

Following Jesus in 2025

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[0 : 00] you do your job or just some relationships that you have that you want to address, some different things that will put you in a better position of ministering the grace of Jesus Christ to other people, even being stewards, better stewards of what God's provided for you in the way of your home and these relationships.

So we understand that New Year resolutions are just kind of part of what this time of year is about. What I'm going to offer you this morning has to do, and I'll throw the title up here for you, with following Jesus in 2025.

I want to talk to you about that, but I want to use a particular passage of Scripture where Jesus actually deals with this as He calls His disciples to Himself. And so if you'll turn to Mark chapter 1, we'll look at verse 16 down through verse 20.

As Jesus, this is Jesus opening up His public ministry, and as He does that, He's gathering what will be His 12 disciples to His side.

So as Jesus was going along by the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Galilee is in the upper northern regions of Israel. You guys have seen that. It's a picturesque place.

[1 : 17] Jesus eventually established Capernaum as His northern headquarters in Israel. It's not too awfully far from Nazareth. This is where they are. It says that while they were around the sea there, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately, Mark says. That's one of Mark's favorite words throughout his gospel is immediately.

Immediately then, without hesitation, these men left their nets. That is, they walked away from their profession, and it says they followed Jesus. Fully. Wholeheartedly.

Verse 19. Then going on a little farther, Jesus saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother. So now we have two sets of brothers.

Jesus is calling away from the fishing industry to follow Him and become fishers of men. They were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately, Jesus called them, and they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with all the hired servants, and they went away to follow Jesus.

[2 : 33] In verse 21, you'll see Capernaum mentioned there. They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and began to teach, establishing his public ministry among the people of Israel.

Now, one of the first things that I want to mention to you as far as a theme for this passage is this. Everyone is following someone. Now, think about that with yourself right now. I really do want you to let that settle on you and let you do some mental energy here with me.

Everyone is following someone. You have someone in your life you've looked up to in the past, and that person's had an influence on you, but you also have someone currently that you are following. And here's what I mean by that. We tend to listen to those whom we admire and respect, don't we? Typically, when we hear things from people we do not admire and do not respect, we understand that we can just kind of put that away and let it go.

It may haunt us a little bit by what they said, depending on what it is. But we only hold on to those things from people that we feel like are speaking worthily about a particular subject or topic, especially if it has to do with us.

[3 : 54] So that what we follow and who we follow has a defining influence on our values, our perspectives, our worldview, and on how we behave, how we live, our lifestyle.

I can put it more simply now. Let me clean it up. But we become like who and what we follow. We become like who and what we follow.

And so I can follow that with this. It matters who you listen to. It matters who our heroes are. And it matters how much attention you and I give to those people in the way of listening to them and following them and allowing them to shape our lives.

Here's how the Lord Jesus spoke to this very issue. He taught His disciples that a pupil is not above His teacher, but everyone. Notice the emphasis Jesus makes here.

Everyone. After He's been fully trained, that is, after He has spent time under His teacher and been fully equipped by His teacher, will be like His teacher.

[5 : 04] We all are exposed to that kind of influence. The Apostle Paul joins in that idea with this. Do not be deceived. Deceived. That's possible, you know.

Depending on who you listen to, you can be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals. We are affected. We are influenced by the people that we look up to and listen to and give attention to.

Look, we don't even have to admire those people. If we listen to them long enough, it's going to rub off and have an effect. Isn't it? We can swallow poison for a long time.

That's why Greg and I have shepherded this church now together for many years, and we tell you constantly, it's not as important that you understand what's wrong. It's more important that you understand what's true.

If you focus and concentrate on the truth that when the bad comes or the wrong or the lie comes, the truth will help you recognize it for what it is, and you're in good shape. So we want to spend more time talking about the truth.

[6 : 06] We've also said it this way. We don't want Grace Church Williamsburg. That's you. Grace Church is you. We don't want you known in this community more by what you stand against.

