Jesus & The Way

Learning to Follow Jesus

MSSNL

Copyright

JESUS & THE WAY
Learning to Follow Jesus

Copyright © 2026 Ryan D. Eldridge

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations used in reviews, articles, sermons, or educational purposes as permitted by copyright law.

Published by MSSNL Inc.

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

This book is intended for educational, discipleship, and spiritual formation purposes. The views expressed are those of the author.

Some names, stories, and identifying details may have been changed to protect privacy.

For information regarding permissions, translations, bulk orders, speaking engagements, discipleship resources, or international distribution, contact:

MSSNL
www.mssnl.org

First Edition 2026

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction	1
1. Come, Follow Me	17
2. Learn from Me	30
3. The Way of Surrender	43
4. Abide in Me	56
5. Hear and Obey	71
6. Walk by the Spirit	85
7. A Life of Prayer	98
8. The People of the Way	113
9. The Narrow Way	128
10. Take Up Your Cross	142
11. As the Father Sent Me	157
12. Make Disciples	171
Conclusion	187

Introduction

The Way

Every person is walking somewhere.

We make decisions, build relationships, develop habits, spend our time, carry responsibilities, and move through seasons we did not always choose. Some parts of life feel clear. Others feel uncertain. Yet beneath all of it, we are being formed by what we trust, what we love, and whom we choose to follow.

Jesus entered the world with an invitation that reached directly into that kind of life. He did not simply ask people to listen to His teaching or agree with His claims. He called them to come near, walk with Him, learn from Him, and eventually become like Him.

"Follow me."

Matthew chapter 4, verse 19.

Those words were first spoken to ordinary men standing beside the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Andrew were fishermen. James and

John were working with their father. Matthew was sitting at a tax booth when Jesus called him.

None of them understood everything that following Jesus would eventually require. They did not know where the road would lead or how deeply their lives would change. They knew enough to take the next step, and that is where discipleship begins.

The first disciples did not receive a complete explanation of the years ahead before they followed. Jesus did not hand them a plan that answered every question or prepared them for every difficulty. He called them into relationship with Himself, and they learned the way as they walked with Him.

They heard Him teach in homes, synagogues, fields, and along crowded roads. They watched Him pray while others slept. They saw Him touch people others avoided, welcome people others dismissed, and speak truth to people who had learned to hide behind religion.

They saw how Jesus treated children, sinners, outsiders, religious leaders, grieving families, close friends, and enemies. They watched how He responded when He was interrupted, misunderstood, rejected, and opposed. They were learning more than what Jesus believed. They were learning how Jesus lived.

This matters because Christian faith was never intended to remain only in the mind. Belief is essential. We must know who Jesus is, understand what He has done, and place our trust in

Him. Yet the faith that begins by believing in Jesus grows into a life of following Jesus.

Jesus said:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

John chapter 14, verse 6.

Jesus did not only teach people where to find the way to God. He identified Himself as the Way. Life with God is found in Him, and the Christian life is shaped by learning to remain with Him.

This distinction matters.

Jesus did not give His followers a way of life separated from Himself. He is the Way. Every practice of discipleship flows from relationship with Him. Prayer, obedience, holiness, community, mission, and sacrifice only make sense when they remain centered on the living Christ.

That is where this book begins.

Belief answers the question of who Jesus is and whether He can be trusted. Scripture tells us that He is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior who carried our sin to the cross and rose from the dead. He is alive, His grace is sufficient, and everyone who trusts in Him is invited into new life.

Yet new life has to be lived.

A person can believe that Jesus rose from the dead and still wonder how faith should shape an ordinary Tuesday morning. We can confess that Jesus is Lord and still wrestle with control, resentment, fear, temptation, hurry, ambition, distraction, and the quiet desire to arrange life on our own terms.

This is where discipleship becomes deeply practical.

How do we actually walk with Jesus?

That question reaches into ordinary life. It touches the way we speak to our spouse, raise our children, respond to pressure, use money, handle disappointment, and treat people who have hurt us. It also raises deeper questions about hearing God clearly, recognizing His direction, and obeying when His way costs us something.

These questions do not belong only to new believers. People can follow Jesus for decades and still discover places where He is inviting them deeper. We continue learning because discipleship is not a course we complete. It is a life lived with Jesus.

The Gospels show this clearly through the disciples themselves.

Peter followed Jesus from the beginning, but Peter still had much to learn. He trusted Jesus enough to step out of a boat, then became afraid when he saw the wind. He confessed that Jesus was the Christ, then resisted Jesus when He began speaking about the cross.

Peter promised loyalty in the upper room, then denied knowing Jesus before the night was over. After the resurrection, Jesus met

him again beside the sea. The man who had denied Him was not discarded. Jesus restored him, recommissioned him, and called him again to follow.

Peter's story reminds us that discipleship is not a straight line of spiritual success. It is the long work of being formed by Jesus through truth, grace, correction, failure, restoration, obedience, and continued relationship. The disciple keeps returning to the Teacher, allowing Him to shape what remains unfinished.

Jesus described this process simply:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."

Luke chapter 6, verse 40.

The goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus. We learn His words, but we also learn His heart. We begin to recognize His ways and allow His character to reshape our own.

That kind of formation reaches deeper than religious activity. A person can attend church, read Scripture, pray before meals, and use Christian language while still keeping certain areas of life from the leadership of Jesus. Spiritual activity can become familiar without producing surrender.

Jesus continually moved beneath the surface. He spoke about anger, lust, money, forgiveness, pride, anxiety, prayer, generosity, truthfulness, enemies, and ambition. He did not separate spiritual life from ordinary life because every part of life belongs before God.

He taught that what grows in the heart will eventually shape the life.

Then Jesus lived what He taught.

He trusted the Father when obedience was costly. He withdrew to pray when crowds were demanding His attention. He remained compassionate when people interrupted Him and patient when His own disciples failed to understand.

He served when others were competing for position. He forgave when others wounded Him. He remained faithful when the road ahead led toward suffering.

His disciples learned the way by watching the One who walked it perfectly.

That same pattern remains for us.

We learn Jesus by staying near Jesus.

This is why His words in Matthew carry so much weight:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."

Matthew chapter 11, verses 28 and 29.

Jesus calls people first to Himself. Then He tells them to learn from Him. Discipleship begins in relationship and continues through a life shaped by His presence, His words, and His leadership.

The image of a yoke would have been familiar to the people listening. A yoke joined an animal to the work it was being trained to carry. Jesus used that picture to describe a life brought under His leadership, where we learn His pace, His direction, and His way.

That kind of following requires trust.

There will be moments when the way of Jesus makes immediate sense to us. There will also be moments when obedience seems slower, harder, or less comfortable than the alternatives in front of us. We may know what Jesus says and still feel the pull of another way.

The world around us offers many paths. We are taught to protect ourselves, prove ourselves, build our own security, pursue recognition, follow our desires, and avoid anything that costs too much. Some of those paths can appear successful for a long time. They can even be rewarded by the culture around us.

Jesus invites us onto another road.

He teaches us to forgive people who have wounded us. He teaches us to serve rather than build our lives around status. He teaches us to tell the truth, practice generosity, care for people who cannot repay us, and seek the kingdom of God before our own comfort or recognition.

His way begins to reshape what we value.

This is why following Jesus eventually brings us to surrender.

Jesus said:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Luke chapter 9, verse 23.

The cross reminds us that Jesus does not simply improve the life we have already designed. He becomes Lord of it. Our plans, desires, relationships, resources, wounds, future, and identity are brought under His care and authority.

That is costly.

Yet the One asking us to surrender is the same One who gave Himself for us.

Jesus never asks His disciples to walk a road He refused to walk. He trusted the Father completely. He chose obedience when obedience led to suffering. He gave His life for people who could not save themselves.

We surrender to someone who has already shown us the full measure of His love.

Obedience grows from love and trust. Grace has brought us near to Jesus, and as we come to know Him, we learn to trust His words and follow His lead. Obedience becomes the response of a disciple who knows the One he is following is good.

As trust deepens, obedience reaches into more of life. We begin to bring our habits, relationships, decisions, and desires before Jesus rather than dividing life into spiritual and ordinary cate-

gories. We learn that His way is not meant to control us from a distance. It is meant to lead us into the life for which we were created.

That life cannot be sustained through willpower alone.

Jesus told His disciples that they needed to remain in Him.

"Abide in me, and I in you."

John chapter 15, verse 4.

A branch does not produce fruit by trying harder to act alive. It bears fruit because it remains connected to the source of life. Jesus used that picture to show His disciples that everything He was calling them to become would grow from relationship with Him.

This is one of the central truths of the Way. As we remain in Jesus, we receive what we cannot produce for ourselves. Over time, His life begins to take shape within us, producing fruit that comes from relationship with Him rather than our own strength.

The Holy Spirit makes this possible.

Jesus did not return to the Father and leave His followers with a set of instructions they had to carry out by themselves. He promised the Spirit, who would dwell within them, remind them of His words, lead them into truth, convict them, strengthen them, and empower them for the work ahead.

The Christian life requires active obedience lived in dependence on the Holy Spirit. We listen, respond, and make real choices while trusting Him to form in us what our own strength could never produce. Following Jesus becomes a life of participation with the Spirit rather than an attempt to imitate Christ through effort alone.

Paul later described this as learning to "walk by the Spirit."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 16.

Walking is an ordinary image. One step follows another, and that is often how spiritual formation happens. God works through moments that seem significant and through days that appear ordinary.

We open Scripture because we want to hear God's voice more clearly. We pray because we need the Father. We confess sin because hiding keeps us from walking in the light. We forgive because Jesus has forgiven us, and we gather with other believers because discipleship was never meant to become a private journey.

We choose faithfulness in small places, then we continue choosing it.

Much of a faithful Christian life is built through decisions that few people will ever notice. Jesus sees the quiet obedience. He sees the choice to remain patient when frustration rises, to speak the truth when dishonesty would be easier, and to walk away when temptation offers another path.

He sees the apology that costs pride, the generosity no one knows about, the prayer offered in weakness, and the service given without recognition. These ordinary steps become part of the way He shapes us.

They also teach us that the Way is meant to be walked with others.

The earliest followers of Jesus were eventually described in Acts as people who belonged to "the Way." Before the word Christian became widely used, this was one of the ways the growing movement of Jesus was identified.

Acts tells us that Saul once searched for anyone "belonging to the Way" so he could arrest them.

Acts chapter 9, verse 2.

The name is fitting.

These believers were known not only by a claim they made about Jesus, but by a life that was taking shape around Him. They gathered, prayed, shared meals, cared for people in need, opened their homes, endured opposition, learned the apostles' teaching, and carried the good news into new places.

Their faith had become visible.

The Church was never meant to become a collection of people who privately believed the same things while remaining disconnected from one another. Jesus formed a body. He created a family where people would learn love, patience, forgive-

ness, generosity, confession, encouragement, and faithfulness together.

Community is one of the places where the way of Jesus becomes real.

It is easy to believe we are patient until another person tests our patience. It is easy to imagine ourselves forgiving until someone actually hurts us. It is easy to speak about service until serving another person becomes inconvenient.

People reveal what still needs to be formed in us.

They also become part of how God forms us. We need people who will remind us of truth when we forget it, pray when our own words are hard to find, and encourage us when faithfulness feels costly. We also need people who will correct us, challenge us, and help us see what we may not see on our own.

Jesus formed disciples in community.

Then He sent them into the world.

"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

John chapter 20, verse 21.

The way of Jesus always moves outward. We come near to Jesus, but we are not gathered around Him simply for ourselves. He forms us so His love, truth, mercy, and kingdom can become visible through the lives we live among other people.

For some, that calling may lead across oceans. For many, it begins across the street. Mission begins wherever Jesus has already placed us and takes shape in homes, workplaces, schools, churches, neighborhoods, friendships, hospitals, farms, offices, job sites, and ordinary conversations.

The question becomes less about finding an impressive mission and more about learning to recognize where Jesus is already inviting us to follow Him.

Eventually, followers also help others follow.

Jesus spent years forming disciples who could continue His work after He returned to the Father. He taught them His words, showed them His life, corrected their misunderstandings, trusted them with responsibility, and sent them out.

Before He ascended, He told them:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19.

That command reveals where the Way leads. A disciple becomes someone who helps others learn the same life. The relationship we receive from Jesus begins to shape how we walk with the people He places around us.

Making disciples often begins in ordinary relationships rather than public ministry. It requires steady faithfulness to walk with another person, to open Scripture together, to pray honestly,

to practice obedience, and to remain present long enough for growth to take root.

A parent teaches a child to pray.

A friend tells another friend what Jesus has done.

A mature believer walks patiently with someone whose faith is still young.

A few people gather around Scripture and begin learning together what it means to obey Jesus.

This is how the Way has continued through generations. The gospel traveled because ordinary people carried it. Churches were formed because disciples made disciples. Families changed because someone decided to follow Jesus faithfully and help the next person do the same.

That work continues.

This book is about learning that life.

We will begin with Jesus' call to follow. We will look at what it means to learn from Him, surrender to Him, abide in Him, hear His words, obey His teaching, walk by the Spirit, pray, live among His people, choose the narrow road, carry the cross, live sent, and make disciples.

These are not separate spiritual subjects. Together, they describe a life shaped by Jesus. Each one belongs to the larger work of learning His way and becoming more like the One we follow.

You may be new to faith.

You may have followed Jesus for years.

You may believe deeply and still recognize places where your life has become hurried, distracted, isolated, or spiritually tired. You may know the right words while sensing that Jesus is inviting you into something deeper than familiarity.

Wherever you begin, Jesus remains the center.

He is not asking you to master every part of discipleship before you take another step. He is asking you to remain near enough to hear Him, trust Him, and follow where He leads. The way forward begins with relationship before it becomes practice.

The road ahead will include joy and surrender. There will be seasons when God's presence feels near and others when faithfulness requires trust without strong emotion. There will be people who strengthen your faith and others who reveal how much you still need to learn about patience, grace, and love.

Through all of it, Jesus will continue forming those who remain with Him.

There will be moments when obedience feels costly. There will also be moments when you look back and realize Jesus has been shaping you in ways you could not see while they were happening.

That is the life of a disciple.

We keep walking because we know the One who leads us.

Jesus is the Way.

And He still says:

“Follow me.”

Chapter One

Come, Follow Me

Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee when He saw two brothers working. Simon Peter and Andrew were fishermen, and their lives were built around boats, nets, weather, water, and the daily work of bringing in enough fish to make a living. They were doing what they knew how to do when Jesus stepped into the ordinary rhythm of their lives.

Matthew tells us:

"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen."

Matthew chapter 4, verse 18.

Nothing about the scene appeared unusual. Peter and Andrew were working, doing what they had probably done hundreds of times before. Then Jesus stepped into an ordinary day and spoke an invitation that would change the direction of their lives.

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew chapter 4, verse 19.

That single sentence contains much of what discipleship will become. "Follow me" is the call into relationship with Jesus. "I will make you" is the promise that He will form those who remain with Him. "Fishers of men" points toward the mission that will eventually grow from a life shaped by Christ.

The disciples did not have to become ready before they followed. They followed, and Jesus began making them into the people He intended them to become. Relationship came first, formation followed, and mission eventually grew from both.

Matthew tells us that Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed Him. A little farther down the shore, Jesus saw James and John working with their father, Zebedee. Jesus called them too, and they left the boat and began walking with Him.

They did not understand everything that following Jesus would eventually require. They did not know where the road would lead, how much they would have to learn, or how deeply their lives would change. They knew enough about the One calling them to take the next step.

That is where discipleship begins.

Jesus calls people to Himself.

The first movement of discipleship is toward a Person. Scripture, prayer, the Church, obedience, and mission will all be-

come essential parts of following Him, but none of them replaces Jesus at the center. The Christian life begins with Him and continues by remaining near Him.

This is what made the call beside the sea so significant. Jesus did not give Peter and Andrew a complete explanation of the years ahead before asking them to follow. He did not describe every town they would visit, every miracle they would witness, every question they would wrestle with, or every hardship they would eventually carry.

He gave them Himself.

Most of us would prefer a map. We want to know where God is taking us before we agree to go, what obedience will cost before we surrender, and whether the road ahead will lead somewhere we consider safe. We often want clarity about the future before we are willing to trust Jesus in the present.

Yet following Jesus rarely works that way.

The disciples learned the road by walking with Him. They discovered His character over meals, long days, crowded roads, storms, questions, failures, and quiet moments away from the crowds. Their confidence did not come from seeing everything ahead. It grew from knowing the One who was leading them.

That remains true for us.

God may give direction for the future, but much of discipleship happens one faithful step at a time. We learn to trust Jesus with what we can see today while leaving what we cannot see in His

hands. Over time, we discover that following Him depends less on having the whole plan and more on knowing the Shepherd who leads us.

The first disciples had to learn this slowly. Peter often wanted clarity before Jesus was ready to give it. He wanted to understand what Jesus was doing, and sometimes he resisted when the path did not match what he expected the Messiah to do.

Jesus continued teaching him.

There will be times when we know exactly what obedience requires. There will also be seasons when the future feels uncertain and the next faithful step appears small. Following Jesus means learning to walk with Him in both.

The call of Jesus also meets us in ordinary life.

Jesus did not wait for Peter and Andrew to enter a religious setting before calling them. He met fishermen beside the sea and Matthew at a tax booth. He spoke with a Samaritan woman beside a well, welcomed Zacchaeus from a crowded street, and entered homes filled with ordinary people carrying ordinary needs.

Jesus has always entered real life.

This matters because we can easily divide life into spiritual and ordinary categories. We think of church, prayer, Scripture, worship, and ministry as the places where following Jesus happens, and then return to work, family, schedules, finances, relation-

ships, and responsibilities as though they belong somewhere else.

Jesus makes no such division.

When He calls a person, He calls the whole person. Our work, relationships, habits, ambitions, fears, resources, decisions, wounds, and future all become places where we learn His way. Following Jesus reaches into the ordinary parts of life because those are the places where most of our lives are actually lived.

It reaches the way we speak when we are frustrated. It shapes how we treat people who cannot do anything for us, how we respond when someone disappoints us, and what we choose when no one else is watching. Jesus teaches us to follow Him at the kitchen table, in the office, on the road, at the job site, and in the quiet decisions that rarely receive attention.

Peter's boat mattered because it was part of Peter's life.

Matthew's work mattered because it was part of Matthew's life.

Your ordinary life matters too.

Jesus took language Peter and Andrew already understood and gave it a new direction. They knew what it meant to cast nets and wait for a catch. Jesus would take what was familiar and slowly teach them that their lives were now part of something larger.

“I will make you fishers of men.”

Notice where the responsibility for transformation begins.

"I will make you."

Jesus did not say, "Become the kind of men I can use, then come find me." He called them as they were and took responsibility for forming them as they remained with Him. They would have to listen, obey, repent, and respond, but the transforming work belonged to Christ.

This is an important part of grace.

Many people delay following Jesus more deeply because they believe they need to become better first. They want to resolve a struggle, break a habit, understand more Scripture, become more disciplined, or somehow prove that they are serious enough before fully surrendering.

Jesus already knows the person He is calling.

He knew Peter would speak too quickly at times. He knew Peter would struggle to understand the cross and argue when Jesus spoke about suffering. He knew that Peter would promise never to abandon Him and later deny three times that he even knew Jesus.

Jesus called him anyway.

The call was not a reward for Peter's finished character. It was the beginning of Peter's formation. Jesus saw the man standing beside the nets, and He also knew the man Peter could become through years spent walking with Him.

Grace meets us where we are, but grace does not leave us there. The same Jesus who says, "Come," also says, "I will make you." He forms what is unfinished, corrects what is false, strengthens what is weak, and teaches us to trust where fear has taught us to protect ourselves.

That work usually takes time.

The Gospels are remarkably honest about the disciples because Scripture does not hide the distance between the people Jesus called and the people they would eventually become. They argued about who was greatest, misunderstood His teaching, fell asleep when He asked them to pray, became afraid in storms, and struggled to accept a Messiah who would suffer.

Still, they remained with Jesus.

Their failures became places where He taught them. Their questions became opportunities for deeper understanding, and their pride, fear, confusion, and weakness could be brought into His presence and transformed. Discipleship was not the appearance of having arrived. It was the willingness to remain with Jesus as He continued to form them.

That requires humility.

Following Jesus means being willing to admit when His way differs from ours. We receive correction from Scripture, listen when the Spirit exposes something in us, and allow trusted believers to help us see places where we may be blind.

Following means Jesus gets to lead.

That can be difficult because many of us have spent years learning to lead ourselves. We make plans, solve problems, carry responsibility, and try to create lives that feel secure. We learn from experience, protect ourselves from disappointment, and sometimes begin to treat control as though it were wisdom.

Then Jesus says, "Follow me."

His call carries authority because He is Lord. Yet throughout the Gospels, people still have to respond. Some leave what they know and follow Him, while others hear His words and walk away.

The Gospel of John describes the relationship between Jesus and His followers through the picture of a shepherd and sheep.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

John chapter 10, verse 27.

