-moment relationship with the Father. Once again, we see this pattern emerge through careful study of the Gospels. He often slipped away into the wilderness to spend time with the Father, just the two of them. Many times He stopped to settle in a garden or go up a mountain to be alone with God.

How much more should the same thing be true of us? The ultimate pursuit of Jesus's life was an intimate love relationship with God the Father. What was true in Jesus's life will be true in our lives as we faithfully follow Him. We must pursue intimacy with the Father by abiding in Christ both personally and daily.

What do we gain by abiding in Christ?

How are you currently seeking to abide in Christ personally and daily?

If Jesus believed that apart from an intimate love relationship with Father He could do nothing, why do we often view it as something that is optional to faithfully follow Him?

DAY 3

A JESUS FOLLOWER CONNECTS WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

READ

Read the following passages slowly and carefully.

John 1:35-51

Mark 4:35-41

Luke 9:12-27

INTERACT

Answer the following questions:

What does the Bible say?

What do these passages teach me about following Jesus?

REFLECT

Apply the teaching of Scripture to your life.

The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus actively and intentionally cultivating relationships with His disciples. And there are many of these stories. In this study, we'll use the word CONNECT to describe Jesus' relationship with His disciples and our relationship with other followers of Jesus.

Jesus started by calling His disciples away from their old lives so they could join Him in doing the work of His kingdom. Jesus prayed with His disciples. He taught them, cared for them, challenged them, and walked with each of them through the ups and downs of life.

Jesus devoted time, energy, and passion to His relationships with twelve men. He identified them and invited them to walk alongside Him (John 1:35–51). Jesus joined the disciples on what was supposed to be a quick sail across the Sea of Galilee—and He used the resulting storm to teach them about the power of faith in difficult times (Mark 4:35–41). Jesus challenged His disciples to feed a crowd of more than 5,000 people and then challenged them to trust God in every circumstance by using only five loaves and two fish to provide a feast for everyone (Luke 9:12–27).

The Gospels serve as historical records of the relationship and fellowship that existed between Jesus and His friends. Jesus poured His life into the disciples. Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father spilled into intentional relationships with His disciples.

Why are relationships with other Christians nonnegotiable for Jesus followers?

What do we gain by investing in relationships with other Jesus followers?

How are you currently investing in your relationships with other Jesus followers?

DAY 4

A JESUS FOLLOWER SHARES WITH THE WORLD

READ

Read the following passages slowly and carefully.

John 3:1-17

John 4:7-29

Luke 19:1-10

Matthew 9:9-13

INTERACT

Answer the following questions:

What does the Bible say?

What do these passages teach me about following Jesus?

REFLECT

Apply the teaching of Scripture to your life.

What do you notice about the relationships Jesus cultivated with people who didn't yet follow Him?

The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus pursuing relationships with the world—meaning, with those who didn't know God. As you journey through the Gospels, you'll read story after story of Jesus seeking out people who were in desperate need of His saving grace. Throughout this study, we'll use the word SHARE to describe Jesus' relationship with the world.

The religious leaders accused Jesus of being a friend of sinners because He joined the hated tax collectors for a meal (Matt. 9:10–12). The tax collector named Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus into his home (Luke 19:1–10). Whether it's those lost in the darkness of religion such as Nicodemus, or those trapped in the seduction of sexual sin such as the Samaritan woman—Jesus is constantly looking to engage with those who are far from God to bring to them the life-changing message of the gospel.

One of the key patterns of Jesus' life was building intentional, engaging, loving relationships with people who were far from God, so He could lead them back to God. If we seek to faithfully follow Jesus, we'll pursue the same kind of relationships Jesus pursued with the world.

What do we gain by investing in relationships with people outside of our faith?

How are you currently developing relationships with people who don't know Jesus?

DAY 5

A JESUS FOLLOWER EMBRACES RELATIONSHIPS

READ

Read the following passage slowly and carefully.

John 13:34-35

INTERACT

Answer the following questions:

What does the Bible say?

What does the passage teach me about following Jesus?

REFLECT

Apply the teaching of Scripture to your life.

Over the next seven weeks of this study, we'll take a deeper look at the three relationships we've thought about this week. But here at the end of this first week, there's one crucial truth we need to think more deeply about. All three of these relationships are interdependent. Listen to the way Jesus describes it in John's Gospel:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you [Abide], that you also love one another [Connect]. By this all men will know [Share] that you're My disciples, if you've love for one another.

John 13:34-35

Do you see how Jesus powerfully wove all three relationships together? It's out of the overflow of our love relationship with Him that God manifests through us the kind of love He desires us to have for one another. Then those relationships become the greatest platform we have to authenticate the gospel to this world. It takes all three to function.

In Jesus' day, the defining mark of a disciple was the relationship they enjoyed with the one they were following. The same is true in our day. Being a follower of Jesus isn't simply conforming to a system of moral behavior, nor is it merely comprehending a set of doctrinal truths. Following Jesus is first and foremost a relationship. In fact, it's all about relationships.

How has your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus changed as you studied Scripture this week?

Where do you see the greatest opportunity for Jesus to work in your life through this study?