We want you to be known in this community by what you stand for. I can make that even more specific. By who you stand for. Who you give yourself to. We want the community to know we're not a bunch of legalists here.

We're not a bunch of rule keepers at any cost here. We follow the truth and obey the Lord, and we put a premium on personal holiness because we love Jesus.

We want to honor Christ and please Him in all respects. And so while we don't at all say that personal holiness and obedience is a secondary thing, we understand that of first importance is that we have in our heart a desire, an overwhelming, defining, life, soul-defining desire to please Jesus in all respects.

We see that from the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1, verses 9 and 10, and in many other places. It's in Ephesians 4 as well. Let me show you this one also from the Apostle Paul and connect it to our worship.

[7 : 23] Therefore, Paul says, I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.

See, that's worship language, isn't it? Acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Now, what am I doing here?

Well, God helps us understand something very, very important about ourselves, our human nature. And it's this. We were created by God to worship.

And so the issue is not will we worship. The issue is every single human being was created to worship and comes out of the womb worshipping. And what's the first thing that we come out of the womb wanting to worship?

Ourselves. And you know it just doesn't change or get better with time, does it? We just get better and better at worshipping ourselves. You know, we talk about, I learned this when I was studying psychology about imprinting.

[8 : 29] You know, you put the baby, what do you call a gosling? What's the baby geese? Thank you. I knew it wasn't gosling, but whatever. A gosling, you know, you put them with the human person and then they follow the human, they imprint on it and all that kind of, well, that's fine.

Well, I don't know how it is. We come out of the womb and we must have some kind of weird mirror and we look into that and fall instantly in love with ourselves. And then it doesn't get any better after that.

Nevertheless, he's teaching us here in these verses that we can live a life acceptable to God as we offer ourselves as living and holy sacrifices, not dead on the altar, living.

We lay down on the altar our lives. This is Jesus saying, deny yourself, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. It's tantamount to the same theme. And then Paul adds, this is your spiritual

service of worship.

You're a spiritual being. And this is how you offer worship to God on a spiritual level. That is from your soul, of the Holy Spirit working in you.

[9 : 35] And God helps us understand that's who we are created to be. The Bible tells us that because of our inner nature being corrupted by sin, we worship the wrong things.

So, what that means is if left unchecked by God's truth and grace, our instinctive inborn desire is to suppress and oppose God's truth through a life of unrighteousness and ungodliness.

Now, preachers like to throw those words around quite a bit. And I don't want to assume that you understand what I mean by unrighteousness and ungodliness. Most of us understand those two concepts.

But again, what I'm saying to us is if we are left unchecked by the divine favor and love of God, we will suppress and oppose, we will disobey the truth of the Lord.

And we will do that as a lifestyle of living in unrighteousness and ungodliness. Unrighteousness means not right with God. If you're unrighteous, you are not right with God.

[10 : 44] Jesus was fully righteous. He never sinned. So, He remained right with God in His personal nature because He took on our sins.

He did not die for His sins. So, His nature remained in that state of closeness to God, rightness to God, but He bore the weight of our sin.

And God punished Him to death for our sins. Big difference in Jesus' nature of righteousness, right? Remaining intact. We talked about that last week and why that's so important.

Ungodly means not conforming to God. If you are ungodly, you are not godlike. You are ungodlike. And now, what these two concepts of unrighteousness and ungodliness tell us about ourselves is this. It refers to a state of being and a state of doing. So, we're covered completely by these two spiritual concepts, truths about our human nature apart from Jesus Christ.

[11 : 50] We are, we are unrighteous and we are ungodly. ungodly. And because we are in our very being those things, we exist in that state of being, then we do or live commensurate with or in line with what we are or who we are.

So, we perform deeds of unrighteousness and ungodliness out of who we are. You're just acting. This is why when we encounter unbelievers who act like unbelievers, we shouldn't be shocked by the fact that they are mean and nasty and selfish.