There is relationship in those words. Jesus knows His sheep, His sheep learn His voice, and then they follow. The order matters because Christian obedience grows from knowing the One who leads us.

A shepherd knows the landscape in ways the sheep do not. He sees dangers they cannot see and knows where water and pasture can be found. The sheep do not need to understand the whole terrain. They need to recognize the shepherd and trust his leadership.

The Christian life grows from that same relationship.

We learn the voice of Jesus through Scripture. We become familiar with His character, His commands, His compassion, and the kind of life His kingdom produces. We begin to recognize what sounds like Him because we have spent time learning who He is.

The more clearly we know Him, the more deeply we can trust Him.

Jesus is not asking us to obey an unknown master. He has shown us His heart. He welcomed sinners, touched lepers, wept with grieving friends, defended the overlooked, confronted hypocrisy, washed His disciples' feet, carried the cross, and gave His life for the world.

The Shepherd who leads us is the Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.

We can trust His voice because we know His heart.

Still, the call requires a response.

Peter and Andrew could have heard Jesus and remained beside their nets. James and John could have decided that leaving the boat carried too much uncertainty. Matthew could have stayed at his tax booth.

The Gospels show both kinds of responses.

Some people followed quickly. Others hesitated. Some wanted to remain near Jesus until His words touched something they were unwilling to surrender.

One of the clearest examples is the rich young man who came to Jesus asking about eternal life. He appears sincere, and Mark tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him. Yet when Jesus touched the place where the man's trust was divided, the man went away sorrowful because he had great possessions.

His story reminds us that it is possible to come near Jesus and still resist His leadership.

Following becomes real when the way of Jesus intersects with something we value deeply. For one person that may be money. For another it may be approval, control, comfort, sexuality, ambition, resentment, reputation, or a future they have already planned.

Jesus eventually reaches those places because discipleship involves the whole life.

We do not surrender everything in a single moment of perfect understanding. Much of discipleship is the gradual discovery of what we are still holding. As we walk with Jesus, He reveals the places where trust has not yet reached and invites us to follow Him there too.

This is why the call of Jesus is not only something we remember from the beginning of faith.

It remains part of the Christian life.

Peter had followed Jesus for years when, after the resurrection, Jesus spoke those words to him again.

"Follow me."

John chapter 21, verse 19.

Peter had failed badly. He had denied Jesus when courage mattered most and carried the memory of that failure into the days after the cross. Yet the risen Christ met him beside another sea, restored him, gave him responsibility, and called him forward again.

Peter's failure did not have to become the place where he stopped walking.

Neither do ours.

When we sin, we return to Jesus. When fear has led us away, we turn back toward Him. When pride has convinced us that our way is better, repentance brings us again under His leadership.

Repentance is part of the Way because disciples sometimes wander.

Jesus continues calling us back.

This should shape the way we think about our own formation and the people around us. Jesus did not begin with polished disciples or people who had everything figured out. He began with ordinary people willing to follow.

The men beside the Sea of Galilee did not have impressive spiritual resumes. They became significant because they spent their lives with Jesus. His presence, teaching, correction, grace, and Spirit formed them for work they could not have imagined when they first put down their nets.

God still works through ordinary people.

Following Jesus is not reserved for pastors, missionaries, authors, or people whose lives appear unusually spiritual. Every believer is invited to live under the leadership of Jesus wherever God has placed them.

A mother can follow Jesus while caring for children. A business owner can follow Him while making difficult decisions. A student can follow Him in a classroom, a farmer in a field, and a friend while sitting beside someone in a hospital room.

The location changes.

The invitation does not.

As this book continues, we will explore what that life looks like. We will learn what it means to learn from Jesus, surrender our will, abide in Him, hear and obey His words, walk by the Spirit, pray, belong to His people, choose the narrow way, carry the cross, live sent, and make disciples.

All of these practices remain centered on Jesus Himself. Discipleship begins with relationship with Him, and mission grows from the life He forms in us. Before we can help others learn

the way of Jesus, we must continue learning to walk with Him ourselves.

There may be parts of your life where following already feels natural. There may be other places where you recognize that you have been walking mostly by your own understanding. Jesus is not asking you to solve the entire journey today.

He is asking for the next faithful step.

That step may be returning to Scripture with a willing heart. It may be obeying something you already know Jesus has been asking of you, releasing a plan you have been holding too tightly, asking forgiveness, telling the truth, reconnecting with the Church, or bringing a hidden struggle into the light.

The next step will not look the same for everyone, but the direction is the same.

The men beside the Sea of Galilee could not see everything that waited ahead. They knew only that Jesus had called them, and they chose to follow. As they walked with Him, He began forming them into people they could never have become on their own.

The same invitation remains before us. We do not need to see the entire road before taking the next faithful step. We need to know the One who is leading.

Jesus still says, “Follow me.”

Chapter Two

Learn from Me

The first disciples left their nets and began following Jesus, but that decision did not make them finished disciples. Peter, Andrew, James, John, and the others still had much to learn. Following brought them close enough for Jesus to begin shaping how they thought, lived, loved, prayed, served, and understood God.

Jesus described this invitation with words that have brought comfort to generations of people carrying burdens:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Matthew chapter 11, verse 28.

Then Jesus continued:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."

Matthew chapter 11, verse 29.

The two invitations belong together: come to Me and learn from Me. Jesus brings people near so they can know Him, and life near Him becomes the place where they are formed. A disciple does not simply receive something from Jesus. A disciple begins learning to live with Him and like Him.

This is what it means to become a disciple.

A disciple is a learner, but the kind of learning Jesus offers goes beyond mere information gathering. His disciples listened to His teaching, remembered His words, asked questions, and tried to understand the kingdom of God. Yet much of what they learned came through sharing life with Him.

They watched Jesus closely. They saw how He responded when crowds interrupted His plans, how He treated people with little status, and how He spoke to those who opposed Him. They saw Him pray, rest, serve, confront, forgive, grieve, celebrate, and remain faithful to the Father.

The disciples were learning a life.

Mark describes one moment when Jesus called twelve men into a particular relationship with Him. He appointed them so "that they might be with him" and so that He might eventually send them out.

Mark chapter 3, verse 14.

The order matters. Jesus called them first to be with Him. Their formation grew from that relationship, and their mission even-

tually flowed from what He had formed in them. They would be sent by Jesus because they had first learned to live with Jesus.

This pattern is easy to overlook because we often want to move quickly toward doing something for God. We want a purpose, an assignment, a role, or a clear place where our lives can make a difference. Those desires can be good, but Jesus begins somewhere deeper.

He calls us to be with Him.

Christian activity can never replace life with Christ. Jesus is forming people who know Him, and everything they eventually do in His name should grow from that relationship. Service, leadership, teaching, generosity, and mission all become healthier when they flow from a life that is still learning from Jesus.

That formation takes time because becoming like Jesus reaches deeper than learning new behavior. Our actions grow from patterns of thought, desire, fear, trust, and love that have been forming in us for years. We carry stories, habits, assumptions, wounds, ambitions, and ways of responding that often feel natural because we have practiced them for so long.

Then we begin walking with Jesus.

His words reveal places where our instincts do not match His. His life shows us ways of responding that are different from the ones we have learned. His presence begins exposing the places where fear, pride, anger, approval, control, or self-protection have been shaping us more than we realized.

This is part of being taught.

A good teacher does more than repeat what a student already knows. A good teacher brings understanding where there has been confusion and correction where something has been learned incorrectly. Jesus teaches with perfect truth and perfect love because He sees both who we are and who He is forming us to become.

The disciples experienced this constantly.

They argued over who was greatest, and Jesus taught them to serve. They wanted to send people away, and Jesus showed compassion. They wanted to call down judgment, and Jesus corrected them. They worried about provision while standing beside the One who had already shown them the Father's care.

They were learning through everything they experienced with Jesus. Sometimes He taught them directly. Sometimes He answered their questions, corrected their assumptions, or allowed their failures to reveal what still needed to change. Jesus used ordinary moments, difficult moments, and even their mistakes as places of formation.

That should change the way we understand our own growth.

We often become discouraged when we recognize how much of our lives still needs to be formed. We may have followed Jesus for years and still find ourselves struggling with impatience, comparison, fear, resentment, selfishness, or the need to control what happens next.

Recognizing what still needs to change does not always mean we are moving backward. Sometimes we are finally close enough to Jesus to see what He wants to teach us. His light reveals patterns we once ignored, and His truth gives names to attitudes we once considered normal.

Growth often begins when we become able to see honestly what grace is already working to transform.

Scripture begins naming things we once excused. The Spirit brings conviction to attitudes that once seemed harmless. Relationships reveal patterns we could not see when we were alone, and hardship exposes where our trust has been resting.

Jesus uses these places to teach us.

He teaches what love looks like when love becomes inconvenient. He teaches patience when life moves slower than we want. He teaches forgiveness when someone has actually hurt us, and He teaches trust when the future cannot be controlled.

These things cannot remain ideas.

They have to become practiced ways of living.

Jesus said:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."

Luke chapter 6, verse 40.

The goal of Christian formation is to be like Jesus. His disciples learn His words so deeply that His character increasingly becomes visible in the way they live. Knowledge matters, but it is meant to lead toward a life shaped by the Teacher.

That kind of change is often gradual.

A person who once responded quickly in anger may begin learning gentleness. Someone who built life around approval may become more secure in the Father's love. A person who always needed control may slowly learn to entrust outcomes to God.

Someone who once avoided difficult people may begin learning compassion. Someone who guarded everything they owned may become generous. Someone who carried resentment for years may discover that Jesus is teaching them how to forgive.

These changes grow through repeated life with Jesus.

This is one reason the words "learn from me" matter so much. Jesus understands that we are learning. He does not speak as though every disciple should already know how to live everything He teaches.

He invites us into a process.

The disciples asked questions that sometimes revealed how little they understood. They misunderstood parables, struggled to grasp what Jesus meant when He spoke about His death, and watched Him feed thousands only to worry about bread later.

Jesus continued teaching them.

There is patience in discipleship.

That patience does not make growth unimportant. It means growth happens under the care of a patient Teacher. Jesus is serious about forming His disciples, and His formation is shaped by the same character He reveals in Matthew chapter 11.

He says:

"I am gentle and lowly in heart."

Matthew chapter 11, verse 29.

Jesus teaches with complete authority and with a heart that is gentle and lowly. His truth can confront us deeply while His grace keeps drawing us near. He corrects because He loves, and His correction is always directed toward restoration and life.

This does not mean Jesus avoids difficult truth. He challenged religious leaders, corrected His disciples, confronted unbelief, and called people to repentance. Yet even His correction was purposeful.

Peter experienced this after denying Jesus.

Jesus did not pretend Peter's failure had not happened. He brought Peter back to the place where love, loyalty, and calling had to be faced again. Yet the conversation beside the sea was not designed to humiliate Peter.

It restored him.

That is the kind of Teacher we are learning from.

Jesus knows how to reveal what needs to change while continuing to call us forward. He can confront pride, expose fear, and show us where we have wandered without turning away from the person He loves.

This allows discipleship to become honest.

We can bring our actual lives to Jesus, including the places where trust is difficult, the habits that remain stubborn, the relationships where patience grows thin, the fears we rarely say aloud, and the questions we still carry. A disciple learns by bringing those places into relationship with the Teacher rather than hiding them from Him.

This is very different from trying to create a spiritual image.

Religious performance teaches us to manage appearances. We learn how to sound mature, say what people expect, and keep difficult parts of ourselves out of view. Jesus teaches us to walk in truth.

Growth begins when we are willing to let Him teach the person we actually are.

Learning from Jesus also requires attention.

The disciples had Jesus physically walking beside them, yet they still missed things. They could be in the boat with Him and remain more focused on the storm than on His presence. They

could watch His compassion toward others and still become impatient with the next person who needed help.

We can do the same.

Jesus may stand at the center of what we believe, yet receive very little of our attention throughout the day. Our minds can become filled with schedules, messages, news, responsibilities, entertainment, work, worries, and endless noise. None of those things has to be evil to make it difficult to listen well.

Discipleship requires learning to pay attention.

We pay attention to the words of Jesus in Scripture. We notice what those words reveal about His character and where they challenge the patterns of our own lives. We make room for prayer, reflection, and the quiet work of allowing truth to move deeper than information.

We also pay attention throughout ordinary life.

As we learn to pay attention, ordinary life becomes part of the classroom. A difficult conversation may expose impatience. An interruption may reveal how tightly we are holding our plans, and disappointment may show us where our hope has quietly shifted away from God.

This does not mean we anxiously search for a hidden lesson in everything that happens. It means we live with an awareness that Jesus is present and that every part of life can be brought under His teaching.

We begin by asking how Jesus would have us respond, what His Word teaches, what a situation may reveal about our heart, and where the Spirit is inviting us to grow. Questions like these create space for formation by bringing ordinary life back under the leadership of Jesus.

Jesus also tells His disciples to take His yoke upon them.

The image of a yoke carried the idea of coming under someone's direction and learning a particular way of life. Jesus invites His disciples to receive His leadership and learn His way. Remarkably, He describes that life as the place where weary people find rest for their souls.

This sounds different from the way many of us understand rest.

We often think rest means the absence of responsibility. Jesus describes rest within a life brought under His leadership. The burden becomes different because we are no longer trying to carry life apart from Him.

Much of our exhaustion comes from trying to carry life without Jesus' leadership. We try to secure our own worth, manage what other people think, control outcomes, and carry responsibilities God never gave us. Learning from Jesus includes discovering what belongs in our hands and what must be entrusted to His.

Jesus offers another way.

His yoke gives direction to our effort, and His presence gives rest to our souls. We participate through obedience, practice,

repentance, prayer, and faithfulness while trusting Him to do the deeper work of transformation.

This also means we may have to unlearn some things.

Not everything that feels natural is faithful.

We may have learned that strength means never admitting weakness. Jesus shows us a strength that can depend on the Father, receive help, and tell the truth about need. We may have learned that leadership means remaining in control, while Jesus kneels before His disciples and washes their feet.

We may have learned that success proves our worth. Jesus teaches us to receive identity from the Father before achievement can define us. We may have learned to protect ourselves through distance, resentment, silence, or self-reliance, while Jesus leads us toward truth, forgiveness, reconciliation, and trust.

Following Jesus involves allowing Him to reshape some of the definitions by which we have been living.

This kind of formation can take years. We may surrender something to Jesus and later discover another layer beneath it. A new season can expose impatience we thought we had overcome or reveal how much our trust still depends on circumstances.

Mature disciples understand that the lesson continues.

Years of following Jesus should make us more teachable, not less. The longer we walk with Christ, the more we begin to un-

derstand that His character cannot be reduced to a few lessons mastered early in faith.

The longer we walk with Jesus, the more we discover the depth of His love, the wisdom of His words, the freedom found in obedience to the Father, and the compassion with which He sees people. His character cannot be exhausted by a few lessons learned early in faith. There is always more of Christ for the disciple to know and more of our lives for Him to form.

Paul continued pursuing this even after years of ministry. He spoke of wanting to know Christ more deeply. His maturity did not produce the belief that he had moved beyond dependence on Jesus.

It deepened his desire for Him.

That is a healthy picture of discipleship.

We do not graduate from Jesus.

We remain His students.

This does not mean we never become capable of teaching others. The first disciples eventually became apostles, leaders, witnesses, and people who helped form the Church. They taught because Jesus had first taught them.

They could help others follow because they were still followers themselves.

That pattern will become important later when we talk about making disciples. We cannot faithfully reproduce a life we have

stopped living. The most important thing we bring into the formation of another person is a life that is still being formed by Jesus.

For now, the invitation is to remain teachable. Pay attention to the words and life of Jesus. Bring your actual life into His presence, practice what He teaches, and allow Him to correct what needs correction and strengthen what is weak.

Disciples are formed by continuing to learn from the Teacher.

The first disciples began beside the sea, but following soon became a life of learning. Every road, meal, question, mistake, miracle, storm, and quiet moment with Jesus became part of their formation. They were slowly becoming like their Teacher because they remained near enough to be taught.

The same is true for us. As we learn the way of Jesus, we eventually discover places where His way confronts our own. Some desires will need to be reordered, some plans placed into His hands, and some parts of life brought more fully under His leadership.

Learning from Jesus eventually leads us to surrender.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Three

The Way of Surrender

Learning from Jesus eventually brings us to places where His way confronts our own. The longer we walk with Him, the more clearly we see the habits, desires, assumptions, and plans that have been shaping us. Discipleship becomes personal when Jesus begins asking us to trust Him in the places we would rather keep under our own control.

Jesus speaks directly about this:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Luke chapter 9, verse 23.

Those words were spoken to people who had already seen His power and heard His teaching. They had watched Jesus heal the sick, feed crowds, cast out demons, and announce the kingdom of God. Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Christ.

Then Jesus began speaking about the cross.

The disciples expected the Messiah to bring victory, but they did not yet understand the kind of victory Jesus had come to accomplish. They imagined a kingdom that would overturn the powers around them. Jesus began teaching them about suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection.

Peter resisted because the road Jesus described did not fit the kind of Messiah he expected. He wanted Jesus, but he struggled with the path Jesus said He must walk. That tension still appears in discipleship whenever we want the gifts of Christ while resisting the places where His leadership challenges our expectations.

We can want the peace of Jesus while still holding tightly to control. We can want forgiveness while protecting patterns, plans, desires, or priorities that feel safer in our own hands. We can believe Jesus is good and still struggle when His way asks us to release something we value deeply.

This is where surrender begins.

Surrender is the willingness to place the whole life under the leadership of Jesus. It means trusting His authority over our plans, desires, relationships, resources, and future. That trust becomes most visible when His way differs from the one we would naturally choose for ourselves.

Jesus describes this as denying ourselves.

To deny ourselves is to stop treating the self as the highest authority. Our desires, emotions, hopes, and needs still matter, but they no longer determine what is ultimately true or faithful. They are brought honestly before Jesus and placed under His leadership.

Sin has trained us to place ourselves at the center. We ask what we want, what protects us, what makes us comfortable, and what helps us maintain control. Even good desires can become ruling desires when we believe we cannot be at peace unless they are fulfilled on our terms.

Jesus calls us out of that center.

He shows us another way.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed:

"Not my will, but yours, be done."

Luke chapter 22, verse 42.

Jesus prayed those words in anguish. He did not minimize what obedience would cost or pretend the road ahead was easy. He brought His desire honestly before the Father and still entrusted Himself to the Father's will.

That is surrender.

Jesus does not teach surrender only with words. He embodies it.

Throughout His life, He lived in complete trust toward the Father. He did not build His ministry around protecting His comfort, securing approval, or avoiding difficulty. He continually chose the Father's will because He knew the Father's heart.

Paul later described the life of Jesus this way:

"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Philippians chapter 2, verse 8.

The cross reveals how far Jesus' obedience went. He gave Himself fully, even when obedience carried suffering. His surrender was not passive resignation. It was active trust in the Father and love for the people He came to save.

This matters because Christian surrender is always a response to the One who first gave Himself for us. Jesus does not stand at a safe distance asking His followers to make sacrifices He knows nothing about. He walked the road of obedience before calling us to follow Him on it.

We trust the One who gave Himself for us.

That does not make surrender easy.

There are places in every life where control feels safer than trust. Some people hold tightly to money because it represents security. Others hold tightly to reputation because being respected has become part of how they understand their worth.

Many of the things we hold tightly are not wrong in themselves. Career, relationships, financial stability, and plans for the future can all be good gifts. The deeper question is whether a good thing has become something we cannot imagine placing into the hands of Jesus.

That is often where the heart is revealed.

Jesus once met a man who appeared eager to follow the path toward eternal life. He had lived carefully and wanted to know what still remained. Mark tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Then Jesus touched the place where the man's trust and allegiance were divided. His wealth had become more than something he possessed. It had become something he could not release when Jesus called him forward.

The man walked away sorrowful.

His story reminds us that it is possible to come near Jesus and still resist His leadership. The issue was not simply that he had possessions. The deeper problem was that when Jesus called him to trust Him more than what he owned, he could not let go.

Surrender opens our hands.

Sometimes Jesus asks us to release something completely. At other times, He asks us to hold something differently. The issue is not always whether something remains in our lives, but whether it remains under His leadership.

Surrender may involve releasing the need to be understood, the desire to win every argument, a future we have already planned, or an ambition that has quietly become more important than faithfulness. It may involve a relationship we are trying to control, resentment we refuse to let go of, or a version of ourselves we have spent years protecting.

Jesus knows where these places are.

Often we discover them slowly.

We begin following Him with sincere faith, assuming that most of our lives are already aligned with His way. Then a situation exposes something deeper. A disappointment reveals how much peace depended on getting the outcome we wanted, while criticism exposes how much identity depended on approval.

A financial setback may reveal where our security has been resting. A conflict may reveal how much we need to be right. A season of waiting may uncover how uncomfortable we become when God does not move according to our timetable.

