

BEYOND BELIEF

Reimagining What it Means to Follow Jesus

“Following Jesus” may be one of the most familiar phrases in Christianity. We use it to describe conversion. We use it to describe discipleship. We use it as an identity. Someone becomes a “follower of Jesus,” and over time, follower begins to sound more like a noun describing who we are than a verb describing what we do.

But following is a movement word. You cannot follow someone without going somewhere.



And that idea is not simply embedded in the English word. The Greek word frequently translated follow in the Gospels is *akoloutheō*. It carries the idea of following someone who goes before you, accompanying them, or going along with them. As the word became associated with discipleship, it carried a much deeper meaning than simply walking behind someone. It described attaching yourself to a person and their way of life.

But the image underneath it remained. Someone is going somewhere. Someone else goes with them.

So when Jesus says, “Follow Me,” He isn’t merely giving us an identity. He is inviting us into His movement.

A Moving Jesus

It is difficult to read the Gospels without noticing how much Jesus moves. He moves through villages and cities. He enters homes and sits at tables. He crosses cultural, religious, and social boundaries. He notices people others overlook. He stops for interruptions. He walks toward people His disciples sometimes would have preferred to avoid.

Crowds gather, and He moves on. Religious expectations establish boundaries, and He crosses them. His disciples develop assumptions about who matters, and Jesus moves toward the people they have overlooked.

He touches lepers. He eats with tax collectors. He speaks with Samaritans. He welcomes children. He notices the person at the edge of the crowd. He stops when someone cries out. Again and again, following Jesus requires His disciples to leave something familiar and move toward something they did not anticipate.

They aren't given a complete itinerary before they begin. They are given an invitation: *"Follow Me."*

The destination unfolds along the way.

When Following Becomes Stationary

Something happens when following becomes primarily an identity. We begin measuring faithfulness by what we know, what we believe, what we attend, and what we practice. Those things matter. But it is entirely possible to do them while remaining remarkably stationary.

We can study Jesus without noticing where He is moving. We can sing about Jesus without following Him toward the people He loves. We can gather around Jesus while becoming increasingly disconnected from the people He continually moves toward. We can become deeply committed to learning about Jesus while quietly expecting Him to stay where we put Him.

But the Jesus of the Gospels refuses to remain stationary. He keeps moving. And if following means going with someone who is moving, eventually following Jesus requires movement from us too.

We Have Seen Him There

For the past fifteen years, we have spent much of our lives among people who don't know Jesus. We did not enter those relationships knowing what would happen. We did not have a model for what Jesus might do. Many of the people around us had little interest in Christianity, no church background, and no reason to participate in something religious.

We simply began entering their world. And we kept seeing Jesus.

We saw curiosity appear in unexpected conversations. We watched trust grow slowly around dinner tables. We heard questions about Jesus from people we never expected to ask them. We saw conversations become sacred without anyone announcing that something sacred was happening. We watched relationships deepen in ways no program could have manufactured.

Eventually, we realized something that changed us: **We weren't bringing Jesus to the harvest. He was already there.**

We have seen Jesus moving among those who don't know Him in ways we never imagined. And He invites us continually to join Him there.

This has changed the question. Instead of asking, *"How do we get people to come to where Jesus is?"* we begin by asking, *"Where is Jesus moving, and are we willing to follow Him there?"*

Following Without Knowing Where

There is adventure hidden inside the word follow. If someone else is leading, we do not determine every turn. That requires dependence.

If we already know exactly where we are going, what we are going to build, what it will look like, and what outcome we expect, we have a plan. Following is different. Following Jesus requires enough openness for Him to lead us somewhere we did not expect to go.

His first disciples experienced this constantly. They followed Jesus into conversations they would not have initiated, places they would not have chosen, and relationships they did not understand. Following required curiosity. Following required relationship. Following required adventure.

And it still does.

We pay attention. We stay curious. We notice people. We listen longer. We allow interruptions. We enter relationships without deciding in advance where they must lead.

Somewhere along the way, we begin noticing movement. A question. A moment of vulnerability. An unexpected conversation. A recurring curiosity. A relationship growing deeper. A door we did not open.

These moments may appear ordinary, but they may also be clues. Jesus may already be moving.

And followers follow.

Learning to Notice Movement

What would happen if we began each day looking for where Jesus is already moving?

Our workplaces might look different. Our neighborhoods might look different. The classroom, hospital, coffee shop, break room, dinner table, apartment building, and ordinary relationships already surrounding us might look different.

Not because every conversation needs to become a ministry opportunity, but because every relationship is sacred.

What if this conversation matters? What if this interruption isn't an interruption? What if that unexpected curiosity is worth paying attention to? What if the person we assumed was far from Jesus is already experiencing His movement in ways neither of us understands yet? What if Jesus is already here?

Following Him does not require knowing exactly what happens next. It requires paying attention to the One who does.

Follow Me

Jesus' invitation remains remarkably simple: *"Follow Me."*

Not merely believe things about Me. Not simply learn about Me. Not build something and ask Me to inhabit it. Follow Me.

Following Jesus means we don't get to determine in advance everywhere following Him will take us. Sometimes He will lead us toward people we would not have noticed. Sometimes He will lead us across boundaries we assumed were fixed. Sometimes He will interrupt plans we thought were important. Sometimes He will lead us beyond what is familiar, predictable, comfortable, or controllable.

And sometimes we will discover that He has been moving among people we assumed were far from Him long before we arrived.

We know because we have seen it.

We have seen Jesus moving among those who don't know Him in ways we never imagined, inviting us to join Him there.

Jesus is moving. Following means going with Him.

So perhaps the question isn't simply whether we believe in Jesus.

Where is He going, and are we following?