Now, I understand that when a man gets on a subway and sets another human being on fire, we should all be aghast at that. But we shouldn't be aghast at where we know it comes from.

We know what that nature is that would allow a human being to do something so heinous. We step back and look at World War II and say, how can six million people be incinerated because of their faith?

How can that even happen? Well, we can answer that. It's demonic. And we live with that kind of thing in us. Now, until we accept that, we really don't understand what we mean when we say Jesus is Lord and Savior.

[13 : 07] If we need a Lord and Savior, there must be something really bad wrong with each of us. I mean like to the core of who we are. So, the cross tells us how bad the situation is.

If you want to know how bad the situation is in your soul, look at what it took God to render your soul free. And that will give you a really clear indication of just how bad it is.

This is how we understand unrighteousness and ungodliness. In fact, I'm not going to assume again that we understand and accept all of this. Let's look at Ephesians chapter 4.

I'm going to keep you rolling right along in this biblical understanding before I actually get into the gospel of Mark with you. I want to set the stage here very carefully for you theologically so that you know what we're dealing with.

In Ephesians chapter 4, beginning in verse 17, Paul is going to lay out what I have entitled in another sermon about this passage as a useless human being.

[14 : 13] A useless human being. So this I say and affirm together with the Lord that you walk or live no longer as the Gentiles also walk or live in the futility of their mind.

Now when he's talking about Gentiles, he's talking about unbelievers. Unbelievers in general. Do not live or walk like them. What do you mean, Paul? How? Well, in the futility of their mind.

That is in the emptiness, the uselessness of their mind. That's why I titled this message way back when I preached it A Useless Human Being. Verse 18. Being darkened in their understanding.

See, they're dark. They don't get it. Excluded or separated from the life of God. There is no spiritual life within them. They're spiritually dead. Why?

Because of the ignorance that is in them. That is the spiritual ignorance of coming to the truth in Christ. because of the hardness of their heart.

[15:16] And they, having become callous in their heart, having given themselves over to sensuality, that is, self-pleasure.

You can see sensuality there as all kinds of self-gratification. They're chasing self-pleasure for the practice of every kind of impurity if that weren't enough with greediness.

And so he tells us that at the heart of why we live lives like this in unbelief is greed. The Bible defines greed as a desire for more of what God forbids.

That's greed. And that is the root that drives this kind of unrighteous, ungodly living. I want more of what God forbids. This is how we're all bent in our nature.

There are passages like that throughout the Scripture, Old Testament, and New. It's why Jesus had to come to rescue us. So all of that characterizes a lifestyle of unbelief.

[16:23] Now, this is exactly why you and I need God to act on our behalf. And God has acted.

That's the good news. God has acted in sending Jesus to call you into spiritual relationship with Christ. God saves us to worship Him.

Why? Because I just told you we worship the wrong things by our very nature. We come out of the womb worshiping the wrong things. We need God to act, to initiate, so that He can save us to worship Himself.

So what's He saving us from? No, no, not what? Who? Us. When I was saved, when I was born again, when I came to faith in Jesus Christ, God did not save me from you.

He saved me from me. He saved me from the sins of Jeff Jackson. When I go to heaven and stand before the Lord to give an account of my life, I will not give an account for your sins.

[17:28] I'll give an account for mine. I won't go to heaven or hell based on your sins or wrongdoings. I'll go on mine. It will be my own personal testimony before the Lord.

This is where I live my life. This is where I put my faith. This is what defined me. And based on who defines you, it will be heaven or hell. This is the point, again, the reflection of the cross.

God saves us to worship Him. Now, what I'm asking for this morning is for us to give our hearts to thinking biblically, thinking biblically about following Jesus in the new life He's given to each of us.

If you truly are a Christian, if you truly are born again, if you truly are devoted in your heart of hearts to following Christ, I'm asking you to carefully and prayerfully surrender your heart, your mind, to the truths that are reflected in this passage.