These moments can become invitations to deeper trust. Jesus does not expose what is ruling us simply to leave us ashamed. He reveals what we have been depending on so that those places can be brought into His grace and under His leadership.

Surrender is learned through repeated acts of trust.

Jesus spoke of taking up the cross "daily."

The word "daily" matters because surrender is rarely limited to a single dramatic moment. There may be decisions that change the direction of a life, but much of discipleship is formed through ordinary obedience repeated over time.

Most surrender happens through those ordinary decisions. We place the day before God, choose truth when dishonesty would protect us, forgive when an old wound rises, release the need to control another person's response, and obey when no one is watching.

These small acts of trust slowly form a surrendered life.

Luke records another moment when large crowds were following Jesus. He spoke openly about the cost of discipleship and used the picture of someone planning to build a tower. A wise builder first considers whether there are enough resources to finish what has been started.

Jesus also spoke of a king considering whether he was prepared for the battle ahead.

Then He said:

"Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Luke chapter 14, verse 33.

Jesus was not hiding the cost of following Him.

He told the truth.

Following Jesus changes the way we understand what has been entrusted to us. Our time, abilities, resources, relationships, and future are no longer treated as independent possessions. They become gifts received from God and brought under His care and direction.

This language can sound severe if we separate it from the character of Jesus. We are entrusting ourselves to the One who washed feet, welcomed sinners, carried the cross, and gave Himself for His enemies. His authority is good because He is good, and the more clearly we know Him, the more surrender becomes connected to trust.

We may not understand every direction Jesus gives or know why a particular road is difficult. We may still grieve what obedience costs. Trust means we continue walking because we know the character of the One who leads us.

This is where surrender and freedom begin to meet.

At first, surrender can feel like losing control. Yet some of the things we cling to most tightly are also the things that keep us anxious, afraid, exhausted, or divided inside. Control promises security, but it often requires us to keep managing outcomes, protecting appearances, and carrying responsibility for things we were never able to guarantee.

Jesus invites us to release the exhausting work of trying to be our own lord. In surrender, we begin learning the difference between faithful responsibility and ultimate control. We do what

has been entrusted to us and leave what belongs to God in His hands.

This is part of what Jesus means when He calls weary people to Himself.

The surrendered life still carries responsibility. It may carry significant responsibility. Yet the disciple no longer has to carry ultimate control over what cannot be controlled.

Surrender does not remove planning, work, leadership, or responsibility. It changes the posture with which we carry them. We make plans with open hands, work without asking our work to define our worth, lead as stewards rather than owners, and care about outcomes while remembering that the final outcome belongs to God.

This kind of surrender changes the posture of a life.

A surrendered posture changes the way we pray, read Scripture, relate to people, and pursue success. Prayer becomes a place where we ask God to lead rather than simply bless decisions already made. Scripture becomes a word we are willing to obey, relationships become places to practice faithful love, and ambition is brought into question: whether success makes us more faithful to Jesus.

Surrender also changes the way we understand loss.

Surrender does not mean calling every painful thing good or assuming every loss was something God specifically asked us to choose. We live in a broken world where sickness, betrayal, grief,

and disappointment are real. Discipleship teaches us to bring those losses to Christ and to continue entrusting ourselves to Him, even when we do not understand what He is allowing or how He will redeem them.

Jesus understands that kind of trust.

He entered suffering rather than standing at a distance from it. He knew betrayal, rejection, physical pain, grief, and abandonment. The cross shows us that obedience and suffering can occupy the same road without suffering having the final word.

Our suffering will not always have an explanation we can see.

Faith does not require us to invent one.

The cross reminds us that God can still be trusted even when obedience and understanding do not coincide. We can bring grief honestly before Him and continue walking even when some questions remain unanswered.

Surrender is also deeply connected to repentance.

Repentance means turning from one direction toward another. Every time we recognize that we have been living by our own way rather than the way of Jesus, we are invited to turn again toward Him.

Repentance remains part of a disciple's life because we continue to discover places where our way has taken the lead. We bring those places into the light, receive grace, and turn again toward Jesus.

Disciples continue repenting because disciples continue learning.

The closer we walk with Jesus, the more clearly we see where His way is still forming ours. This does not mean living under constant fear that we have failed. It means remaining responsive to the One who loves us enough to keep shaping us.

Peter experienced this repeatedly.

Peter's surrender unfolded over time. He left his nets, but he later had to surrender his expectations of the Messiah, his desire for greatness, his confidence in his own courage, and eventually his desire to control what the future would hold.

By the end of John's Gospel, Peter had learned that following Jesus was not a single dramatic decision made by the sea. It was a lifetime of bringing more of himself under the leadership of Christ.

After the resurrection, Jesus told Peter that his path would one day include suffering.

Then Jesus said again:

"Follow me."

John chapter 21, verse 19.

The words were the same as they had been years earlier.

Peter was different.

He had learned that following Jesus meant continuing to trust the One who called him even when the road ahead could not be controlled.

That is the way of surrender.

Surrender does not need to be manufactured. Often Jesus is already showing us where trust is difficult or where our hands are closed. The invitation is to bring that place honestly before Him and take the next faithful step He is already making clear.

There may be something clearly sinful that needs to be confessed and left behind. There may be something good that has become too central, or something uncertain that you have been trying to control. There may simply be an area where Jesus is asking for trust before He gives you clarity.

Bring that place to Him.

The goal is not dramatic sacrifice for its own sake.

The goal is faithfulness to Jesus.

Surrender is not the destination of discipleship. It creates room for deeper life with Jesus. As our hands open, we discover that following Him is sustained by relationship rather than constant effort to control the journey.

Jesus does not call us merely to lay things down. He calls us to remain with Him.

Surrender makes room for abiding.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Four

Abide in Me

Surrender opens our hands, but an open hand still needs somewhere to rest. Jesus does not call His disciples to release control and then leave them to figure out how to live on their own. He calls them closer. The life we place into His hands becomes a life we learn to receive from Him, and this is where abiding begins.

On the night before the cross, Jesus gathered with His disciples. He knew what was coming and understood the confusion, grief, and fear they would soon experience. The physical closeness they had known with Him for years was about to change, so Jesus gave them an image they could carry into everything that was ahead.

“I am the vine; you are the branches.”

John chapter 15, verse 5.

The picture was simple. A branch lives because it remains connected to the vine, receiving what it cannot produce for itself.

Everything the branch needs for life and fruitfulness flows from the source to which it remains connected.

Then Jesus said:

"Abide in me, and I in you."

John chapter 15, verse 4.

To abide means to remain. Jesus was teaching His disciples that following Him would require more than remembering what He had taught them. They would need to continue living in relationship with Him as the source of their strength, fruitfulness, obedience, and endurance.

This becomes especially important after surrender.

When we begin releasing control, we may assume the next step is to work harder to become the person Jesus wants us to be. We try to become more disciplined, patient, loving, prayerful, and faithful through stronger effort. Without realizing it, spiritual formation can become another project we believe we are responsible for completing.

Effort has a place in discipleship. We make choices, practice obedience, and develop rhythms that help us pay attention to God. Yet Jesus makes clear that our effort can never become the source of spiritual life. A branch cannot produce life apart from the vine, and neither can a disciple produce the life of Christ apart from Christ.

Jesus continued:

"As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

John chapter 15, verse 4.

That statement reaches into one of the deepest temptations of spiritual life. We can want patience without slowing down long enough to be with Jesus, wisdom while giving little attention to His Word, and peace while carrying the future as though everything depends on us. We can even desire to become like Christ while living at a distance from Him.

Jesus teaches that spiritual fruit grows another way.

Remain in Me.

The word remain suggests something steady. Abiding is not a dramatic spiritual moment that happens once. It is an ongoing relationship in which we continually return to Jesus, allowing His words, presence, grace, and Spirit to shape the life we are living.

Abiding keeps discipleship relational. Without it, faith can slowly become a collection of responsibilities where prayer becomes another task, Scripture another item to complete, service another obligation, and obedience something we attempt through determination. The activities may still look spiritual, even as the heart grows tired.

Jesus speaks about remaining before He speaks about fruit.

That order matters.

Fruit grows because the branch lives from the vine. In the same way, Christian character grows as the disciple receives life from Christ. Love, patience, courage, generosity, peace, and faithfulness become increasingly visible because Jesus is forming something deeper within us.

The fruit Jesus describes includes the character He forms in us, the obedience that grows from love, and a life through which the Father is increasingly glorified. This is more than learning to appear patient, generous, peaceful, or faithful. Jesus is interested in what is becoming true within us.

The vine gives life to the branch from the inside, and Jesus forms His people in the same way. He renews the mind, reshapes desires, softens what has become hard, and strengthens what has become weak. Over time, what He is forming within us becomes visible in the way we live.

Jesus said:

"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

John chapter 15, verse 5.

Jesus expects fruit from the lives of His disciples. Abiding is not a passive spirituality in which we avoid responsibility and wait for God to do everything. A healthy branch bears fruit because life is flowing through it, and a disciple who remains with Jesus will increasingly become a person whose life reflects Him.

The difference is the source.

We do not create the life of Jesus through pressure. We receive His life and learn to live from it. Our choices matter, but transformation begins with what Christ supplies rather than what we can manufacture for ourselves.

This truth can be difficult for people who are used to measuring life by performance. Much of the world trains us to believe that value comes through what we produce, accomplish, earn, or prove. Even spiritual growth can become another place where we keep score.

We measure how much Scripture we read, how long we prayed, how consistently we served, or how quickly we seem to be changing. Those practices matter, but they were never meant to become measurements of our worth before God. They are ways of remaining attentive and responsive to the One who has already brought us near.

Jesus calls us branches.

A branch does not become valuable because it produces a certain amount of fruit. It belongs to the vine, receives life from the vine, and bears fruit from that living connection. Our relationship with Jesus begins with grace and continues in grace.

We do not remain near Him so He will finally accept us. We remain because through Christ we have already been brought near. Abiding becomes the posture of someone who has discovered where life is found and does not want to live disconnected from its source.

This changes the way we understand spiritual practices.

Prayer becomes a way of remaining aware of God rather than proving that we are serious Christians. Scripture becomes a place where we hear the voice of Jesus and allow His words to remain in us. Worship becomes a response to who God is and a way of turning our attention toward Him.

Confession also becomes part of abiding.

When we sin, the instinct is often to hide. Shame tells us to create distance until we have somehow made ourselves presentable again. Yet hiding moves us away from the relationship where grace and transformation are found.

John later wrote:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

First John chapter 1, verse 9.

Confession brings what is hidden into the light. We name what is true, receive the forgiveness Christ has secured, and return to relationship rather than allowing failure to create distance. Abiding teaches us that when we sin, the direction of grace is back toward Jesus rather than farther away from Him.

This matters in the ordinary struggle with temptation.

Temptation often becomes stronger when we are hurried, tired, isolated, distracted, or spiritually disconnected. We become more vulnerable when the voice of Jesus has grown faint be-

neath other voices that have received more of our attention. What captures our attention eventually begins to shape our desires and responses.

Abiding helps reorder that attention. We return to Scripture, pray honestly, remain connected to God's people, and slow down enough to recognize what is happening within us. These rhythms do not earn God's presence. They help us become attentive to the presence He has already promised.

The Gospels show Jesus Himself living in continual communion with the Father. He withdrew to pray as crowds grew, sought the Father before significant decisions, and prayed through moments of suffering. His ministry flowed from perfect relationship, trust, and obedience to the Father.

Jesus described this dependence by saying:

"The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing."

John chapter 5, verse 19.

Jesus did not move through His earthly ministry driven by every crowd, critic, demand, or opportunity. He listened to the Father and remained faithful to what the Father had given Him to do. His disciples had watched that life, and now Jesus was teaching them to live with the same posture of dependence.

This becomes difficult in a hurried life.

Busyness can create the appearance of fruitfulness while slowly weakening our awareness of Jesus. We can move from responsibility to responsibility, answer every message, solve every problem, and arrive at the end of the day having given little attention to the One we say is leading us.

The deeper question is often how we are carrying what has been entrusted to us. We can move through the day with an awareness of God, listening and receiving strength from Him, or we can carry the same responsibilities almost entirely by reacting, using only our remaining energy. Abiding changes the source from which we live.

This does not require withdrawing from ordinary responsibility. Most disciples are called to lives filled with work, family, relationships, service, and real demands. Jesus teaches us to remain with Him while living faithfully within those places.

An ordinary day can include opening Scripture slowly enough to listen, pausing before a difficult conversation to ask for wisdom, turning anxiety into prayer, noticing reasons for gratitude, and confessing quickly when something goes wrong. Abiding becomes less about creating a single perfect spiritual routine and more about cultivating a life that continually returns to Christ.

There will be seasons when these rhythms feel easier and seasons when they do not. Prayer may sometimes feel alive and clear, while at other times the words feel simple or difficult to find. Scripture may speak with immediate clarity in one season and require patient attention in another.

Abiding is not measured by constant spiritual emotion.

It is the decision to remain.

This matters when suffering enters the story.

Some of the disciples who heard Jesus speak about the vine would soon face persecution, opposition, loss, and uncertainty. They would need something deeper than a temporary feeling of closeness to God. They would need a life rooted in the faithfulness of Christ.

The same is true when our own lives become difficult. A diagnosis can change the future we expected, a relationship can break, a prayer can remain unanswered longer than we hoped, or grief can make God feel distant even while we believe He is near. Abiding in those seasons may look less like confidence and more like continuing to turn toward Jesus when we do not understand.

In those seasons, we keep turning toward Jesus because we know where life is found. We pray even when the words are simple, open Scripture because we need truth stronger than our feelings, and remain near other believers who can help carry hope when our own faith feels tired. Abiding in difficult seasons becomes a quiet form of endurance.

Peter once gave words to this dependence when many others stopped following Jesus.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John chapter 6, verse 68.

Peter did not understand everything Jesus was saying. The road had become difficult, and people around him were leaving. Yet Peter had come to know enough about Jesus to understand that walking away from Him would also mean walking away from the source of life.

That is the heart of abiding.

The writer of Hebrews later told believers:

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

Hebrews chapter 10, verse 23.

The foundation is His faithfulness. Our grip may feel strong or weak at times, our emotions may change, our circumstances may shift, and our understanding may remain incomplete. The character of Jesus remains steady.

Abiding means returning to that reality.

Jesus also connects abiding with His words.

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you."

John chapter 15, verse 7.

We cannot separate remaining in Jesus from receiving what He says. His words shape our understanding of God, ourselves, other people, and the life we have been given. They correct the

stories we tell ourselves and expose beliefs that have been quietly directing us.

Our feelings will sometimes tell stories that contradict the words of Jesus. Fear may tell us we are alone, shame may tell us to hide, anxiety may convince us that everything depends on our control, and resentment may tell us forgiveness is impossible. As the words of Jesus remain in us, His truth begins to correct those stories and shape how we interpret what is happening around us.

This is why Scripture cannot become an occasional source of inspiration for the disciple. We need the words of Jesus to dwell deeply within us when decisions are difficult, temptation is strong, circumstances are confusing, or another voice sounds more convincing. Abiding in His Word gives truth time to form us.

Jesus also connects abiding with obedience.

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love."

John chapter 15, verse 10.

Obedience does not purchase the love of Jesus. It is one of the ways in which the relationship with Him becomes visible. As we know Him and trust Him, His words begin moving from something we hear into something we practice.

Obedience also deepens our experience of relationship with Jesus. We discover His faithfulness by walking where He leads, learn the wisdom of forgiveness by practicing it, and experience

the freedom of generosity by opening our hands. Truth moves from something we understand into something we have begun to live.

This does not mean we will obey perfectly.

There will still be moments when fear wins, desire pulls us elsewhere, or old habits return. When we fail, abiding gives us somewhere to return. We come back to Jesus, where grace receives us, truth corrects us, and the Spirit continues His work.

This is how a life with Christ can take sin seriously without allowing failure to drive us away from Him. Grace keeps us near enough to repent, receive forgiveness, and continue being changed. The branch remains connected to the source of life even as growth continues.

Jesus also speaks about pruning.

"Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

John chapter 15, verse 2.

A gardener cuts back even living growth so the branch can become healthier and more fruitful. In the same way, God's formative work may involve removing what is sinful and simplifying what is not wrong but has become distracting, excessive, or poorly ordered.

God may simplify a life He is deepening by exposing habits that keep us hurried, redirecting priorities, or asking us to release

opportunities that appear good but pull us away from what He has actually entrusted to us. Pruning can be uncomfortable because healthy growth sometimes requires letting go.

The surrendered life prepares us for this. Open hands make it easier to receive both what Jesus gives and what He asks us to release. We begin to trust that the Gardener is not careless with the branches He loves.

The goal of pruning is fruit.

Jesus is forming lives that increasingly reflect His character and carry His love into the world. That fruit will not always be dramatic or easily measured. Often it appears through ordinary changes that become visible over time.

Someone becomes slower to anger, more willing to tell the truth, more present with family, or more patient in leadership. A wounded person begins forgiving, a fearful person learns to trust, and a busy person becomes more available to the people God places in front of them. Viewed one moment at a time, these changes can seem small.

Over years, they become a life.

This is why abiding cannot be rushed.

Fruit grows.

The work of God in us often unfolds more slowly than we would choose. We may want an old struggle gone immediately or a new habit formed quickly. We may become discouraged

when transformation comes through months and years rather than days.

Jesus uses the image of a living plant for a reason. Healthy growth takes time, and the branch cannot force the process. Our responsibility is to remain with Christ, respond to His Spirit, receive His Word, and obey what He places before us.

He does the deeper work.

There is freedom in that because we do not have to become impressive disciples. We are called to become faithful ones. Another person's season, gifts, calling, or visible fruit does not determine whether Christ is faithfully at work in us.

The question is whether we are remaining with Him. Are His words finding a home within us? Are we becoming more responsive to His leadership, and is His life becoming increasingly visible through ours?

These questions bring us back to relationship.

At the heart of abiding is a simple truth: stay close to the source. Fruit grows as we remain near Christ, receive His Word, respond to His Spirit, and learn obedience over time. The Christian life cannot be sustained at a distance from Jesus.

Jesus ends this part of His teaching with another promise:

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

John chapter 15, verse 11.

Abiding is not merely how disciples endure or become fruitful. Jesus wants His own joy to be present in them, a joy rooted in relationship with Him rather than favorable circumstances. The life of the vine is a life in which obedience, love, fruitfulness, and joy remain connected.

This is the life Jesus offers.

There will be days when remaining includes long prayer and clear direction. Other days may involve opening Scripture while tired, whispering a simple prayer, confessing quickly, or choosing one act of obedience when the larger road remains uncertain. Both can be abiding because the strength of the branch is found in its connection to the vine, not in the drama of the day.

We do not have to manufacture spiritual life. We need Jesus, and as we remain with Him, His words begin shaping us more deeply. We learn to recognize His voice, receive His truth, and put what He says into practice.

Abiding prepares us to hear, and hearing Jesus leads toward obedience.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Five

Hear and Obey

Abiding keeps us near Jesus, and life near Him begins shaping the way we live. His words do more than comfort us or give us something to consider. They reveal what is true, correct the ways we have learned to think, and show us how to walk. Remaining with Jesus eventually requires responding to what He says.

Jesus made this clear at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. He had taught about anger, lust, prayer, forgiveness, generosity, worry, judgment, loving enemies, and seeking the kingdom of God. Then He closed with a picture that brought everything He had said toward a decision.

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

Matthew chapter 7, verse 24.

Jesus described two builders, and both of them heard His words. The wise builder built on rock, and when rain fell, floods

came, and winds struck the house, it remained standing because its foundation held. The foolish builder also heard, but he built on sand, and when the same storm came, the house fell.

The difference was not who heard Jesus.

The difference was how they responded to what they heard.

Both builders received the words, but only one allowed those words to determine how he built. This is the movement from hearing to obedience. Abiding keeps us near enough to receive the words of Jesus, and obedience allows those words to begin shaping the life we are actually building.

Jesus was teaching that His words are meant to become the foundation of a life. Hearing matters because we cannot follow words we have never received. Yet hearing alone does not form the kind of disciple Jesus describes.

We hear so that we can obey.

We can understand the teaching of Jesus without allowing it to govern us. We can agree that forgiveness matters while protecting resentment, believe generosity is good while keeping our hands closed, and speak about trusting God while allowing fear to direct our decisions. Biblical knowledge matters, but discipleship asks whether what we know is becoming part of the way we live.

James later wrote:

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

James chapter 1, verse 22.

James uses the image of someone looking into a mirror, then walking away, quickly forgetting what was seen. The mirror shows what is there, but seeing produces little change if the person immediately turns away. In the same way, truth can be received clearly and still leave the life unchanged when there is no response.

God's Word reveals what is true about Him and about us. It exposes sin, corrects false thinking, gives wisdom, reminds us of grace, and shows us the way of Christ. The problem James identifies is not that the hearer failed to encounter truth. The problem is that what was seen produced no lasting response.

Our instincts have been formed by many influences, including family, culture, experience, pain, desire, and repeated habits. Some of what we have learned may be wise, while other patterns simply feel natural because we have practiced them for years. The words of Jesus give us a standard outside ourselves by which those instincts can be tested and, when necessary, changed.

We may believe we have every right to remain angry, and Jesus teaches us about forgiveness. We may have learned to measure our worth through possessions, success, or recognition, and Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God. We may want to return hurt for hurt, and Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

His words reveal another way.

This is why Scripture cannot merely confirm what we already want to believe. If we receive only the parts that agree with us, we are not allowing Jesus to teach us. We are asking Him to support a life we have already decided to live.

Paul wrote:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

Second Timothy chapter 3, verse 16.

Scripture teaches because we need to know what is true, corrects because our understanding can be wrong, and trains because a faithful life develops through repeated practice. Receiving Scripture therefore requires humility. We come willing not only to learn something new but also to have our thinking and living brought into greater agreement with God.

We bring our questions honestly to Scripture, but we also allow Scripture to question us. We ask what God has actually said before deciding what we wish He had said. Then we allow His truth to reshape conclusions, priorities, and patterns we may have carried for a long time.

Jesus Himself lived with complete confidence in the Word of God.

When He was tempted in the wilderness, He answered temptation with Scripture. He did not treat God's Word as a collection of inspirational sayings to use when convenient. He lived under its truth and remained obedient to the Father even when another path appeared easier.

When Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus answered:

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Matthew chapter 4, verse 4.

Jesus was physically hungry, yet He refused to allow immediate desire to determine obedience. The Word of the Father carried greater authority than the pressure of the moment. His hunger was real, but it did not become His master.

We face that tension in ordinary ways throughout our lives. A feeling can be real without being a faithful guide, a desire can be strong without being good, and an opportunity can appear attractive without being where Jesus is leading. Scripture gives us something steadier than the changing pressures of the moment.

The psalmist described it this way:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Psalm 119, verse 105.

A lamp does not necessarily reveal the entire road. It gives light for the steps immediately ahead. God's Word often works that way in the life of a disciple.

We often want clarity about everything ahead, while Scripture shows us how to walk faithfully in what is already before us. God's Word may not reveal every future detail, but it gives light for present obedience. Often the next step is not hidden. It is found in something Jesus has already made clear.

This does not mean Scripture gives a direct answer to every individual decision. It may not tell us which job to accept, where to live, or exactly how every conversation should unfold. Instead, Scripture forms the kind of person who can make those decisions with wisdom, honesty, humility, courage, purity, generosity, mercy, and love.

The more deeply God's Word shapes us, the more faithfully we can respond when there is no simple verse that answers the entire question. Scripture gives boundaries, priorities, and a vision of God's character that help us discern what is wise. It trains us to make decisions as people who are learning the way of Jesus.

Jesus also described His followers in terms of hearing.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

John chapter 10, verse 27.

The image brings us back to relationship. Jesus knows His sheep, His sheep learn His voice, and then they follow. Hearing Jesus is therefore not separated from knowing Him.

The primary place we learn the voice and way of Jesus is Scripture. The Spirit may guide, convict, remind, and lead, but He does not lead us away from the truth God has already given. The more deeply Scripture forms us, the better prepared we are to recognize what is consistent with the character and teaching of Christ.

This gives us an important safeguard.

Strong feelings, persistent thoughts, and open opportunities should not automatically be treated as direction from God. We are capable of confusing desire, fear, pressure, impulse, and personal preference with His leading. Whatever guidance we believe we are receiving must remain consistent with Scripture and with the character of Jesus.

God will not lead us toward dishonesty in the name of a good result, nurture bitterness while commanding forgiveness, redefine as freedom what His Word identifies as sin, or cultivate pride while forming us in the humility of Christ. His leading will remain consistent with His revealed truth.

This does not remove every difficult question. There will still be situations that require prayer, patience, discernment, and wisdom. Yet the disciple has a foundation from which to listen.

Trusted believers can also help us recognize places where desire or fear may be shaping the way we interpret Scripture. The Church does not replace the authority of God's Word, but mature Christians can help one another hear it honestly and respond faithfully. We were never meant to discern every difficult question in isolation.

For now, the central question is simpler.

What are we doing with what Jesus has already said?

It is possible to spend years around Scripture without allowing Scripture to form us. We can listen to sermons, read books, complete Bible studies, memorize verses, and know the language of Christianity while continuing to resist the places where Jesus is asking for obedience.

Knowledge can even become a way of keeping Jesus at a safe distance. We continue learning about Him without allowing what we learn to reach the parts of life we would rather protect. Jesus warned against separating religious language from actual obedience.

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

Luke chapter 6, verse 46.

The question reaches beneath religious language to the reality of lordship. Calling Jesus Lord means His authority reaches the way we actually live. When His words consistently carry less authority than our desires, fears, preferences, or culture, something else is still functioning as lord.

This does not mean disciples obey perfectly.

The first disciples themselves obeyed imperfectly. They misunderstood, hesitated, acted from fear, and sometimes failed even after hearing Jesus clearly. Yet He continued to teach them, correct them, restore them, and call them forward.

Obedience grows within grace.

Grace does not remove obedience from the Christian life. Grace brings us into a relationship with Christ, and from that relationship we begin to learn to trust His words enough to act on them. Obedience becomes the response of a disciple who knows the One giving the command is good.

Jesus connected obedience with love when He said:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

John chapter 14, verse 15.

Jesus connects obedience with love because love for Him cannot remain only emotional or verbal. As we come to know His goodness, love learns to listen, trust, and respond. His love comes first, and our obedience becomes one expression of a life that is learning to love Him in return.

This changes the posture of obedience.

We are not trying to discover the smallest amount of obedience required to remain close to Jesus. We begin by wanting more of our lives to align with Him because we trust His heart and believe His way is good.

Obedience becomes visible in ordinary places. A husband hears Jesus teach about serving and realizes that love must become visible at home. A business owner reads about honesty and understands that discipleship reaches decisions no customer may ever discover. A person carrying resentment hears Jesus teach about forgiveness and begins taking the first steps toward letting go of the desire for revenge.

A parent's tone with a child, a friend's willingness to make a difficult phone call, the way money is handled, and the truth spoken when dishonesty would be easier can all become places of obedience. These decisions may seem small, but they are where the way of Jesus becomes an actual way of life.

We may ask God for a dramatic calling while overlooking simple acts of faithfulness already before us. Much of discipleship is built through ordinary obedience, as repeated choices begin to shape the direction of a life. What appears small today can become part of the foundation from which we respond when greater pressure eventually comes.

Jesus said:

"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much."

Luke chapter 16, verse 10.

Small obedience matters because it trains trust. Every time we hear Jesus and respond, obedience becomes more practiced. When we repeatedly ignore what we already know, resistance can become practiced too.

This brings us back to the builders.

The wise builder established a foundation before the storm arrived. Its strength became visible when the weather changed. In the same way, habits of prayer, truth, forgiveness, generosity, and faithfulness begin shaping us before the moment comes when those convictions are tested.

Jesus does not teach that storms come only to people who have failed to obey. Both houses faced wind and rain. The difference was not whether difficulty came, but what had been built underneath the life before it arrived.

Following Jesus does not remove storms. It teaches us where to build.

There will be times when obedience costs something. Telling the truth may bring consequences; forgiveness may require letting go of the desire to make someone pay; purity may require walking away from something deeply desired; and generosity may ask us to trust God with resources we would rather protect. Faithfulness can sometimes look foolish to people building on a different foundation.

This is why obedience and surrender remain connected.

We cannot obey Jesus only when His way agrees with ours. At some point, every disciple encounters a word from Christ that reaches into preference, fear, comfort, ambition, or desire. Those moments reveal whether we trust the One who is leading.

Peter faced a moment like that early in his relationship with Jesus.

He and the other fishermen had worked through the night without catching anything. When Jesus told Peter to lower the nets again, Peter had plenty of experience telling him that another attempt would accomplish nothing.

Peter answered:

"But at your word I will let down the nets."

Luke chapter 5, verse 5.

Peter's response captures something important about obedience. The instruction did not make sense in light of his experience, but the word of Jesus carried greater weight. "At your word" is the posture of a disciple who has learned that trust sometimes comes before complete understanding.

There will be times when the wisdom of Jesus is immediately clear to us. At other times, understanding may deepen after obedience. We take the faithful step because we trust Him, and along the way we begin seeing more clearly why His way leads toward life.

This does not mean abandoning wisdom, careful thought, or discernment. Biblical obedience is not unquestioning allegiance to every impression we have or every person who claims to speak for God. It is a thoughtful and trusting response to Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture, increasingly shaped by truth, wisdom, and a life close to Him.

There will also be times when we recognize that we have heard but not obeyed.

When that happens, Jesus does not invite us to remain trapped in shame. He calls us to repentance and renewed obedience. Yesterday's failure does not require us to stop listening today.

James calls hearers to become doers.

We can begin again.

There may already be something in Scripture that Jesus has made clear to us and that we have delayed putting into practice. The issue may involve forgiveness, honesty, generosity, purity, reconciliation, confession, service, or another pattern that we know needs to change. We do not need to seek a more dramatic command before responding to the truth already before us.

The life of a disciple is built this way. We remain near Jesus, receive His words, trust the One who speaks, and allow His truth to become practice. Over time, obedience moves from isolated decisions toward a life increasingly shaped by the way of Christ.

The wise builder heard the words of Jesus and built on them. The storms still came, but the foundation held. Jesus is forming that kind of life in His disciples: a life that listens carefully, receives truth humbly, and responds faithfully.

Yet Jesus never intended His followers to live that life through determination alone. The One who gives the command also

gives His people the Spirit, who teaches, reminds, convicts, strengthens, and forms the character of Christ within them.

Obedience reveals how deeply we need His power.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Six

Walk by the Spirit

Jesus calls His disciples to hear His words and obey them, but He never intended obedience to be carried by human determination alone. The life He describes cannot be produced through discipline, good intentions, or stronger effort. The One who commands us to follow also gives us the help we need to walk in His way.

Jesus knew His disciples would need that help.

On the night before the cross, He told them that His physical presence with them was about to change. They had spent years walking beside Him, listening to His teaching, watching His life, and bringing their questions to Him. The thought of continuing without Jesus standing beside them must have been difficult to imagine.

Jesus told them:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

John chapter 14, verse 16.

Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, spiritual energy, or religious feeling. He is God, present with and within His people. He teaches, reminds, convicts, comforts, strengthens, and leads as He continues God's work of forming the people of Jesus.

Jesus explained:

"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

John chapter 14, verse 26.

Through the Holy Spirit, God would dwell within His people and continue the work Jesus had promised to accomplish in them. The disciples would need His words brought back to them, His truth made clear, and God's strength at work within them. They would need help becoming the people Jesus had called them to be.

So do we.

The Holy Spirit is not an optional part of the Christian life or something reserved for unusually spiritual Christians. The Spirit teaches, reminds, convicts, comforts, strengthens, and leads God's people as He forms them into the likeness of Christ. The Christian life is therefore more than trying to imitate Jesus from a distance. God is at work within His people, enabling

them to trust Christ, resist sin, obey His words, and increasingly reflect His character.

This is why Paul could write:

"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 16.

Paul deliberately uses the language of walking. Walking suggests movement, direction, and a life lived one step at a time, which fits the picture of the Way we have been developing throughout this book. Walking by the Spirit is not an occasional spiritual experience. It is a daily life increasingly brought under His direction.

To understand what Paul means, we also need to understand what he calls "the flesh."

When Paul speaks about the flesh, he is not teaching that the physical body is evil. He is describing human life operating apart from submission to God, including the desires and patterns that pull us toward self-rule and sin. The flesh is the old way of living with ourselves at the center.

The flesh wants life on its own terms. It resists surrender, protects pride, excuses sin, and seeks satisfaction without bringing desire under God's leadership. It is the self-directed pattern of life that discipleship continually brings under the rule of Jesus.

Paul says there is a conflict taking place within us:

"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 17.

Every follower of Jesus eventually recognizes this tension. We can sincerely love Christ and still experience desires that pull another direction. We can know what Scripture teaches and still feel anger, envy, lust, pride, greed, fear, selfishness, or resentment rising within us.

Experiencing that conflict does not mean the Spirit is absent. In many cases, the struggle becomes clearer as the Spirit exposes desires and patterns that once went unquestioned. He awakens new desires, brings conviction, and gives us strength to respond differently.

His work reaches beneath behavior into the heart from which behavior grows.

Paul describes the result as fruit:

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Galatians chapter 5, verses 22 and 23.

Paul's word "fruit" connects naturally with Jesus' teaching about the vine and branches. Fruit grows because life is present within the branch, not because something has been attached from the outside. In the same way, the Spirit forms the char-

acter of Jesus within His people until that inner work becomes increasingly visible in the way they live.

Love begins reaching places where selfishness once ruled. Patience develops where frustration once controlled our response. Gentleness becomes possible where harshness felt natural, and self-control grows where desire once seemed impossible to resist.

This growth may be gradual, but it is real. A person may notice that something which once produced immediate anger is beginning to receive a different response. Someone may recognize conviction sooner, apologize more quickly, listen more patiently, or turn toward God earlier when anxiety rises.

We participate through obedience, repentance, attention, and faithful choices, yet we do not manufacture the fruit ourselves. The Spirit supplies the life from which transformation grows.

We can make two opposite mistakes here. One is believing spiritual maturity depends entirely on our effort, leaving us exhausted by attempts to manage ourselves through willpower. The other is becoming passive, asking the Spirit to change patterns while continuing to feed the desires and habits that strengthen them.

Walking by the Spirit avoids both errors because dependence on God and responsive obedience belong together.

The Spirit gives strength as we take the faithful step, brings conviction that leads us toward repentance, and reminds us of

truth so that truth can become practice. His work does not remove our response. It makes faithful response possible.

Paul describes this posture again:

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Galatians chapter 5, verse 25.

Keeping in step suggests attentive responsiveness. We do not try to build the Christian life ahead of God through our own strength, nor do we knowingly resist what He has already made clear. We learn to walk with Him, responding to truth as the Spirit forms our desires and directs our lives toward Jesus.

Part of that work is conviction.

Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit would convict concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Spirit brings sin into the light because God loves us too much to leave destructive patterns hidden. His conviction allows us to see where our lives are moving away from the way of Jesus and calls us to turn.

Conviction must be understood within grace.

Paul writes:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Romans chapter 8, verse 1.

The Spirit's conviction brings sin into the light so that we can repent and return to Christ. Condemnation has already been answered for those who belong to Jesus. Conviction tells the truth about sin within the security of grace, exposing what needs to change while drawing us toward forgiveness and renewed obedience.

This allows us to become more responsive in ordinary moments. We begin noticing impatience before it controls the conversation, pride before it hardens our response, or temptation before it carries us farther than we intended. Awareness creates an opportunity to stop, remember what is true, and choose another way.

Walking by the Spirit often begins with becoming attentive to what is happening within us. We learn to recognize which desires are attempting to lead, remember what Scripture says is true, and consider what response would reflect the character of Jesus. This is not anxious self-examination. It is growing awareness of the Spirit's forming work within ordinary life.

The Spirit also reminds us who we are.

Paul writes:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Romans chapter 8, verse 14.

Then he says:

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Romans chapter 8, verse 16.

The Spirit's work is not only correcting what is wrong. He also anchors us in what God has made true through Christ. We belong to God.

Fear may tell us that we have to protect ourselves, shame may define us by what we have done, and performance may convince us that our worth still has to be proven. The Spirit brings us back to the truth that through Christ we belong to God. That identity becomes the secure place from which obedience and transformation can grow.

We are not trying to earn our way into God's family through better behavior. We have been received through Christ, and the Spirit teaches us to live as people who belong to the Father. Holiness grows from belonging rather than becoming the price we pay to belong.

Paul gives another remarkable picture of the Spirit's presence:

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

Romans chapter 8, verse 11.

The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in God's people. Paul's promise reaches ultimately toward resurrection, but

it also reminds us that the Christian life is lived in the presence of the same Spirit through whom God gives life. Our hope and transformation do not rest only on the resources we can produce for ourselves.

This matters because some commands are simple to understand and still difficult to practice. Forgiveness becomes costly when the wound is deep, patience becomes difficult when someone repeatedly tests it, and purity requires strength when desire is intense. Courage can threaten approval, and generosity can feel risky when the future is uncertain.

Knowing what Jesus commands does not mean we can carry it out through willpower alone.

The Spirit helps us walk in what Jesus has said. Sometimes His help comes through conviction that interrupts an old pattern, Scripture remembered at the right moment, or strength to do what we already know is right while our emotions are pulling another direction.

Often the Spirit's help is quieter than we expect. His work may become visible in the courage to apologize, the restraint to keep from speaking harshly, the strength to leave temptation before it grows stronger, or the willingness to obey when another choice feels easier. Ordinary obedience can still be Spirit-empowered obedience.

This is why Scripture and the Spirit must never be separated.

The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not lead God's people away from its truth. Jesus said the Spirit would remind the disciples of what He had taught and guide them in truth. His work brings us more deeply into the way of Jesus rather than beyond it.

Jesus also said of the Spirit:

"He will glorify me."

John chapter 16, verse 14.

The Spirit's work is centered on Jesus. He does not draw disciples beyond Christ or into a different way. He makes Christ known, reminds us of His words, and forms His character within us.

For that reason, we should speak humbly about personal guidance. There may be times when we sense a strong conviction, burden, or direction, but those impressions should be tested against Scripture, the character of Jesus, wisdom, and, when appropriate, the counsel of mature believers. Significant decisions rarely become less faithful because we took time to discern them carefully.

Patient discernment is not opposed to the Spirit's leading.

Walking by the Spirit is different from chasing spiritual impressions. It is a life shaped by Scripture, responsive to conviction, attentive to God's presence, and increasingly marked by the fruit the Spirit produces.

Paul directs our attention toward character. A life increasingly shaped by the Spirit should become more marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The evidence is not merely that someone has had unusual spiritual experiences, but that Jesus' character is becoming increasingly visible.

The Spirit also gives gifts for the good of the Church, but giftedness and maturity are not the same thing. A person can possess remarkable ability and still need deep formation in humility, love, patience, and self-control. The Spirit who empowers God's people also forms them into the likeness of Jesus.

Because the Spirit glorifies Christ, His work will increasingly move us toward the character of Christ. That includes truth and grace, holiness and compassion, courage and gentleness. The Spirit may strengthen us to speak when silence would be easier and restrain us when speaking would serve only our pride.

This kind of life requires dependence.

We begin the day knowing our strength is not enough. We bring our plans before God rather than assuming every plan should be blessed, and we enter conversations aware that our instincts alone will not always lead us toward the way of Jesus.

Throughout the day, we learn to return our attention to God. Frustration can become a place to ask for patience, fear a place to remember truth, sin a place for quick repentance, and something good a reason for gratitude. The goal is not constant

self-examination but growing dependence on God within the life we are already living.

The Spirit is present within the ordinary life of God's people, including a parent's need for patience, an ethical decision at work, a difficult conversation, temptation, grief, waiting, service, and joy. The life of the Spirit reaches the whole life of the disciple rather than only moments that feel explicitly spiritual.

We should not measure the Spirit's presence by the intensity of our emotions. There will be moments when God's nearness feels unmistakable and others when faithfulness feels quiet and ordinary. Jesus promised that the Helper would remain with His people, and that promise is steadier than our changing feelings.

The Spirit also helps us when our weakness reaches beyond what we know how to carry.

Paul writes:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness."

Romans chapter 8, verse 26.

Paul is speaking especially about prayer. There are moments when we do not understand what is happening, do not know what to ask, or cannot find language for what we are carrying. The Spirit meets us in that weakness rather than waiting for us to become spiritually strong enough to approach God.

This tells us something important about the life of the Spirit.

Dependence on the Spirit does not make us increasingly self-sufficient. It teaches us how deeply we need God. We need Him to remind us of truth, expose what is false, form new desires, strengthen obedience, anchor our identity, and produce the character of Christ within us.

The Christian life is lived in dependence on the Holy Spirit. As He forms us, we become more aware of our need for God, not less. That dependence naturally gives rise to prayer.

Prayer is not merely another practice added to the life of a disciple. It is one of the primary ways we live in relationship with the Father, bringing our weakness, gratitude, questions, needs, and desires before Him.

The Spirit teaches us that we need God, and prayer gives that dependence a voice.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Seven

A Life of Prayer

Walking by the Spirit teaches us to live in dependence on God. We need His truth when our thinking becomes unclear, His strength when obedience feels costly, and His grace when weakness becomes impossible to hide. Prayer gives that dependence a voice by turning our attention toward the Father and bringing our actual lives before Him.

Jesus did not treat prayer as an occasional spiritual practice. It was woven throughout His life. The Gospels repeatedly show Him stepping away from crowds, responsibilities, and demands so He could be with the Father.

Luke tells us:

"But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

Luke chapter 5, verse 16.

Jesus prayed before choosing the twelve disciples, in moments of thanksgiving, before the cross, and while suffering on it.