I'm asking you to do that so that you can apply these truths to help you actively repent, turn away from the distractions and the infractions which have tended to derail you in a close walk with the Lord.

[18:41] Have you got that in your life? Are you coming this morning and thinking there are things that I need, I know that I need to deal with in my life in terms of my relationship to Jesus and how I relate to other people and how I think about the values of my life.

I need to take stock and do some re-evaluation about how I'm allowing or not allowing Jesus to define my perspectives and values, my relationships, from how I spend God's money to how I take care of God's stuff, to how I relate to people, to how I worship, to the time and resources that I give to seeing this local body of believers moved forward and becoming more like Jesus and enriched in how they love one another.

What investment am I making? See, there are things like that across the spectrum of our lives that we need to think about. I've called them distractions, things that distract us from that kind of focus, and infractions, things that we're doing where we know we're disobedient.

And we need to repent. We don't need to let this drag on. This is a good time to take stock and deal with that. Now we're back in Mark.

Mark's account of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John, two sets of brothers, gives us five, I'm going to put it up here for you, five spiritual realities is what I'm calling it.

[20:09] Five spiritual realities of Jesus calling men to a new life with Him. It's a good time for us to think about this. Another way for you to think about these five things, we can see these as encouragements to follow Jesus and blessings for following Jesus.

I'm called to follow, and as I follow, I receive the blessing of that obedience and devotion to God. So the first spiritual reality that I want to put before you is your call to follow Jesus is planned.

I want you to notice the text with me there in verse 16. As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen.

And then notice the beginning of verse 7. And Jesus said, Jesus saw, and Jesus said, or called to them.

Called to them. Jesus Christ is on a mission. And it is the mission that the Father has called Him to. This is so important for us to draw as a baseline for how Christ worked in His public ministry and what it has to do with our own salvation.

[21 : 28] Jesus is on a mission. That mission is ongoing. He fulfilled a significant portion of it by going to the cross for us. But then that mission continues as we'll see in one of my following points here.

That mission continues. And aren't we glad? You can say it this way. When Jesus saved me, when I reflect on the moment that I became born again, a new creature in Christ, believing on Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins and believing in Jesus alone, my life changed.

And when that happened, I understand that that was the fulfillment of Jesus' mission to save me. He's on mission. And part of that mission came at a point for you personally where you came to know Him as He fulfills that mission.

There are people in your life you are hoping to see saved, aren't you? Me too. Well, Jesus is still on mission and so there's still hope. Pray for them.

Open your mouth and testify to them. Be gracious to them. Don't let anything stand between you and them in terms of them seeing the work and life and light of Jesus in your life for them.

[22 : 44] You would rather pay any price it costs you to pay. If God can use you to bring them to Jesus, give them heaven and save them from hell, what price would you put on that?

Where you would stop and say, that's enough, I'm not going any further. If you go to hell, so be it. I'm drawing a line right here.

Wouldn't you rather pay any price you had to pay that would not compromise the gospel to see them saved? Me too. Me too. This is what Jesus is doing as He calls these men.

Hold your finger here in Mark and let's go over to John again. We'll visit a couple of places in John. This is John chapter 6. John chapter 6.

And I'll remind you, we read this earlier. Look at verse 37. Here is Jesus explaining His mission. All that the Father gives me will come to me.

[23 : 48] Now He's talking about all of those people who are being chosen and drawn by the Father for salvation in Jesus Christ. We see that that is a truth of Scripture.

All that the Father gives me will come to me. So God has to give these people to Jesus. And the one who comes to me, what will happen? I will certainly not cast him out.

Isn't that beautiful? All that the Father has predestined for salvation, I will receive them. They will not be lost, He says. Verse 38.

I have come down from heaven not to do my own will. Isn't that interesting? But the will of Him who sent me. This is the will of Him who sent me. That of all that He's given me, those people I just mentioned, I won't lose a single one of them.

But I will raise these people up on the last day. Then verse 40 caps it off. This is the will of my Father that everyone who beholds the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and believes in Him will have eternal life and I myself will raise Him up on the last day.