He prayed for His disciples, for those who would later believe through their witness, and for the Father's will to be accomplished. Prayer was woven into the way Jesus lived, and that should shape the way His disciples understand dependence on God.

If the Son of God continually sought communion with the Father, prayer cannot be treated merely as a response to crisis or a sign that we have run out of other options. It belongs near the center of a life lived with God. Jesus showed His disciples that dependence on the Father is not weakness. It is part of what faithful life with God looks like.

The disciples noticed this about Jesus.

Luke records that after Jesus had been praying, one of His disciples said:

"Lord, teach us to pray."

Luke chapter 11, verse 1.

The disciples did not merely want an explanation of prayer. They wanted Jesus to teach them how to pray because they had seen prayer embodied in His life. Prayer must eventually move beyond something we understand into something we practice.

We can read about prayer, study it, listen to other people pray, and agree that it matters. Yet eventually we have to turn our attention toward God and bring our lives before Him. A life of prayer grows through actual relationship with the Father.

Jesus taught about that relationship in the Sermon on the Mount.

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites."

Matthew chapter 6, verse 5.

Jesus was not criticizing public prayer simply because other people could hear it. He was confronting prayer used as performance. Some had learned how to appear spiritual before others while losing sight of the Father they claimed to be addressing.

Jesus brought prayer back to relationship.

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."

Matthew chapter 6, verse 6.

The hidden place exposes the heart differently from the public one. There is no audience to impress, no reputation to maintain, and no need to sound more spiritual than we are. Prayer becomes a place where we can stand honestly before the Father who already knows us.

Prayer does not require polished language because the Father already knows us. Gratitude, joy, confusion, fear, anger, temptation, grief, regret, hope, and questions can all be brought honestly into His presence. We do not need to make our faith sound stronger than it feels or our pain smaller than it is.

Scripture is filled with prayers like this.

The Psalms include praise and thanksgiving, but they also include grief, fear, frustration, confession, and questions. God's people cried out when they felt surrounded, asked how long suffering would continue, admitted when sin had become heavy, and praised God when deliverance came. Honest prayer is biblical prayer.

The father who brought his son to Jesus gave us one of the simplest examples:

"I believe; help my unbelief!"

Mark chapter 9, verse 24.

The father brought faith and uncertainty into the same prayer. He did not wait until every doubt disappeared before coming to Jesus. He brought what was actually true and asked Christ to meet him there.

There will be days when prayer comes with confidence and gratitude. There will also be days when the most honest prayer may be a few words spoken through exhaustion, grief, or uncertainty. The strength of prayer does not depend on our ability to sound impressive before God.

Jesus said:

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Matthew chapter 6, verse 8.

If the Father already knows, why pray?

We pray because prayer is more than giving God information. It is relationship with the Father. We name what we carry, place our needs into His hands, receive His truth, and learn to trust Him with what happens next.

Prayer begins by changing our posture before God, whether or not our circumstances change in the way we hope.

Jesus then gave His disciples a pattern that gathers the whole life before God. The prayer begins with the Father's name and kingdom, moves through daily dependence and forgiveness, and ends with our need for protection. Its order teaches us not only what to pray but how life begins to be reordered in the presence of God.

Jesus said:

"Pray then like this:

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"

Matthew chapter 6, verses 9 through 13.

The prayer begins with "Our Father in heaven." Jesus teaches His disciples to approach the holy and sovereign God as Father. Through Christ, reverence and nearness belong together, and

prayer begins from the astonishing truth that God's people have been invited into relationship with Him.

Then Jesus teaches us to pray:

"Hallowed be your name."

Those words turn our attention away from ourselves and toward God. Before we ask Him to change what surrounds us, we remember who He is and desire that His name be honored in our lives and in the world. Prayer begins reordering us by placing God's glory ahead of our immediate concerns.

Then comes:

"Your kingdom come, your will be done."

These words make prayer an act of surrender.

We often come to God knowing exactly what we want Him to do. We know the door we want opened, the problem we want removed, the person we want changed, or the outcome we believe would be best. Jesus does not teach us to hide those desires, but He teaches us to place them inside something larger.

"Your will be done" is not passive resignation. Jesus prayed those words in Gethsemane while speaking honestly about His desire and anguish. Prayer gives us room to ask boldly while placing even deeply held desires beneath the wisdom and goodness of the Father.

We can ask for healing and still entrust the future to God. We can ask for provision without allowing fear to control us, and

we can pray for a relationship to be restored without trying to control another person's response. Prayer is not a technique for securing our preferred outcome from God. It is one of the ways we learn to live under His reign, bringing our desires before Him while trusting His wisdom beyond what we can see.

Jesus then teaches:

"Give us this day our daily bread."

There is nothing unspiritual about bringing practical needs before the Father. Jesus teaches us to pray for provision because God cares about the actual lives of His children. Food, work, shelter, health, responsibilities, and the needs of those we love all belong in prayer.

Daily bread also teaches dependence. We often want enough certainty to protect ourselves far into the future, while Jesus teaches us to receive what we need today and trust the Father with what tomorrow will require. Wise planning still matters, but prayer keeps planning from becoming the place where we seek ultimate security.

Jesus then moves into forgiveness:

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Prayer brings us into the presence of a holy God, which means sin cannot remain hidden forever. As we walk honestly before Him, we become aware of where we have failed, wounded others, resisted truth, or chosen our own way. Confession belongs in prayer because grace allows us to tell the truth.

We do not confess so that we can convince a reluctant God to show mercy. Through Christ, we bring sin into the light, receive forgiveness, and continue walking in restored relationship with God. Grace gives us somewhere to return when we fail.

Jesus also places receiving and extending forgiveness close together because people who live by mercy are being formed to give mercy. We do not earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, the grace we receive begins reshaping the way we hold the debts of those who have wounded us.

That can be difficult.

Forgiveness may require time, wisdom, boundaries, and repeated surrender. Prayer gives us a place to bring the wound honestly before God while asking Him to keep resentment, revenge, or bitterness from becoming the forces that form us. We can ask Him to teach us how to forgive even when the process is slow.

Jesus closes the prayer by teaching His disciples to recognize their need for protection:

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Praying for protection from temptation is an act of humility. We admit that we are not strong enough to face every pressure alone and ask God to make us alert, guide our steps, and help us take the way of escape He provides. Dependence begins before temptation becomes overwhelming.

The Lord's Prayer gathers the whole life before God: His name, His kingdom and will, our daily needs, our sins and relation-

ships, and our vulnerability to temptation and evil. Nothing is excluded from His care. Prayer becomes much larger than a list of requests because every part of life is brought into relationship with the Father.

This is why prayer includes more than asking.

It includes worship, thanksgiving, confession, surrender, lament, intercession, and attentive presence before God. Jesus' own prayer life shows us this depth.

In John chapter 17, Jesus prayed that the Father would keep His disciples, sanctify them in truth, and make them one. He also prayed for those who would later believe through their witness, extending His prayer beyond the room toward the future Church. Even as the cross approached, Jesus carried other people and the mission entrusted to them before the Father.

Prayer was not an escape from mission.

It was part of how Jesus entrusted mission to the Father.

The same begins happening in us.

Intercession stretches our love beyond our own immediate concerns. We begin carrying family, friends, neighbors, leaders, churches, people who suffer, and people who do not yet know Christ before God. Sometimes prayer leads us toward action, while at other times prayer may be the faithful action available to us.

Either way, we refuse to carry the need as though everything depends on us.

We place people into the hands of God.

Prayer also teaches us to listen, but this requires care.

Listening in prayer remains grounded in Scripture, where God has given us His revealed truth. We do not treat every thought that appears in silence as His voice. Instead, we make room for Scripture to address us and for the Spirit to apply its truth to our lives.

We slow down enough to reflect on what we have read, allow conviction to reach us, remember the promises and commands of Jesus, and consider how His truth speaks into what we are carrying. Listening is not an attempt to create mysterious messages. It is a posture of attentiveness before God.

Silence can help because much of life is filled with noise, messages, work, entertainment, and unresolved thoughts competing for our attention. Creating quiet does not, by itself, make us spiritual. It simply gives us space to become attentive to God, Scripture, and what may be happening within us.

Quiet sometimes reveals how restless we have become. We may notice anxiety we have been avoiding, anger beneath our busyness, grief we have not allowed ourselves to feel, or a decision we know needs to be brought before God. Prayer gives those things somewhere to go by bringing them honestly into His presence.

This is one reason prayer changes us.

We may begin by asking God to change a situation and discover that He is also forming something within us. We may pray for a difficult person and become convicted about the way we have been speaking about them. We may ask for direction and realize that the next act of obedience has already been made clear.

Prayer reorders us by reminding us that God is God and we are not. His kingdom matters more than our control, His provision is enough for today, grace is available when we confess, and His strength is necessary when temptation comes. Over time, prayer forms a posture of dependence that reaches far beyond the moments when we are consciously praying.

This is how prayer becomes a way of life.

Paul tells believers:

"Pray without ceasing."

First Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17.

Paul is not suggesting that every moment must be spent with eyes closed and words spoken aloud. He is describing a life continually turned toward God. Prayer becomes an ongoing openness to the Father throughout the ordinary movements of the day.

A life turned toward God can include prayer before a meeting, a request for wisdom before responding to a difficult message, gratitude when something beautiful interrupts the day, or a quiet cry for help when temptation or fear appears. These brief prayers do not replace longer times of focused prayer. They

grow from a relationship that is learning to remain open to God throughout the day.

Intentional time still matters because relationships deepen when they receive attention. Jesus withdrew to pray, and His example reminds us that attention rarely happens accidentally. The time, place, and rhythm will vary with seasons of life, responsibilities, and family circumstances.

The goal is not to reproduce someone else's routine.

The goal is relationship with God.

A parent with young children may pray differently from someone who lives alone. A person working changing hours may need a different rhythm from someone with a predictable schedule. Faithfulness is not measured by copying another person's practice, but by making real room for communion with the Father within the life we have been given.

We should not measure prayer by emotional intensity. Some prayers will feel deeply meaningful, while others may feel ordinary, distracted, or dry. Faithfulness in prayer rests in the relationship itself rather than in our ability to produce a particular spiritual feeling.

The Spirit helps us here.

Paul writes:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness."

Romans chapter 8, verse 26.

Paul is speaking specifically about prayer when we do not know what to pray for. There are burdens too complicated for language and circumstances we do not understand well enough to know what outcome to request. The Spirit meets us there.

We do not need perfect words for God to receive us. There are moments when all we can offer is weakness, silence, tears, or a simple request for help. Romans reminds us that even there, the Spirit is interceding for God's people in ways that go beyond our ability to speak.

Prayer is therefore not measured by length or eloquence. Through Jesus, we come to the Father, and by the Spirit we are helped in our weakness. Prayer becomes the life of God's children lived in communion with Him.

This is also why unanswered prayer can become one of the most difficult places of faith.

We ask because Jesus teaches us to ask and because we believe the Father is good and able to act. Yet healing may not come when we hoped, a relationship may still be lost, or clarity may remain beyond our reach. Scripture allows us to grieve those realities without pretending they are easy.

Jesus Himself prayed in Gethsemane with a desire honestly expressed before the Father. He asked if the cup could pass from Him, yet His prayer remained inside deeper trust:

“Not my will, but yours, be done.”

Luke chapter 22, verse 42.

Faithful prayer holds bold asking and humble surrender together. We ask with confidence because God is our Father, and we surrender because His wisdom extends beyond what we can see. Holding both protects prayer from becoming either resignation or an attempt to control outcomes.

God may answer quickly, lead us through a season of waiting, or respond differently from what we expected. There will also be prayers whose answers we may never fully understand in this life. In every case, prayer keeps returning us to the character of the One we are addressing.

Jesus showed us the Father and taught us to trust His care. He taught us to ask, surrender, forgive, seek the kingdom, and place our daily needs into the Father's hands. A life of prayer keeps returning us to these truths until they begin shaping the way we live.

Prayer does not remove uncertainty or every burden from the life of a disciple. It gives us somewhere to bring them. As we pray, we become more aware of our dependence on God, more willing to surrender control, and increasingly attentive to the people around us.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father." Even prayer offered alone reminds us that we belong to a family, and following Jesus was never intended to become an isolated spiritual life. The Father draws His children to Himself and, in doing so, joins them to one another.

Prayer prepares us for shared life with the people of Jesus.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Eight

The People of the Way

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father." Even when those words are spoken alone, they remind us that following Jesus places us among other people. God is not only forming individual disciples who happen to believe the same things. He is gathering a people who learn to live together under the leadership of His Son.

The Way was never meant to be walked alone.

Jesus began showing this from the beginning of His ministry. He called Peter and Andrew, James and John, Matthew and others into relationship with Himself, but He also called them into relationship with one another. These men carried different personalities, histories, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses into the same group.

They listened, ate, traveled, questioned, failed, and learned together. They saw Jesus correct one another, forgive failure, settle

arguments, and patiently form people who were very different from one another. Their formation was personal, but much of it happened within shared life. Jesus was not simply forming individual followers. He was forming a people.

After the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, that shared life became visible in the early Church. Peter proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus, people responded in faith, and those new believers did not simply return to separate spiritual lives.

Luke tells us:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts chapter 2, verse 42.

Luke's description gives us a picture of shared discipleship. The believers devoted themselves to truth, fellowship, shared meals, and prayer, and that life began producing generosity, worship, care for needs, and a visible witness. The Church was not simply a gathering they attended. It was becoming a people whose common life was shaped by Jesus.

Acts chapter 2 continues by describing believers who spent time together, opened their homes, shared what they had when needs arose, ate together, worshiped God, and lived with generosity. Their faith began reshaping not only what they believed but how they treated people, used their resources, and organized their lives.

This is important because the word church can mean many things to us. We may first think of a building, a Sunday service, a denomination, an organization, or a particular style of worship. Those things may serve the life of the Church, but none of them is the Church by itself.

The Church is the people of Jesus.

It is made up of those who have been received by grace, joined to Christ, given the Holy Spirit, and called to walk together under His lordship. Buildings, services, traditions, leaders, and structures may help organize that shared life, but the Church belongs to Jesus before it belongs to any institution, movement, pastor, or generation.

Jesus said:

"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Matthew chapter 16, verse 18.

Jesus is the One who builds His Church. That truth gives us humility because the Church does not belong to us. It also gives us confidence because the future of God's people finally rests in the faithfulness of Christ rather than our ability to hold everything together perfectly.

That does not mean His people will always treat one another faithfully.

The early Church described in Acts chapter 2 was beautiful, but the New Testament never presents Christian community as free from problems. As Acts continues and the New Testament letters are written, we find disagreements, hypocrisy, selfishness, favoritism, false teaching, sexual sin, cultural tensions, leadership problems, and conflict.

The believers brought their unfinished lives into the Church, and so do we. Community brings people close enough for love to become real, but it also brings them close enough for pride, insecurity, impatience, fear, and selfishness to become visible. Shared life gives Jesus places to form us that isolation never could.

Different personalities, expectations, backgrounds, family histories, convictions, maturity levels, and preferences eventually come into the same community. That can be uncomfortable, but discomfort is not always a sign that something has gone wrong. Sometimes it reveals places where Jesus is still teaching us how to love.

Community often exposes what solitude can hide. We may think we are patient until someone repeatedly tests our patience, forgiving until someone actually disappoints us, or humble until another person disagrees with us or receives the recognition we wanted. Relationships reveal places where the character of Jesus still needs to be formed within us.

This does not mean every conflict is good. It means Jesus can use shared life to form people who are willing to remain teachable.

He gave His disciples a clear command about the kind of community they were becoming:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

John chapter 13, verse 34.

Jesus did not leave the meaning of love undefined. He said, "Just as I have loved you," pointing His disciples back to the life they had witnessed firsthand. He had welcomed, taught, corrected, served, forgiven, and remained patient with them, and within hours He would give His life for them. His own love became the pattern for theirs.

Christian community is therefore built on something deeper than shared interests or natural compatibility. Meaningful friendships are a gift, but Jesus does not call His people only to relationships with those who are easy to understand or naturally enjoyable to be around. He calls us to love one another as He has loved us.

That kind of love serves, tells the truth, forgives, bears with weakness, protects the vulnerable, and refuses to use people for selfish ends. It becomes willing to sacrifice comfort or convenience for another person's good. Christian love is not merely affection. It is the practiced life of Jesus taking shape among His people.

Jesus continued:

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John chapter 13, verse 35.

The world should be able to see something of Jesus in the way His people treat one another. A community shaped by grace, truth, forgiveness, generosity, patience, and sacrificial love tells a story about the One at its center.

Love does not require the absence of disagreement. Christians will sometimes reach different conclusions on questions of wisdom, preference, timing, or practice. The challenge is learning to remain truthful, humble, patient, and charitable when agreement does not come easily.

Paul repeatedly teaches believers to bear with one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, serve one another, and speak the truth in love. Those commands assume that Christian community includes people who will occasionally frustrate, disappoint, misunderstand, or challenge one another.

Christian love requires both grace and truth. Grace makes room for patience, forgiveness, and restoration, while truth refuses to pretend that destructive patterns are harmless. Jesus holds both together, and His people continue learning to do the same.

This kind of community also requires being known.

Christian community can remain shallow even when people gather regularly. Attendance creates proximity, but formation requires relationships in which people can become known

enough to share questions, struggles, grief, joy, and the places where they may be drifting. We need people who know enough about our lives to offer both encouragement and truth.

That requires courage. We may have to admit that we need help, acknowledge that temptation has become stronger than we want to admit, or receive correction without immediately defending ourselves. We may need to let another person see fear, grief, confusion, or weakness we have been carrying privately.

Being known can feel risky, but hiding carries risks of its own. Sin can deepen in secrecy, discouragement becomes heavier when carried alone, and distorted thinking can become more convincing when no trusted person is close enough to challenge it. Healthy community creates places where truth can be spoken before isolation becomes stronger.

James tells believers:

"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

James chapter 5, verse 16.

James is not commanding public disclosure of every private struggle. He is describing a community where confession, prayer, and healing can happen because believers are willing to walk honestly with one another. Wisdom, trust, and appropriate boundaries still matter.

There are also burdens no person should have to carry alone.

Paul writes:

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians chapter 6, verse 2.

Some burdens are visible and practical. A family may need food, transportation, financial help, childcare, or someone willing to sit with them in a hospital room. The early Church took physical needs seriously because Christian love reaches into what people are actually carrying.

Other burdens are quieter. Grief, temptation, fear, exhaustion, shame, confusion, or discouragement may remain mostly unseen. We may not be able to solve what another person is facing, but Christian love refuses to let people carry every burden unnoticed. We can listen, pray, help, and remain present even when there is no simple answer.

This is one reason gathering matters.

The writer of Hebrews says:

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another."

Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 and 25.

Hebrews does not describe gathering merely as attendance. Believers come together to consider how to stir one another toward love and good works, and to encourage one another toward perseverance. Our presence matters not only because

of what we receive, but because God may use us to strengthen someone else.

Our presence may encourage someone whose faith feels tired, give another person an opportunity to ask for prayer, or simply remind someone that they have not been forgotten. Gathering becomes participation in a people rather than consumption of an event.

This challenges the way we sometimes evaluate church.

It is natural to notice practical things such as preaching, music, children's ministry, schedules, location, or whether a church feels welcoming. Some of those considerations genuinely matter. Yet discipleship also teaches us to ask how we can love, serve, grow, encourage, and contribute rather than evaluating community only by what it provides for us.

Paul describes the Church as a body:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12.

Paul's picture of the body teaches us that difference is part of God's design for the Church. He does not give every disciple the same gifts, personality, experiences, or calling. The body becomes healthy as different members receive what God has entrusted to them and use it for the good of others rather than comparing visibility or importance.

The Spirit gives gifts so the Church can be strengthened. Some gifts are visible, and others happen quietly, but their purpose is service rather than status. Spiritual gifts become less about discovering what makes us important and more about recognizing how what God has entrusted to us can strengthen His people.

Gifts become service, and service becomes one expression of love.

Yet for some people, the word church is more closely connected to pain than to belonging.

People have been wounded by Christians. Some have experienced ordinary conflict, broken trust, disappointment, or the failure of people who should have behaved differently. Others have encountered manipulation, coercion, serious misconduct, exclusion, or abuse of authority.

Those situations should not all be treated the same.

Ordinary conflict between imperfect people may require patience, conversation, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Serious misconduct or abuse may require protection, reporting, accountability, outside help, or leaving an unsafe environment. Jesus does not ask people to pretend harmful things were harmless simply because they happened in a church.

Truth still matters. Repentance matters. Accountability and protection matter. Forgiveness should never be used as a tool to silence someone, excuse abuse, or keep a person in danger.

For those who have been wounded, renewed trust in Christian community may take time. Healing should not be rushed, and no one should be pressured back into unsafe relationships. Yet when healthy community becomes possible, Jesus' purpose remains to gather His people into relationships marked by truth, safety, grace, and love.

Healthy Christian community remains centered on Jesus and rooted in Scripture. It practices truth without weaponizing it, grace without excusing sin, protects people from abuse, and expects leaders to live with humility and accountability. It should help people become more dependent on Christ rather than on a personality, platform, or institution.

No church will embody these things perfectly because every church is made of unfinished people. The question is not whether we can find a flawless community, but whether a church is willing to remain under the authority of Jesus, submit to Scripture, repent when wrong, practice grace, and continue becoming more faithful.

We also enter community with humility because we bring our own unfinished lives with us. It is easy to see what other people or churches need to change while forgetting that we also need correction, patience, forgiveness, and grace. The Church is not a gathering of people who no longer need formation. It is one of the places where formation happens.

Acts chapter 2 brings us back to the basic shape of that shared discipleship. The believers received apostolic teaching, prayed, shared meals, opened their homes, cared for needs, worshiped,

and practiced generosity. None of those actions alone defined the Church, but together they showed what happens when faith in Jesus begins becoming a shared life.

Generosity was part of that life because the gospel was changing the way believers viewed what they possessed. Needs that once belonged only to someone else became concerns the community was willing to carry together. Their resources became opportunities for love.

Hospitality mattered too.

Meals appear throughout Scripture because tables create room for people to become more than faces in a crowd. Jesus repeatedly used meals as places of welcome, teaching, relationship, and reconciliation. The early believers continued opening their homes because shared life requires places where relationships can deepen.

Shared life often grows through ordinary acts such as meals, conversations, prayer, a ride to an appointment, a phone call when someone has grown quiet, or time given without a program attached. These things can appear small, yet they are often where Christian love becomes tangible.

The early believers' common life also became part of their witness. Their teaching mattered, but so did the kind of people that teaching was producing. The gospel was becoming visible through generosity, worship, reconciliation, and a new allegiance to Jesus.

Our life together still says something about our King.

When pride, hostility, competition, or contempt shape Christian community, the witness becomes difficult to see. When believers practice truth, repentance, reconciliation, generosity, patience, and love, people catch glimpses of another kingdom. The Church does not exist to impress the world, but people who follow Jesus should increasingly reflect the One they follow.

There is another reason we need one another.

Faith can become tired. There are seasons when prayer feels difficult, Scripture seems dry, circumstances become heavy, or hope feels less immediate than it once did. In those seasons, another believer's faith can help remind us of what remains true.

This is part of encouragement.

Hebrews tells believers to encourage one another because perseverance is not only an individual responsibility. Sometimes we need someone to remind us to keep walking. At other times, God may use our presence and words to strengthen another person.

There will be seasons when we are strong enough to help carry someone else's burden and seasons when we need others to help carry ours. Receiving help can require as much humility as giving it. Shared discipleship makes room for both.

The Church also gathers so that it can scatter faithfully.

Shared worship, teaching, prayer, correction, and encouragement form us for the homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, and relationships to which we return. The life of Jesus is meant to travel with us when the gathering ends. Gathering and scattering belong together.

Christian community should therefore never become a place where we retreat from everyone who does not believe as we do. Jesus forms a people who can reflect His kingdom within the world He loves. There will be more to say about mission later, but shared life itself is already part of that witness.

We need one another because other ways will continually compete for our allegiance. Culture will form us if we never allow the words of Jesus and the people of Jesus to challenge what it teaches us to desire. Our own hearts can drift as well.

Faithful community helps us remember what is true. We need people who can encourage holiness without pretending they have already arrived, speak truth when we begin drifting, and remain with us when choosing the way of Jesus becomes difficult or lonely.

Our relationships within the Church should help move us toward love, obedience, courage, faithfulness, and ultimately toward Jesus Himself. We gather because none of us has mastered discipleship, and because we need others who are also learning His way.

The Way is personal, but it is not private. Jesus calls each disciple by name and then places us among people who also belong to

Him. Some of those relationships will bring deep friendship, while others will teach patience, forgiveness, humility, and grace in ways we could never have learned alone.

We also need one another because the way of Jesus will not always align with what the world around us encourages or with our own desires. Faithful community helps us remember what is true, recognize when we are drifting, and keep choosing Jesus when another road appears easier.

The people of the Way help one another remain on the Way.

And together, we learn to walk the narrow road.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Nine

The Narrow Way

The people of Jesus help one another remain on the Way because other roads will continually compete for our allegiance. Some are shaped by the world around us, others by desires within us, and many simply appear easier than the life Jesus describes. The question beneath all of them is the same: whom will we trust to show us the way to life?

Jesus spoke plainly about this near the end of the Sermon on the Mount:

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many."

Matthew chapter 7, verse 13.

Then He continued:

"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Matthew chapter 7, verse 14.

Jesus places two ways before His listeners. One is wide and easy to enter, while the other is narrow and requires a deliberate choice. The difference is not simply that one road is more difficult than the other. The roads lead to different destinations.

The narrow way is not difficult because God has hidden life from us. It is narrow because life is found under the leadership of Jesus rather than through every road we might choose for ourselves. The Way has a shape because it has a King.

The narrow way is the life Jesus has already been describing: trusting the Father, loving enemies, telling the truth, practicing mercy, seeking God's kingdom, forgiving others, resisting hypocrisy, and building on His words. Holiness belongs within that life because following Jesus eventually reaches our conduct, desires, habits, relationships, and loyalties.

Following Jesus begins becoming visible in what we choose.

Biblical holiness begins with belonging to God.

Peter writes:

"As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

First Peter chapter 1, verse 15.

God is holy in His character, love, justice, goodness, truth, and purity. Because He is holy, His people are called to become increasingly shaped by His character in every part of life. Holiness

is not moral superiority. It is a life being set apart for God and formed to reflect the One to whom it belongs.

Peter connects holiness with a changed way of living. He tells believers not to be conformed to the passions that once shaped them. They had known another way of life, but grace had brought them into relationship with God, and their conduct was now meant to reflect their new belonging.

Grace and holiness belong together. Grace receives us in Christ before our lives are finished, and that same grace begins freeing us from the patterns that once ruled us. Transformation is not the price of belonging to God. It is part of the life that begins because we belong to Him.

Jesus does not simply forgive us and leave every desire untouched. He begins forming us from the inside.

That formation reaches beneath outward behavior into the heart. A person can maintain a respectable appearance while pride, lust, greed, bitterness, or the desire for recognition continues growing within. Jesus is not interested merely in behavior that looks righteous. He forms the inner life from which faithful behavior eventually grows.

This keeps holiness from becoming religious performance.

Paul writes:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Romans chapter 12, verse 2.

Paul's language reminds us that everyone is being formed. The question is not whether influences are shaping us, but which influences receive enough of our attention to shape what we desire, fear, celebrate, pursue, and consider normal. The renewed mind learns to bring those influences under the truth of God.

The world around us continually teaches us what to value. Families shape us, friends shape us, workplaces shape us, and the stories repeated through entertainment, advertising, social media, technology, politics, and culture all influence what begins to feel normal. Some of that influence may be good, while other parts quietly pull us away from the way of Jesus.

Following Jesus does not require treating everything outside the Church as corrupt. Human creativity, friendship, work, art, learning, medicine, technology, and countless other parts of culture can become sources of genuine good. Discipleship does require discernment.

The disciple learns not to ask only whether something is popular, legal, normal, entertaining, profitable, or accepted by the people around us. We begin asking whether it agrees with the character and teaching of Jesus. Scripture gives us a truth outside ourselves by which the assumptions of our culture and our own hearts can be tested.

Sometimes those ways will agree.

Sometimes they will not.

The teaching of Jesus may confront what our culture tells us about sexuality, money, success, power, identity, revenge, and personal freedom. His way of forgiveness challenges outrage, His teaching about wealth challenges greed and false security, and His commands about truth confront our willingness to bend reality for convenience or advantage.

His call to love enemies challenges the ease with which people can reduce those who disagree with them to something less than neighbors. His teaching about the body challenges the idea that desire alone should define what is good. His call to seek the kingdom challenges every ambition that slowly asks to become our highest loyalty.

The narrow way reaches all of life.

It reaches private choices no one else sees and public decisions that may be noticed. It reaches what we watch, how we speak, what we do with our bodies, the way we use money, how we treat people, and what receives the deepest loyalty of our hearts.

Holiness is learning to belong wholly to God.

This requires attention because sin rarely announces its intent to destroy us. It often begins quietly through a thought repeatedly entertained, resentment rehearsed, an image revisited, a compromise justified, or a habit given more space than we intended.

Repeated choices become patterns, and patterns begin shaping what feels natural to us. Over time, something we once resisted

can become easier to justify simply because we have practiced it repeatedly. This is why habits matter in discipleship: what we repeatedly give our attention and action to helps shape the direction in which we are walking.

Our habits do not save us.

They do help form us.

Paul understood this when he told believers to put off the old self and put on the new. Christian formation is not only about removing what is sinful. Scripture repeatedly pairs putting off the old with putting on the new.

We learn generosity where greed once ruled, truth where deception had become convenient, gratitude where envy grew, and blessing where resentment once shaped our response. We learn patience where anger once moved quickly and self-control where desire had become accustomed to receiving whatever it wanted.

Holiness increasingly becomes learning to say yes to the life of Jesus.

This is why removing one destructive habit without replacing it with something faithful can leave an empty space. A person may reduce time spent feeding temptation but still need to redirect that attention toward Scripture, prayer, healthy relationships, meaningful work, service, rest, or something else that helps desire move toward what is good.

Discipleship asks what we are becoming, not merely what we have stopped doing.

The Holy Spirit is essential in this work.

We have already seen that the fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holiness is not produced through fear or willpower alone. The Spirit forms new desires while strengthening us to resist those that lead away from Jesus.

Still, the Spirit's work calls for our response. Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit, Peter tells us to prepare our minds for action, and Jesus tells us to enter the narrow gate. Scripture consistently treats disciples as people who depend fully on God's grace while making real choices.

We choose what receives our attention. We decide whether to remain in a situation that repeatedly feeds temptation, whether to confess early or hide longer, and whether to listen to wise counsel or protect a pattern we do not want challenged.

Those choices matter because temptation is real.

Temptation itself is not the same as sin. Jesus was tempted and remained without sin. A thought, desire, or opportunity can present itself without becoming something we have chosen to embrace.

The important question is what we do when temptation appears.

Wisdom learns when temptation should be resisted in the moment and when it should be avoided before the moment arrives. A disciple who recognizes recurring vulnerability may need practical boundaries around situations, relationships, technology, substances, money, or other areas where judgment repeatedly weakens.

The boundary itself is not holiness. It simply protects space in which faithful habits can grow.

Jesus used deliberately vivid language about removing what repeatedly leads us into sin. He was not commanding bodily harm. He was teaching His disciples to take seriously whatever continually pulls the heart away from God, rather than to treat destructive patterns casually.

We should take sin seriously because Jesus does.

Sin damages people. It distorts love, harms relationships, enslaves desire, hides behind deception, and moves us away from the life God intends. Grace does not require us to minimize that damage.

At the same time, taking sin seriously does not mean living under constant fear of failure. Those who belong to Christ live under grace, have been given the Spirit, receive truth through Scripture, and walk among people who can help them remain faithful.

When we fall, repentance gives us a way to turn.

Repentance is one of God's gifts to disciples walking the narrow road. We do not have to defend yesterday's direction simply because we walked in it. We can name sin honestly, receive forgiveness, make right what can be made right, and turn again toward Jesus.

Failure does not have to determine the direction of the next step.

This matters because shame can become another form of self-focus. After failure, we may spend more time thinking about our disappointment in ourselves than about the grace and leadership of Jesus. Repentance moves us away from both self-justification and self-condemnation and brings us back under His leadership.

The narrow way is not a road for people who never stumble.

It is a road for people who keep returning to Jesus.

Holiness also carries its own temptation when obedience becomes a reason to compare ourselves with other people. Moral seriousness can quietly become pride, and conviction can become contempt. Jesus repeatedly exposed that kind of religion because a person can separate from obvious sins while remaining deeply centered on self.

Jesus told about a Pharisee who prayed by thanking God that he was not like other people. Nearby stood a tax collector who would not even lift his eyes toward heaven but asked God for mercy. The man whose prayer sounded less impressive was the one who understood his need for grace.

Growing holiness should deepen our awareness of grace rather than lessen it. The closer we come to the light, the more clearly we see both the goodness of God and the places where we still need His mercy. Mature disciples become serious about sin without becoming impressed with themselves.

They remember who saved them.

This also shapes how we respond to people who are walking differently from us.

Christian conviction never gives us permission to treat another person with contempt. Jesus could speak clearly about sin while moving toward people with compassion and dignity. His disciples can hold biblical conviction without reducing people to their sins, disagreements, or distance from God.

We do not have to call something good in order to love someone faithfully. Neither do we need to treat people as enemies simply because they do not understand or choose the way of Jesus. Holiness should make us more like Christ, which means that truth and love continue to walk together.

The narrow way will sometimes make us different from the people around us.

The goal is not to be different for the sake of being different. There is nothing spiritual about creating unnecessary distance or trying to appear unusual. There will simply be moments when allegiance to Jesus produces choices that differ from what others consider normal.

A disciple may step away from something friends consider harmless. A business leader may refuse an advantage that requires dishonesty. A young person may set boundaries that seem unusual to peers, while a family may organize their time, money, technology, or priorities differently as they try to live under the leadership of Jesus.

Those choices do not make someone better than the people around them.

They reveal whom we are learning to trust and obey.

This is where the people of Jesus become especially important. Choosing another way becomes more difficult when we feel completely alone. We need believers who can encourage us when obedience feels strange, remind us of what is true, and help us recognize when conviction has slowly given way to compromise.

We also need people who can question us.

Not every difference between Christians and the surrounding culture is evidence of holiness. Believers can give spiritual authority to tradition, politics, personality, cultural habits, or personal preferences that Jesus never commanded. The narrow way is defined by Jesus, which is why conviction must remain humble, biblical, and open to correction.

We keep returning to Scripture and to the character of Christ. We ask whether our convictions actually grow from His teaching or whether we have given spiritual authority to something

else. Holiness is too important to be shaped merely by our own instincts.

Romans chapter 12 gives us a helpful picture.

Paul begins by urging believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Then he tells them not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed through renewed minds.

Paul's language gathers the whole person under God's leadership. Our bodies, minds, desires, relationships, and ordinary decisions all matter because Christian holiness is not an escape from being human. It is human life increasingly restored to the good leadership of the One who made us.

This kind of formation takes time.

Some patterns may change quickly, while others require years of prayer, accountability, repentance, new habits, and dependence on the Spirit. Certain temptations may weaken while others remain places where vigilance is necessary.

Slow growth is still real growth when the direction of life continues to move toward Jesus.

The important question is whether we are continuing to bring our lives under His leadership. Are we making peace with what Jesus calls us away from, or are we bringing it into the light? Are we feeding the pattern or practicing another way?

The narrow road is walked through thousands of choices like these. Some will feel important, and many will feel ordinary. Together, they form the direction of a life.

Jesus does not call His disciples toward holiness because He wants life to become smaller. He calls us away from things that promise freedom while gradually becoming masters. The narrow way leads to life because Jesus knows where life is found, and His commands come from the character of the One who loved us enough to give Himself for us.

That is why holiness remains rooted in trust.

We trust Jesus enough to believe His definition of life, even when another definition feels easier. We trust Him enough to obey when desire pulls elsewhere and enough to repent when we have wandered. The narrow way is ultimately a life of continually placing our confidence in the One who leads us.

The road will not always be easy. There will be desires we must refuse, habits that need to change, relationships where boundaries become necessary, and moments when faithfulness costs approval, opportunity, or comfort. Jesus never promised that following Him would remove every cost.

The narrow way teaches us to choose Jesus when another road looks easier. Eventually, however, discipleship asks an even deeper question: will we continue to follow when the road of obedience entails suffering, sacrifice, or loss?

Jesus gave His disciples an image for that kind of faithfulness.

A cross.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Ten

Take Up Your Cross

The narrow way teaches us to choose Jesus when another road appears easier, but discipleship eventually asks an even deeper question. Will we continue following when faithfulness costs us something? Jesus gave His disciples a striking image for that kind of allegiance: a cross.

He said:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Luke chapter 9, verse 23.

For the first disciples, a cross was not yet a familiar Christian symbol. It was an instrument of Roman execution associated with shame, suffering, and death. When Jesus told them to take up a cross, He was making clear that allegiance to Him could cost far more than comfort or convenience.

The disciples were still learning what that meant.

Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, but he struggled to accept that the Messiah's road would include rejection, suffering, and death. He wanted Jesus while resisting the path Jesus said He must walk. The disciples would have to learn that God's victory could look very different from the kind of victory they expected.

We can understand Peter's resistance because most of us would prefer a faith that leads around suffering rather than through it. We want Jesus to protect what matters to us, answer prayer in the way we hope, remove obstacles, and make the road clearer. There is nothing wrong with asking God for help or longing for relief, but Jesus never promised that following Him would make every road easy.

Taking up the cross is the willingness to remain faithful to Jesus when allegiance to Him becomes costly. It is not the pursuit of pain, the glorification of hardship, or the passive acceptance of whatever happens to us. It is costly obedience rooted in love for Christ.

Jesus prepared His disciples for the possibility that faithfulness would bring opposition.

He said:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

John chapter 15, verse 18.

Opposition by itself is not evidence of faithfulness. Christians can create unnecessary conflict through arrogance, carelessness, harsh speech, or refusal to receive correction and then wrongly call the response persecution. Peter later distinguishes suffering for doing wrong from suffering for doing good.

First Peter chapter 2, verse 20.

Jesus gives us the pattern. He spoke truth courageously without loving conflict, and He remained faithful without becoming cruel or defensive. His suffering came because He continued to obey the Father and to love faithfully, even when that obedience was rejected.

Taking up the cross means learning that kind of faithfulness.

Faithfulness may carry a real cost. Telling the truth can threaten an opportunity, refusing dishonesty can cost money, sexual faithfulness may require releasing a relationship or desire, and forgiveness can require surrendering the hope of revenge. In some parts of the world, allegiance to Jesus can carry far more serious consequences, including imprisonment, violence, displacement, or death.

The cost will differ from one disciple to another, but the call remains the same: follow Jesus faithfully.

This is why Jesus says the cross is taken up "daily."

The word daily reminds us that costly faithfulness is usually practiced long before a dramatic moment arrives. A parent chooses patience when exhaustion makes anger easier, a leader

accepts responsibility rather than protecting their reputation, and a believer tells the truth when deception would lead to an easier outcome. Ordinary obedience trains the heart for moments when allegiance to Jesus may demand more.

A person who has practiced truth in small decisions is better prepared to tell the truth when something important is at stake. Someone who has learned surrender through ordinary choices becomes more prepared when the future cannot be controlled. Daily faithfulness slowly forms the kind of disciple who can remain steady when the cost grows.

The cross is not first about dramatic sacrifice.

It is about faithful allegiance to Jesus.

This also means we should be careful not to call every hardship a cross.

Not every hardship is what Jesus means by taking up our cross. Illness, grief, financial loss, broken relationships, and other forms of suffering may come simply because we live in a broken world. Jesus meets us faithfully in those places, but cross-bearing refers more specifically to the cost of continuing to follow Him.

Some suffering may also come from our own choices or from the harmful choices of other people. Christian language should never be used to make every painful circumstance sound spiritually necessary. Faithfulness requires wisdom about what kind of suffering we are actually facing.

The command to endure must never be used to trap someone in abuse or prevent appropriate protection. Taking up a cross does not mean remaining in danger, refusing medical care, protecting an abusive leader, avoiding legal or pastoral accountability, or staying silent while someone is being harmed. Seeking safety and pursuing accountability can themselves be faithful acts.

Jesus did not glorify suffering for its own sake.

Christian disciples do not seek suffering simply because suffering is difficult. We seek Jesus, and when faithful obedience leads through suffering, we remain with Him there. The value is not found in pain itself but in faithfulness to Christ.

Jesus Himself endured suffering because He remained obedient to the Father and because love carried Him toward the work He had been sent to accomplish. His cross stands alone in its redemptive power. He gave His life for sinners and accomplished what no suffering of ours could ever accomplish.

That distinction matters.

Our crosses do not save us or anyone else.

Christ's cross does.

We follow the Crucified One because He has already done what we could never do for ourselves.

The writer of Hebrews gives disciples a picture of what endurance looks like:

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1.

The Christian life requires endurance because faithfulness unfolds across an entire life. Some seasons carry obvious joy, visible fruit, and answers to prayer, while others involve waiting, uncertainty, repeated temptation, disappointment, grief, or obedience that seems to produce little immediate result.

Hebrews gives endurance both a direction and a focus. We continue running the life God has placed before us by fixing our attention on Jesus rather than allowing suffering to become the center of our vision.

The writer continues:

"Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith."

Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2.

Suffering has a way of narrowing our vision. Pain becomes loud, disappointment fills our thoughts, and unanswered questions can slowly reshape what we believe about God. We may begin to interpret the character of Jesus through our circumstances rather than bringing our circumstances beneath what we already know about His character.