[24 : 56] That's a guarantee. That's a promise. That's a seal that we can stand on. That is the mission of Jesus. Jesus in John chapter 13 as well.

Let me show you what He says here. Again, this is helping us to flesh out more of what Jesus Himself described as His mission. Jesus Christ is initiating the action.

He's on mission. He's doing what God commanded Him to do. And now we see that He is the one standing behind initiating the salvation of souls.

If Jesus doesn't move on you, you won't move to Him. That's just the reality. If you look at John 13 and verse 18.

I do not speak of all of you. Jesus is saying as He speaks to these people about the disciples. I know the ones I have chosen.

[25 : 54] That's what I want you to center in on. I know the ones I have chosen. But it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled. He who eats my bread is lifted up his heel.

Who's He talking about there? Yeah, Judas. I know. I've chosen every single one of you. Even the one I know will betray me. I know who you are.

You didn't sneak in unawares. I'm not deceived by this. Nobody's fooling me. I chose you because this is the will of God. The Scriptures have said that you will betray me in these ways and the Scripture must be fulfilled.

Therefore, I chose you that you might fulfill the Scripture about me. That's our Lord. Then you'll see in John 15 verse 16 a similar idea.

You, He's speaking now to the disciples, You did not choose me but I chose you. And notice what He goes on to say appointed you.

[27 : 00] That you would go and bear fruit. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. And that your fruit would remain so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

You didn't choose me. I chose you. And the point is I'm the one doing the choosing. I'm the one doing the initiating. I'm the one doing all of the work toward bringing you to Myself.

That's a beautiful sentiment because here's what it tells Jeff. Jeff, if God had left you to your own devices you'd still be chasing Jeff. And you wouldn't know any of these people or any of the blessings of God that have come on your life since you've come to Christ.

I'd still be out there chasing a lie, deceived and I'd end up standing before God and being thrown into a devil's hell. And so I go to the Lord and I say, Lord, thank You for pursuing me.

We can say it this way, Jesus Christ is the planner behind the plan. Jesus Christ is the caller behind the call. Now what does this tell us? One of the things it tells us is that we never want to miss Jesus behind the blessing, behind the purpose, behind the trial, behind the suffering, behind the pain.

[28 : 13] There is always this planner behind the plan, this purposer behind the purpose. And we don't want to miss that. Him. Because if we miss Him in life, we miss the point of life.

We don't want that to happen. What are we back to now, friends? We're back to the distractions. We're back to those things that pull our hearts and souls away from being simply devoted to Jesus. I'll say that now. The second thing that He tells us, the second reality, your call to follow is personal. We draw this right out of the text. Look at, He uses the names of these men because He knows these men.

He made them. Jesus made these guys. Your call to follow is personal. Andrew, Simon. Go a little further. And now we've got James and John.

Notice who He didn't call. The text tells us, and nothing is wasted in the Scriptures. Not Zebedee, James and John's dad, and not the hired men.

[29 : 21] Now, can you imagine this scene? They're in the boats and they're after a night's fishing and they're mending the nets. This is what this is, their livelihood. They're mending the nets. They're sitting in there with Dad.

They're joking around and talking about what's going on. And they've got the hired men around them and they're mending and Jesus comes by and says, hey, follow me. And so immediately, Mark said, they get up out of the boat and Zebedee's like, what?

No, they just left. And now they're following the Lord. I mean, this is the grammar here. This is what we're being told. Right. No hesitation.

They didn't go to Zebedee and say, hold on. Wait a minute. Wait a minute, Dad. Listen, we got to go. What? You're just going to, well, what? You guys, I was going to hand this off to you.

You guys are the next me. There was none of that. They go. That's how it is. When Christ saved me, I don't know about you.

[30 : 22] When Christ saved me, it was radical. Now, look, I can't tell you the day. I can't even tell you the week or the month. What I can tell you is the season. I can tell you that as this, and I'll tell you my testimony another time, as this happened to me, I can look back on my life and say, wow, that's the season of my life where Jesus Christ came and saved me.