Hebrews turns our attention back toward Christ.

Jesus understands suffering from within the human story. He experienced betrayal, rejection, injustice, physical pain, grief, loneliness, and death. Christianity does not ask hurting people to trust a Savior who remained untouched by suffering.

Hebrews continues:

"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."

Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2.

Jesus' suffering was uniquely redemptive. His death accomplished what ours never could, and His resurrection defeated the power of death. Yet because His disciples belong to the risen Christ, our endurance now takes place inside the hope His resurrection has secured.

Jesus endured the cross knowing that the cross would not be the final word.

Resurrection was coming.

His suffering was real, and His death was real, but death would not keep Him. The Father raised the Son, and what appeared to be defeat became the place where sin and death were decisively overcome.

Christian endurance lives inside that resurrection hope.

We do not believe every painful circumstance will be resolved quickly or that every loss will be restored in the form we desire during this life. We believe the risen Jesus will have the final word. He will make all things new, and no act of faithfulness offered to Him is wasted.

Resurrection hope does not make pain unreal or require us to minimize loss. It keeps suffering from becoming the whole

story. Because Jesus lives, death, injustice, grief, and loss do not possess the final word over those who belong to Him.

Hebrews then says:

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

Hebrews chapter 12, verse 3.

Weariness is real.

People can become tired of doing what is right when little seems to change. We can become tired of forgiving, waiting, resisting temptation, serving without recognition, praying for something that remains unresolved, or carrying responsibilities that seem heavier than expected.

Weariness is not necessarily failure. Sometimes it simply means we are human and have reached the limits God built into us. Jesus Himself slept, withdrew, ate with friends, prayed, and received the care of others.

Christian endurance includes learning when faithfulness means continuing and when faithfulness means receiving rest so that we can continue.

Rest and endurance belong together.

This is one reason God gives us His people.

A tired disciple may need another believer to remind them what is true. Someone carrying grief may need a friend willing to sit

quietly rather than explain the pain. A person facing temptation may need enough humility to ask for help before weakness turns into isolation.

Endurance is personal, but it is not solitary.

Shared endurance also means refusing to compare suffering. Another person's grief does not become less real because someone else appears to carry a heavier burden. The people of Jesus can take pain seriously without requiring it to compete for legitimacy.

Jesus modeled that kind of compassion.

He never treated someone's pain as too insignificant for His attention. He wept beside the grave of Lazarus even though He knew resurrection was moments away. He received people in sickness, fear, grief, and need without shaming them for feeling the weight of what they carried.

Endurance leaves room for sorrow.

The Bible does not teach faithful people to hide sorrow behind religious optimism. The Psalms cry out to God, Job brings questions, the prophets grieve, and Jesus Himself weeps and prays in anguish.

Biblical sorrow gives us permission to ask why, wonder how long suffering will continue, and ask God honestly for relief. Taking up the cross does not require emotional numbness. It means bringing pain into relationship with God rather than allowing pain to become the place where we leave Him.

There may be seasons when faithful prayer sounds less like confidence and more like the words Peter once spoke to Jesus:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John chapter 6, verse 68.

Peter's words capture something of endurance. He did not understand everything Jesus was saying, but he had come to know where life was found. Sometimes perseverance looks less like certainty and more like refusing to walk away from the One we have learned to trust.

This also protects Christian endurance from becoming stubbornness.

Endurance should not be confused with refusing to change direction. Faithfulness to Jesus may require staying in a difficult situation, but it may also require leaving an unhealthy one, setting a boundary, changing a plan, asking for help, or admitting that an earlier decision was mistaken. The goal is not to prove how much hardship we can tolerate.

The goal is obedience to Christ.

Discernment asks what faithfulness requires in the particular situation before us. Scripture, prayer, the Spirit, wise believers, and the character of Jesus help us distinguish costly obedience from burdens God never asked us to carry.

Jesus Himself did not respond to every difficult situation in the same way.

At times He withdrew from danger. At other times He spoke directly. Sometimes He remained silent, and eventually He willingly went to the cross because the Father's appointed hour had come.

His endurance was obedience, not recklessness.

His courage remained under the Father's leadership.

Taking up the cross also changes the way we think about success.

Disciples can easily measure decisions only by outcomes: whether the business grew, the relationship improved, people approved, or the ministry became larger. Outcomes matter, but they are not the final measure of faithfulness.

Jesus went to the cross in what appeared to be defeat. His followers scattered, His enemies seemed to win, and His body was placed in a tomb. Yet Jesus had remained perfectly obedient to the Father.

Sometimes obedience produces visible fruit quickly.

Sometimes the fruit belongs to a future we cannot yet see.

The disciple therefore learns to ask whether we remained truthful, loving, obedient, and willing to entrust the outcome to God. Results still matter, but they no longer serve as the final authority on whether obedience was worthwhile.

Faithfulness becomes a deeper measure of success.

This becomes especially important when following Jesus costs approval.

We naturally want people to understand us. We want family, friends, coworkers, and people we respect to see our decisions as reasonable. Yet there may be moments when obedience to Christ will not be understood.

Jesus prepared His disciples for that possibility:

"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

John chapter 15, verse 20.

These words do not give Christians permission to seek hostility or treat disagreement as persecution. They prepare disciples to remain faithful when hostility actually comes because of their allegiance to Jesus.

The early believers learned this quickly.

In Acts chapter 5, the apostles were arrested, threatened, and beaten because they continued speaking about Jesus. Luke says they left rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name.

The apostles did not rejoice because pain itself was good. They rejoiced because suffering had not separated them from Christ or silenced the witness entrusted to them. Their allegiance to Jesus remained intact even under pressure.

Most disciples may never experience what those apostles experienced.

Their example still asks the same question.

Is Jesus worth following when faithfulness costs something?

That question reaches far beyond persecution.

Cross-shaped faithfulness often appears ordinary. It can look like integrity without applause, obedience without immediate reward, patient love when gratitude never comes, and hope that survives disappointment because its foundation remains Christ. It can mean continuing to love faithfully when withdrawal into bitterness would be easier.

Costly faithfulness does not need an audience in order to matter.

None of this is sustained through grit alone. The Spirit remains with us, the Father hears our prayers, Scripture reminds us of what is true, and the people of God help us continue when our strength is thin. Endurance remains a life of dependence on grace.

Even then, we will not carry the cross perfectly.

Peter learned this personally. He promised that he would remain with Jesus even if everyone else fell away, yet hours later fear overcame him and he denied knowing Christ three times. After the resurrection, Jesus restored Peter and called him forward again, teaching him that endurance could never rest on confidence in his own strength.

Peter would eventually become faithful in ways he once believed he could accomplish through determination alone. Grace had taught him to trust Jesus more deeply and himself more humbly.

We will need that grace too.

There may be moments when we avoid a difficult obedience, choose comfort, become afraid, or grow weary enough to wonder whether continuing is worth it. When we fail, we return to Jesus, receive grace, stand again, and continue walking.

The call to take up the cross is not reserved for disciples who never become afraid. It is given to people who keep returning their allegiance to Christ.

Taking up the cross is not a celebration of pain. It is the decision to remain faithful to Jesus, even when following Him becomes costly. We endure because the Crucified One is also the risen King, and His resurrection assures us that costly faithfulness is never the final chapter.

The cross also turns the disciple outward.

Jesus gave Himself for others, and those who follow Him begin to learn a love that is willing to serve, sacrifice, and move toward people rather than to organize life entirely around self-protection. Cross-shaped discipleship prepares us to become people who can be sent.

After the resurrection, Jesus told His disciples:

"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

John chapter 20, verse 21.

The Way that teaches us to remain faithful also teaches us to go.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Eleven

As the Father Sent Me

Cross-shaped discipleship eventually turns the disciple outward. Jesus teaches us to surrender, remain faithful, and stop organizing life entirely around self-protection. As His love takes shape within us, we become increasingly available to other people. The life Jesus forms in His disciples was never meant to end with them.

After the resurrection, Jesus stood among His disciples and said:

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

John chapter 20, verse 21.

Those words reveal the movement from formation to mission. The disciples had been called, taught, corrected, restored, and formed through years with Jesus. Now the risen Christ was sending them into the world as His witnesses.

The men Jesus sent had recently been afraid. They had watched Him arrested and crucified, scattered when danger became real, and spent the days after His death trying to understand what had happened. The risen Jesus met them in that fear, spoke peace, and then entrusted them with His mission.

Mission did not begin with their confidence, courage, experience, or ability to influence people. It began with Jesus and His authority. The One sent by the Father was now sending those who had learned to follow Him.

Discipleship therefore moves outward. Jesus forms people not only for their own growth but so that His life can become visible through them in the world He loves.

The language of being sent can make us think first about missionaries crossing oceans or people leaving ordinary careers for vocational ministry. God does call some disciples into those assignments, and the gospel has crossed cultures and generations because people were willing to go. Yet the life of mission begins much closer, in the places where Jesus has already placed us.

Homes, workplaces, classrooms, neighborhoods, farms, businesses, hospital rooms, locker rooms, and dinner tables can all become places where the character and truth of Jesus are made visible. Mission begins by becoming available to Christ within the life we already have.

This helps us understand what Jesus means when He says, "As the Father has sent me."

Our sending is not identical to the Father's sending of the Son. Jesus alone is the incarnate Son who accomplished salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. We do not repeat His saving work, but His mission gives shape to ours as we carry His message, character, and love into the world.

John tells us:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

John chapter 1, verse 14.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus entered ordinary human life, ate at tables, walked roads, attended celebrations, entered homes, touched those considered unclean, and moved toward people carrying grief, shame, sickness, and sin. His mission was marked by nearness.

Those He sends must also become willing to draw near.

We can become so focused on accomplishing something significant for God that we overlook the people already in front of us. A conversation at the table, a coworker who has grown quiet, a neighbor walking through grief, or a family member beginning to ask questions about faith may become the place where mission is already waiting.

Jesus often met people in ordinary places. He spoke with a Samaritan woman beside a well, noticed Zacchaeus in a crowd, ate with tax collectors and sinners, received children others considered an interruption, and stopped for people who were

calling for help while He was already on His way somewhere else.

He was present enough to notice people.

Living sent requires seeing people as people rather than projects. No one exists as an opportunity for us to prove that we are spiritual, persuasive, or successful at evangelism. Each person is made in the image of God and worthy of dignity, attention, and love regardless of how they respond to us.

Faithful witness listens carefully, becomes interested in another person's story, notices pain before rushing toward answers, and serves without demanding a particular response. When we speak about Jesus, we do so because He is worthy of being known, not because we need to win an argument or prove ourselves right.

Jesus described His people with another image:

"You are the light of the world."

Matthew chapter 5, verse 14.

He continued:

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Matthew chapter 5, verse 16.

Light is meant to become visible. Jesus expects the lives of His disciples to reveal something of God's character through

integrity, generosity, mercy, courage, forgiveness, compassion, faithfulness, and love. Those good works do not save us or replace the gospel. They reveal something of the life grace is producing.

A business owner who treats people with honesty and dignity, a teenager who refuses to join in humiliating another student, a family that practices hospitality, or a neighbor who keeps showing up during grief can all make something of Christ's character visible. Ordinary faithfulness gives credibility to the words we eventually speak.

Christian witness includes both the life we live and the message we speak. Our actions can display the character of Jesus, while our words identify the One from whom our hope comes. The first disciples not only lived differently after the resurrection. They spoke openly about Jesus.

Before ascending to the Father, Jesus said:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses."

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

A witness tells what they know to be true.

The apostles were witnesses in a unique sense because they had seen the risen Jesus. They had heard His teaching, witnessed His death, encountered Him after His resurrection, and received His grace despite their own failures. Our witness depends on the apostolic testimony preserved in Scripture, yet we can also

speak honestly about the grace we ourselves have received and the ways Christ is forming our lives.

Christian testimony does not need to be dramatic to be meaningful. Some people can describe rescue from destructive patterns, while others came to trust Jesus through years of ordinary faith and formation. The center of every Christian testimony is not the drama of the story but the person and work of Jesus.

We can speak honestly about who He is, what He has done, and why we trust Him. We can tell someone how grace changed the way we understand failure, how prayer carried us through suffering, or how Scripture has corrected and guided us.

We do not have to pretend that every struggle in our lives has been resolved before we speak about Jesus. Honest confession, repentance, dependence, and continued growth can themselves reveal something about His grace. People do not need Christians who pretend to have mastered life. They need witnesses who know where to bring failure, grief, temptation, uncertainty, and need.

Our weakness does not automatically disqualify our witness. It can teach us to point away from ourselves and toward Christ.

Paul understood this deeply. He never treated himself as the center of the message, and neither should we. Mission becomes distorted when influence, recognition, numbers, platforms, or results begin determining our identity. Those things may accompany faithful ministry, but the mission exists because Jesus loves people and because the gospel is good news.

We are sent because Jesus loves people; we speak because the gospel is good news, and we serve because love becomes practical. The mission belongs to Christ, which means our faithfulness matters without making us responsible for controlling every outcome.

That truth brings freedom.

We cannot make another person believe. We cannot argue someone into spiritual life, control the timing of their response, or carry responsibility for everything God may be doing in them. Faithful witness matters, but the outcome does not rest entirely on us.

Paul described his own ministry by saying that one person planted and another watered, but God gave the growth.

"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

First Corinthians chapter 3, verse 7.

Paul's picture of planting and watering gives mission the right perspective. We participate faithfully, but God gives growth. That allows us to speak, pray, answer questions, remain present, and love someone for years without treating them as a failed project if their response does not come on our timetable.

Jesus saves, the Spirit convicts and awakens, and God gives growth. Our responsibility is faithful witness rather than control.

This also protects us from pressure-driven evangelism.

People are not targets or numbers to be reported. They carry stories, wounds, questions, experiences, and reasons trust may be difficult. Some have never heard the gospel clearly, while others may have encountered distorted versions shaped by fear, manipulation, hypocrisy, or abuse.

Faithful witness takes people seriously.

Taking people seriously does not require changing the gospel to make it easier to receive. Jesus still calls people toward repentance, faith, and life under His lordship. Yet He also shows us how truth can be carried with patience, dignity, and love.

Truth and love remain together.

Listening helps us understand the question beneath the question. Resistance to church may carry a history of betrayal, and questions about suffering may grow from personal grief rather than abstract curiosity. Listening does not weaken witness. It helps us love the person actually standing in front of us.

Peter later told believers:

"Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

First Peter chapter 3, verse 15.

He immediately describes the manner:

"Yet do it with gentleness and respect."

First Peter chapter 3, verse 15.

Peter joins confidence and character. Christian witness should be prepared to explain its hope while carrying that hope with gentleness and respect. Gentleness is not uncertainty, and respect is not compromise. They belong to the way of Jesus.

Mission also takes us across boundaries.

Jesus told His disciples that they would be witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts chapter 1, verse 8.

Jesus' words show a mission that begins nearby and keeps moving outward. Jerusalem was home, Judea widened the circle, Samaria crossed deep social and religious boundaries, and the ends of the earth opened the mission beyond anything the disciples could accomplish themselves.

The gospel moves outward because the love of God is not confined to the people already near us.

Jesus repeatedly crossed boundaries others considered important. He spoke with Samaritans, welcomed children, touched lepers, responded to Gentiles, ate with people carrying social shame, and noticed those others overlooked. His compassion was not limited to people whose backgrounds resembled His disciples'.

His followers would have to learn the same thing.

The book of Acts shows that the disciples themselves had to keep learning this. Peter needed God to challenge assumptions about whom the gospel could welcome fully into God's people. Mission did not only change the people being reached. It continued changing the disciples who were being sent.

The same can be true for us.

We may need to move toward someone whose story is very different from ours. We may need to listen across cultural, economic, generational, ethnic, or social differences rather than assuming we already understand another person's life.

For some disciples, obedience may eventually cross cultures or oceans. For others, the most important boundary may be the street, workplace, neighborhood, or relationship directly in front of them. Both require a willingness to go where Jesus sends.

This is where mission and the Church belong together.

Mission belongs to the Church rather than to isolated individuals building private work around themselves. The Church prays, sends, supports, welcomes, teaches, serves, and bears witness together. Even Paul's missionary work remained deeply connected to other believers and local churches.

When the Church scatters, disciples carry the presence and way of Christ into classrooms, workplaces, homes, hospitals, businesses, neighborhoods, and countless ordinary relationships.

Every disciple enters real places where faithfulness can make Jesus more visible.

This does not require calling every occupation a ministry position. It means every occupation and responsibility belongs under the lordship of Jesus. Work can become a place for integrity, leadership can become service, skill can become generosity, and influence can become stewardship.

Alongside questions about what work to do or where to live, disciples begin asking how they can remain faithful to Jesus wherever He places them. That question can reshape the way we see an ordinary day.

Faithfulness may take the form of service, words, or both together. Someone may first encounter the love of Christ through a person who listens, helps, welcomes, or remains present, but Christian love should not permanently hide the name of the One from whom our hope comes.

We serve in Jesus' name because Jesus is the hope we ultimately have to offer.

Speaking about faith can feel uncomfortable because we may fear sounding pushy, being misunderstood, damaging a relationship, or facing questions we cannot answer. Faithful witness does not require forcing conversations. It means becoming prepared and attentive enough to speak when a genuine opportunity opens.

Prayer makes us attentive to those opportunities. The Spirit gives courage and wisdom, Scripture gives us truth, and love helps us care more about the person than about how impressive our answer sounds.

When a door opens, we can speak simply about who Jesus is, why His cross and resurrection matter, and why we trust Him. We can answer what we know, admit what we do not know, offer to pray, and invite someone to explore Scripture or a healthy Christian community with us.

Mission rarely requires having every answer.

It requires faithfulness with the opportunity before us.

Jesus did not wait until the first disciples had completed their formation before sending them. Peter still had much to learn, and the Church in Acts continued to navigate failure, conflict, and misunderstanding as the gospel moved outward. Being unfinished does not make a disciple unusable. It means we remain learners while we are sent.

That protects mission from becoming a posture of superiority.

We are not standing above people and telling them to follow a road we have mastered. We are pointing toward the Jesus we ourselves are still following and inviting others to discover His way with us.

Mission is not standing above people.

It is pointing toward Jesus.

Jesus sends His people with His message, under His authority, dependent on His Spirit, shaped by His character, and connected to His Church. We become available where God has already placed us while remaining willing to move when He opens another door. Mission can cross an ocean, but it often begins with the person sitting across the table.

The important thing is that we live awake to being sent.

Jesus has formed us through relationship, surrender, abiding, obedience, the Spirit, prayer, community, holiness, and costly faithfulness. None of that formation ends with us. The grace we receive begins becoming grace we carry, the truth we learn becomes truth we can share, and the love we experience in Christ begins moving outward toward others.

Formation becomes witness.

Being sent brings us into the lives of others, but Jesus' mission does not end when someone hears the gospel or begins to believe. He calls His followers to help others learn everything He has been teaching us throughout this book: how to trust Him, remain with Him, obey His words, walk by the Spirit, and live His way.

After His resurrection, Jesus gave that responsibility a clear command:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19.

We witness to who Jesus is and testify to what He has done. Disciple-making goes further by walking with people as they learn to follow Him for themselves.

That is where the Way leads next.

Chapter Twelve

Make Disciples

We witness to who Jesus is and testify to what He has done, but Jesus' mission does not end when someone hears the gospel or begins to believe. He calls His followers to walk with people as they learn to follow Him for themselves. Disciples become part of how other disciples are formed.

After His resurrection, Jesus gathered His followers in Galilee and said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Matthew chapter 28, verse 18.

Everything that follows rests on the authority of Jesus. The Great Commission is not a human project built on the disciples' confidence or competence. The risen King has authority over heaven and earth, and He sends His followers under that authority.

The disciples standing before Jesus had failed, doubted, misunderstood, and scattered, yet He still entrusted His mission to them. Their usefulness would not rest on having become flawless. It would rest on the authority and presence of the One sending them.

Then Jesus said:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19.

Jesus did not simply tell them to gather listeners, gain supporters, or convince people to agree with a set of ideas. To make disciples is to help people become followers of Jesus who learn His truth, trust His leadership, obey His words, remain with His people, and increasingly live His way.

It begins with believing the gospel, but it does not end with belief.

Coming to faith is not the finish line of discipleship. It is the beginning of a life with Jesus.

The first invitation Jesus gave His disciples was, "Follow me." Near the end of His earthly ministry, He commanded those same disciples to help others become followers too. Between those moments, Jesus had shown them what disciple-making looks like by giving them His own life.

Jesus lived among them, taught them, corrected them, answered their questions, exposed pride, welcomed weakness, confronted

unbelief, sent them to serve, and restored them after failure. Their discipleship happened through truth received within relationship. Now they were being sent to help others learn the same way.

Disciple-making is relational, but relationship alone is not enough. People need Scripture because discipleship means learning the truth Jesus has revealed. At the same time, Jesus did not form His disciples through information alone. His teaching was demonstrated through the life they shared with Him.

They watched Him pray, serve, respond to opposition, welcome interruptions, use authority, speak truth, and love people others often ignored. They learned not only by hearing what Jesus taught but also by seeing what His words looked like when lived out.

Disciple-making follows that pattern.

We open Scripture with people and help them understand what Jesus has said. We also allow them to see how closely His teaching is becoming part of our own lives.

People we disciple may see how we pray, serve, repent, forgive, make decisions, endure disappointment, and return to Jesus after failure. Our lives will never be perfect examples, but they can become honest examples of what it looks like to keep following Christ.

This requires honesty because disciple-making cannot be built on pretending.

We cannot invite someone into a perfect life we do not actually possess. We invite them into a life of following Jesus as we continue to follow Him ourselves. The most helpful disciple-maker is not necessarily the person with the most impressive answers, but someone who has learned to keep bringing life beneath the leadership of Christ.

Paul could say:

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

First Corinthians chapter 11, verse 1.

When Paul said this, he was not placing himself at the center. His example was valuable only insofar as it pointed beyond him to Jesus. The same must be true of anyone who disciples another person.

We are not creating followers of ourselves.

We are helping people follow Jesus.

That distinction matters because disciple-making becomes unhealthy when influence turns into control. A pastor, mentor, parent, teacher, or spiritual leader may begin by offering guidance but slowly expect another person to adopt personal preferences, opinions, or decisions as though they carried the authority of Jesus.

Healthy discipleship always remembers that Jesus remains Lord of the disciple.

Our role is to help people hear Him more clearly through Scripture, mature in wisdom, walk by the Spirit, participate in the life of the Church, and increasingly become able to follow Christ faithfully. Healthy disciple-making should deepen a person's dependence on Jesus, not create increasing dependence on the disciple-maker.

That requires humility from anyone who disciples others.

We will encounter questions we cannot answer, situations in which another believer reaches a wiser conclusion than we would, and moments when we need to admit that we were wrong. People do not need the illusion that mature Christians never make mistakes. They need to see mature Christians repent.

Jesus continued:

"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19.

Baptism reminds us that discipleship is not merely a private relationship between two people. Jesus identifies new disciples with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and brings them into the visible life of His people. Disciple-making therefore belongs within the Church rather than becoming an isolated mentoring relationship.

No individual believer can provide everything another disciple needs. Christians need Scripture, worship, prayer, the Lord's

Supper, fellowship, correction, encouragement, and the different gifts God has placed within His Church. A healthy disciple-maker helps people become rooted in the larger body rather than build their spiritual lives around a single relationship.

Jesus then said:

"Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 20.

Jesus does not command His disciples merely to teach what He said. He tells them to teach others to observe what He commanded. Christian discipleship therefore aims beyond information toward faithful obedience.

The goal is not simply to know more about Jesus.

It is to learn His way.

A disciple learns to answer Jesus' call, learn from Him, surrender, abide, listen, obey, walk by the Spirit, pray, belong to His people, choose His way, carry the cross, and live sent. Disciple-making helps another person learn that same life.

There is no single program required for disciple-making. It may happen through a small group, friendship, family relationship, mentoring, shared meals, Bible reading, prayer, service, or conversations repeated over years. The structure may vary, but Jesus and His words remain at the center.

Simple rhythms can carry enormous formative value. Disciples can read Scripture together, talk honestly about what it

means, pray, identify places where obedience is difficult, celebrate growth, notice drift, and encourage the next faithful step. None of this requires becoming a complicated program.

The goal is to keep placing real life beneath the truth and leadership of Jesus.

Healthy discipleship also makes room for questions because Jesus' own disciples asked many of them. They misunderstood Him, argued about greatness, resisted difficult teaching, and often learned slowly. Jesus continued teaching rather than abandoning them for not understanding quickly enough.

People still need that kind of patience.

A new believer may carry assumptions formed over many years. Someone may understand grace before understanding obedience, love Scripture while struggling deeply with a particular command, or need time before an old pattern begins to loosen its grip.

Spiritual formation usually unfolds over time. Disciple-making does not rush what Jesus may be patiently forming, but neither does patience mean avoiding truth or obedience. We keep walking with people while continuing to point them toward Christ.

Love sometimes requires correction.

If someone we care about is moving toward something destructive, silence may not be the most loving response. We may need to ask a difficult question or remind them gently of what Jesus

has said, always with the goal of restoration rather than control or humiliation.

Jesus' warning about the speck and the log keeps correction humble. We never speak truth as people who have graduated from needing truth ourselves. Both people in a discipleship relationship remain under the authority and grace of Jesus.

That makes mutual honesty possible.

Even when one person is further along in faith, both remain disciples.

Both need grace.

Both are still being formed.

Disciple-making is one disciple helping another disciple keep walking.

Paul gave Timothy a picture of how this continues beyond a single relationship:

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

Second Timothy chapter 2, verse 2.

Paul's words contain several generations of discipleship. Timothy had received what Paul taught, and he was now to entrust that truth to faithful people who would become able to teach

others. The gospel was meant to keep moving beyond both of them.

This is biblical multiplication.

Biblical multiplication is not primarily about scale, platforms, or organizational growth. It happens whenever a disciple becomes mature enough to help another person follow Jesus faithfully. The life received from Christ continues moving through ordinary people.

That changes the goal of disciple-making.

The goal is not to keep another person dependent on our direction. Over time, healthy discipleship helps people read Scripture, pray, discern wisely, participate in the Church, obey Jesus, serve others, and make faithful decisions without needing us to manage every step.

We want them to walk with Jesus.

And eventually, we want them to help someone else walk with Jesus too.

Disciple-making often happens within ordinary relationships.

Parents have years of opportunities to teach Scripture, model prayer, practice repentance, and show children that following Jesus is part of everyday life, even though faithful parenting cannot guarantee a child's eventual faith. Friendships and mentoring relationships can create similar opportunities as believers

open Scripture, pray, and learn how faith shapes marriage, work, temptation, grief, leadership, and ordinary decisions.

Whether a discipleship relationship lasts for years or only a season, the goal is never possession. We serve faithfully for as long as God gives us influence while remembering that the person ultimately belongs to Jesus.

A disciple does not need to become an expert before helping someone else grow.

We should be honest about what we know and what we still need to learn, but someone who has taken a faithful step can often help another person take that same step. Someone learning to pray can invite another person to pray with them, and someone who has learned to love Scripture can begin reading it with someone else.

We give what we have received while continuing to receive more.

Encouraging another believer is different from being ready for every form of spiritual leadership. Scripture sets high standards for teachers and leaders, and enthusiasm should not be mistaken for maturity. The Church helps recognize gifts, form leaders, teach sound doctrine, and give people responsibilities appropriate to their growth.

Disciple-making respects maturity without demanding perfection.

Jesus also connects discipleship with fruit.

He said:

"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

John chapter 15, verse 8.

Jesus connects discipleship with fruit, but John chapter 15 reminds us where fruit comes from. The branch bears fruit because it remains in the vine. Disciple-making therefore cannot be separated from abiding.

We can only give faithfully from the life we continue receiving from Christ.

That fruit appears in Christlike character, obedience, generosity, service, witness, and relationships through which others grow. Some fruit may become visible quickly, while other fruit develops slowly and quietly over years.

We should also be careful not to measure fruit by numbers alone.

Numbers matter because people matter, and Acts openly celebrates occasions when many people believed. Yet numbers alone cannot tell us whether healthy disciples are being formed. A ministry can grow rapidly while character, obedience, or depth remain shallow.

Disciple-making cares not only that people respond but also about the kind of life being formed over time. Are people becoming more rooted in Jesus, more obedient to His words,

more loving toward others, and more able to help someone else follow Him?

That kind of formation often takes time.

Disciple-making can also bring disappointment.

We may invest deeply in someone who later walks away, resists the truth, or makes decisions that leave us wondering whether anything we said mattered. Even Jesus experienced people walking away, and Judas lived close to Him while ultimately choosing betrayal.

The rich young ruler heard Jesus personally and still walked away sorrowful.

Faithful disciple-making does not give us control over another person's response.

Our responsibility is to love, teach, model, encourage, correct when appropriate, and entrust people to God. The same God who gives growth in evangelism gives growth in discipleship.

That frees us to remain faithful without assuming responsibility that belongs to the Holy Spirit.

It also reminds us that disciple-making requires prayer.

Prayer keeps disciple-making dependent on God. We pray for wisdom, for Scripture to become clear, for sin to be exposed, faith to be strengthened, and growth to occur that no conversation can manufacture. The person before us belongs to Jesus before they belong to any plan we have for them.

This becomes especially important when discipleship grows difficult.

There will be people who learn slowly. Some may repeat the same struggle many times, resist correction, disappear for a season, return after failure, or need more patience than we expected.

We remember how Jesus formed Peter.

Peter misunderstood Jesus, resisted the cross, fell asleep when asked to pray, acted impulsively, and eventually denied Christ. Jesus did not ignore those failures, but neither did He discard Peter because formation took time. After the resurrection, He restored Peter and entrusted him with caring for others.

Grace formed Peter through failure rather than simply working around it.

Disciple-makers need that same patience because the goal is not producing impressive people quickly. The goal is to help people become deeply rooted in Jesus so they keep following Him over time.

Healthy disciple-making also knows when to release responsibility.

We walk with people so that they become increasingly able to walk faithfully without our constant direction. Eventually, maturity creates room for them to serve, lead, and help others follow Jesus.

That is part of multiplication.

A conversation around a kitchen table may help one person begin following Jesus more seriously. Years later, that person may help a child, friend, coworker, neighbor, or someone across the world learn His way. We may never see how far a faithful act of discipleship travels.

That is all right.

The kingdom has never depended on one person being able to see the whole result.

Jesus began with a small group of ordinary disciples, patiently formed them, and sent them into the world. They carried His teaching to others, who entrusted it to another generation, and the invitation continued moving across centuries, languages, cultures, and nations.

Eventually, it reached us.

We have spent this journey learning what it means to respond to that invitation. We come to Jesus and learn from Him. We surrender, abide, hear and obey, walk by the Spirit, pray, live among His people, choose the narrow way, take up the cross, and become people who can be sent.

Then we help another person begin walking too.

Disciple-making is never about building our name or surrounding ourselves with followers. It is about helping people

become deeply rooted in Jesus so they can continue following Him and eventually help others do the same.

Jesus ended the Great Commission with a promise:

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 20.

The Great Commission begins with Jesus' authority and ends with Jesus' presence. Everything between those promises is carried out by disciples who remain dependent on Him.

The commission ends where discipleship began: with Jesus Himself.

He first said, "Follow me," and now He sends His followers with the promise that He will remain with them as they help others do the same. They would cross borders, encounter opposition, make mistakes, learn, suffer, teach, serve, and entrust the gospel to another generation, but they would never be asked to do it apart from Him.

Neither are we.

There is no season in this life when disciples move beyond following Jesus. We continue learning, abiding, obeying, loving, and helping others toward Him because disciple-making never replaces discipleship.

It grows out of it.

The Great Commission is not an invitation to graduate from discipleship. It is an invitation to give our lives to it. Jesus calls us to follow Him, and as He forms us, He sends us to help others learn His way.

The first call remains the final call.

"Follow me."

Conclusion

Keep Walking

Jesus began with an invitation.

"Follow me."

Those words called ordinary people out of the lives they had known and into life with Him. They did not understand everything the invitation would require, where the road would lead, or how deeply Jesus would change them. They simply knew that He had called them, and they began walking.

That is still how discipleship begins. Jesus does not hand us a complete map of the years ahead. He calls us to Himself, teaches us who He is, and invites us to trust Him enough to take the next faithful step.

Over time, that first step becomes a way of life. We learn from Jesus, surrender our leadership, abide in Him, listen to His words, and learn obedience. We walk by the Spirit and pray because the life of a disciple cannot be sustained through our own strength.

Jesus joins us to His people, teaches us holiness, leads us along the narrow road, and forms us to remain faithful when obedience becomes costly. Then He sends us, and as we go, He teaches us to help others follow Him too.

None of these movements is something mature disciples eventually leave behind. We do not graduate from surrender, outgrow abiding, become too experienced for prayer, or reach a point where obedience becomes automatic. We continue needing Scripture, the Spirit, grace, Christian community, correction, repentance, and the presence of Jesus because discipleship never moves beyond dependence on Him.

Discipleship is not a staircase we climb until we finally reach the top. It is a life lived with Jesus, and every season gives us new places to trust Him, obey Him, and receive His grace.

There will be seasons when following Jesus feels clear. Prayer comes easily, Scripture feels alive, relationships are healthy, and the work before us seems fruitful. We may recognize growth in places where we once struggled and see evidence of how Jesus has changed us over time. Those seasons are gifts, and we should receive them with gratitude.

There will also be seasons when the road is harder to read. Prayer may feel quiet, circumstances may change, relationships may disappoint us, and questions may remain unanswered longer than we expected. In those seasons, we may wonder whether we are growing at all.

Keep walking.

Keeping walking does not mean stubbornly continuing in every direction we have already chosen. Disciples still need wisdom, correction, repentance, and sometimes a change of course. It means that when Jesus has made the next faithful step clear, we do not need to see the whole road before taking it.

We trust the One who leads.

Many of the most important acts of discipleship will never be noticed publicly. They happen when we tell the truth, even though a lie would be easier; forgive when resentment feels justified; apologize after speaking harshly; resist what feeds temptation; listen rather than defend ourselves; or choose generosity when fear tells us to hold tightly.

The Way is walked in ordinary places.

Jesus spent much of His earthly life in places that seemed ordinary. He ate meals, entered homes, walked between towns, attended celebrations, prayed, rested, and responded to people who interrupted His plans. The kingdom often became visible through those ordinary moments.

Our lives are no different.

We may spend years waiting for some great assignment while Jesus is forming us through responsibilities already in our hands. The person in front of us, the work we have been given, the family we are called to love, or the community where God has placed us may become the place where discipleship takes its

deepest shape. Faithfulness does not need to be famous in order to matter.

There will also be failure along the way.

Peter followed Jesus closely and still misunderstood Him. He spoke boldly, later became afraid, promised loyalty, and then denied that he knew Jesus. Yet failure was not the end of Peter's story, because Jesus restored him and continued to form him.

The disciple who needed repeated correction became someone God used to strengthen others.

Peter's usefulness did not depend on pretending his past had disappeared. It grew from the grace of Jesus, who continued to form him through it.

That is good news for us.

There will be places where we respond poorly, choose fear, return to an old pattern, or realize we were wrong. Discipleship does not teach us to hide those moments. It teaches us to bring what is true into the light, receive God's mercy, make right what we can, and return to the leadership of Jesus.

Grace does not make our choices meaningless. It makes return possible.

We keep walking because Christ remains faithful.

This is different from simply trying harder.

The Christian life is not sustained by endlessly demanding more from ourselves. Jesus never said that we could produce spiritual life if we became disciplined enough.

He said:

"Apart from me you can do nothing."

John chapter 15, verse 5.

That truth does not weaken discipleship. It reveals its source. Everything Jesus forms in us grows from life with Him.

Prayer, Scripture, obedience, holiness, love, endurance, mission, and disciple-making all become distorted when they are separated from relationship with Jesus. We can become active while slowly becoming spiritually empty. We can serve while forgetting why we serve, defend truth while losing love, build ministries while neglecting our souls, or speak often about Jesus while paying less attention to Him.

Faithful activity cannot replace remaining with Christ.

The answer is not to abandon faithful action but to return to the vine. We remain in Christ, let His words remain in us, allow the Spirit to expose what needs to change, and receive again what we cannot manufacture for ourselves.

And we keep walking.

The same is true when life becomes painful.

Following Jesus does not make us immune to suffering. We will experience loss, disappointment, sickness, uncertainty, and circumstances we would never have chosen, and some disciples will also bear real costs because of allegiance to Christ. None of that means Jesus has left the road.

The crucified and risen Christ knows suffering from within the human story. He does not ask wounded people to pretend pain is small, but invites us to bring sorrow, confusion, questions, and weakness into the presence of God.

We do not need to understand every painful chapter before trusting Him in it.

Sometimes faith looks like confidence, and sometimes it sounds more like Peter saying:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John chapter 6, verse 68.

Peter did not understand everything, but he knew where life was found. There may be seasons when we cannot explain what God is doing or why the road looks the way it does.

So we remain near Jesus.

We also remain near His people.

There will be seasons when another believer's faith helps carry ours through prayer, Scripture, encouragement, or simply faithful presence. At other times, God will use us to do the same for someone else.

No one else can follow Jesus for us, but we were never meant to follow Him alone.

Christian community will not always be easy. People will disappoint one another, churches will make mistakes, and serious failures may require truth, accountability, boundaries, or change. Yet Jesus continues to gather and form a people who learn to love one another as He has loved them.

The love formed among the people of Jesus is never meant to remain turned inward. As we walk with Him, His love increasingly makes us available to the people around us. We learn to notice, serve, listen, speak about our hope, and move toward people whose lives may be very different from ours.

We begin living as people who have been sent.

Not because we have mastered the Way.

Because we know the One who is the Way.

Jesus said:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

John chapter 14, verse 6.

The Way is not ultimately a system, strategy, or spiritual formula.

It is Jesus.

Everything in this book returns to Him. We follow because He called us, learn because He is our teacher, surrender because He is Lord, and abide because He is the source of our life. We obey because His words are life, walk by the Spirit because He has not left us alone, and pray because through Him we have been brought near to the Father.

We belong to His people because He is building His Church, choose the narrow road because He knows where life is found, take up the cross because the One we follow first carried His, and go because He sends us. We make disciples because Jesus told us to help others learn His way. Through every movement, He remains the center.

Keeping Jesus at the center also protects us from measuring our discipleship against someone else's. Another person may know more Scripture, pray more confidently, serve more visibly, or seem farther along. Comparison can feed either pride or discouragement, while neither helps us follow Christ.

The question is not whether our journey looks like theirs.

It is whether we are still following Jesus.

Jesus did not lead every disciple through the same path. Peter's calling was not John's, and Paul's ministry was not identical to Barnabas's. Our lives will also take different shapes while remaining centered on the same Lord.

Following Jesus also means refusing to spend our lives waiting until we feel completely ready. The first disciples were unfin-

ished when Jesus sent them, and we will remain unfinished in important ways too. Being unfinished does not excuse disobedience, but neither does it require us to wait for perfection before taking the next faithful step.

The next step may be to pray, forgive, open Scripture, confess, serve, encourage someone, or speak about Jesus when an opportunity opens. We do not need to accomplish the entire journey today. We need to take the faithful step in front of us.

Over time, ordinary acts of faithfulness become a life, and that life may become part of how someone else discovers the Way.

A child may watch a parent repent, a friend may see faith remain steady through suffering, a coworker may notice integrity when no one is watching, or a younger believer may experience patient guidance from someone willing to walk slowly with them. Another person begins asking why, and a disciple has an opportunity to point toward Jesus.

That is how the Way continues.

It continues through churches, preaching, books, ministry, missions, and countless other ways God chooses to work. Yet beneath all of them are ordinary people whose lives have been captured by Jesus and who are willing to help others know Him.

The Way has continued through ordinary people for generations. Someone translated Scripture, preached, taught a class, opened a home, raised a child, crossed a border, prayed faith-

fully, answered a question, planted a church, shared a meal, or simply spoke the name of Jesus when an opportunity opened.

Through countless acts of faithfulness, the gospel eventually reached us.

We are standing inside a story much larger than ourselves.

Paul taught Timothy. Timothy entrusted the truth to faithful people. Those people taught others, and generation after generation, the gospel continued to move.

Eventually, someone told us.

Now we have been entrusted with our part.

We may never know what grows from every faithful act, and we do not need to. God gives the growth. Our calling is to remain faithful.

Jesus' final words in Matthew's Gospel give us confidence for that calling:

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew chapter 28, verse 20.

Jesus does not send His disciples away from His presence. He sends them with it. The same Jesus who first said, "Follow me," promises to remain with His people as they follow.

His presence does not mean the road will always be clear or easy.

It means we never walk it alone.

Because Jesus remains with us, we do not have to carry the future, manufacture the fruit, control another person's response, or understand where every turn will lead. Our calling is to remain near Him and faithfully take the step He places before us.

There will always be more to learn, more to surrender, more places where grace needs to reach, more people to love, and more opportunities to obey. That is not evidence that discipleship is failing.

It is evidence that we are still disciples.

A disciple is a learner, and until we see Jesus face to face, we remain learners.

So return often to the beginning.

Remember Jesus beside the water, calling ordinary people into life with Him. Hear again the invitation that started everything:

"Follow me."

Stay near Him, listen to His words, trust His leadership, and obey what He makes clear. Receive grace when you fail, remain with His people, love those He places before you, go where He sends you, and help someone else learn His way.

Then wake tomorrow and follow Him again.

Jesus is still the Way, and He is still leading. The road ahead will hold joy, surrender, growth, failure, grace, sacrifice, and opportunities we cannot yet see. We do not need to know every turn.

We need to know the One who leads us.

Follow Jesus.

Keep walking.