I was already in church. I thought I was a Christian. I wasn't. But when I did get saved, it was like, wow, I understand the Bible now. I love the Lord.

I want to be with these people. I want to read more of the Bible. God just gave me a hunger for things spiritual, for Him, for Christ. I wanted to know my Lord. Isn't that the way it's supposed to be?

Yeah. You would think that if God comes to live in your life, something radical is going to happen. Remember, we have a planner, we have a plan, and we have those who execute the plan. This is personal. God is sovereign over the lives of men. He knows what He's doing and He's in control of all those details. So this is a privileged invitation to relationship with God through the sacrifice.

[31 : 36] Oh, my cross is... Michael, we've got to get this cross back up on the thing here, man. Usually it hangs right here. This is the wonderful privilege of relationship with God that Jesus paid the price for us to know the Father.

And what that should do for us is nurture humility and gratitude. Not pride, not greed. These are red flags. Anytime you and I are living, putting Jesus off on the margins in the periphery of our lives, red flag.

Anytime we're allowing greed or pride or lust or self to dominate in the way that we're thinking about a relationship or a context or situation or trial in our life, red flag.

Because what that's telling me is that I'm losing a grip on what should humble me and fill me with thanksgiving. And so I need to circle back around before the Lord.

This is personal. Aren't you glad? Aren't you glad that of all the billions of people in the world during your lifetime, He looked out and He said, I see Jeff Messenger. And I'm going to save that man.

[32 : 43] Right, brother? I see Jeff Jackson. He's not just a face in a crowd. Come here, Simon. Come here. Come here, you. Andrew, come here.

James, John, come on. How about this? Your call to follow is purposeful. Notice Jesus in this verse. I will make you. I will make you. The great I Am. I will make you fishers of men. Wow. This is the work of God Himself.

So this is what I've been telling you. Jesus knows who we are and Jesus uses who we are. Jesus uses, please hear my language, Jesus uses who we have been and who we are becoming. He uses past, present, and future. There is nothing that escapes the usefulness of Jesus in making us His disciples and using us to redeem whatever we've lived in our past, to redeem that for His purpose and use in our service to Him.

[33 : 55] Isn't that beautiful? That no matter what you've done in your life, Jesus' forgiveness overcomes it and continues to overcome it so that you remain useful to Him, so that you love Him, and so that you love what He loves or who He loves.

Each other. There's nothing more powerful than this in defining a human being. Once you've come to Christ, why would we ever go back and play in the mud?

But we do. We're tempted to do that, aren't we? Jesus uses us. He comes to us where we are and He brings us where we need to be.

Don't we see that as we read the Gospels? When these men stood up to follow Jesus Christ, did they know all that they needed to know about Jesus and what was awaiting them? No.

Jesus brought them along in a process of learning and growing. I mean, we're looking at Simon here and we're going, yeah, this is the dude that's going to deny Jesus and cuss about it when he does it.

[34 : 59] Just become like an unbeliever in that moment. That's the same man right now that God's bringing him along. Jesus Christ causes us to share in His life.

Boy, don't let that one go by you. Jesus Christ is causing you to share in His life. He is our life. We are those whom He's chosen to follow Him. Fishing for men is His work and He's letting us get in on it.

So sharing His life means sharing in all that is important and precious to Him. This is Jeff denying Jeff and saying, you know what, Lord, I need a complete remake in the way I think about relationships and marriage and life and friendship and work, parenting.

God, please help me understand the priorities and values you place on those things so that I can act wisely in those roles to other people. So just like His first disciples, Jesus teaches you how to follow Him and you're in a process.

[36 : 14] You're a work in progress. And you're learning and you're growing. Then, your call to follow Jesus is pricey. It's pricey.

They immediately left and immediately they left the boat and their father. Twice in this passage, Mark speaks, let me see if that's on. Nope. Alright, I'll come to that one in just a minute.

They immediately left and immediately they left the boat and their father. Two different times. Now what does that tell us? It costs Jesus His life to save your life.

It will cost you your life to share in His and to follow Him. Isn't that what He says? Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. Those who wish to save their life must lose it.

And anybody who tries to save their life in your own way, in your own time, according to what you think is right, you'll end up forfeiting it.

[37 : 15] If you want to save your life, lose it. Because losing your life is a way that you save it. Lose it to Christ. That's what it means. He finds us where we are and brings us where we need to be.

These men then are leaving, listen now, they are leaving one direction and allegiance in life to assume the opposite direction and loyalty in life.

that's repentance. They are moving in this direction for these reasons and as Jesus Christ comes to take over their life, He turns them in a completely different direction.

They're walking away from all that now. They're leaving that behind as they pursue the Lord. That's what it means to, look now, this is, I'm giving you the picture of what these things mean. This is what it means when we say, alright, here's Jeff Jackson unbelieving.

Jeff gets saved. Now, this is Jeff denying self. Denying self. Nope. This is what I do. Nope, nope, nope.

[38 : 19] Nope. Sometimes we even do this. Right? Red flags. Red flags.

We are called to follow Him and it's going to cost. We don't need to mamby-pamby that when we share the gospel with people. Have you ever had somebody say this to you?

Because I have many times. Will I have to quit smoking? Will I have to quit drinking? Most people know that you've got to stop chasing loose women.

I don't think I've ever had that one. I've had them say, I don't think I'm going to stop that, but not, do I have to give that up? Most people know that. You know, they come up with devices.

That they know. This is just not something a religious person does. You know, a nice person doesn't live like this. They ask that question.

[39 : 17] Do I have to give? That's the wrong question, isn't it? Now we're back to what Jesus says. What will you give? Or what will you forfeit?

What's worth your soul? What's worth your soul? That's what Jesus said. What are you willing to hold on to so that you forfeit your soul?

You and I both know that those become non-issues when you come to love Jesus. When you come to love Jesus, you want to lay down anything and everything that isn't pleasing to Him. Anything and everything that turns out to be a terrible testimony on the character of Jesus as you live for Him among watching people.

You don't want anything about the character of Christ to be drug into the mud. And so because you're concerned about His character, you are living uprightly in yours.

And that's the right motivation. This is pricey. It costs. So our call to salvation, this is what Jesus is doing. He's calling.

[40 : 24] That's what it means. Whenever you see called in the Bible as it speaks to the issue of salvation, that's what He's talking about. You being saved or the person calling. Our call to salvation might not involve physically leaving a job or taking on a new career, but it does involve a radical death to self-will.

A radical death to self-will. I don't know how many of you have a testimony that said, you know Jeff, when I got saved and I started learning to live for Jesus, I lost friends or I lost family members or I lost a job or whatever.

Sometimes that does happen. The issue is one of a growing obedience, submission, a wholehearted trust that you learn to grow in in the Lord.

This is why more mature Christians come alongside less mature or babies in Christ, people who are just becoming saved and we put our arms around them and we walk with them because we know they're vulnerable.

We know that they're trying to learn how to be discerning, how to recognize lies, replace with the truth. They're in a vulnerable position. So we come alongside of them and walk with them in this endeavor.

[41 : 41] To learn from Christ, we have to be willing to follow Him whatever the cost and wherever His road takes us. That's what we need to do.

That's how we understand the price that we have to pay to follow the Lord. Let me put this one up here. In order to follow, the disciples had to make a decision.

That is, this was a, their response to Jesus was just that. It was a response of their mind, will, emotions, and affections. In other words, and that's why I put this up here, I want you to see it defined.

It was their full personhood to the call of Jesus on their lives. None of this nonsense. I'm going to make Jesus my Savior right now and somewhere down the road I'll make Him my Lord.

Nonsense. The Bible knows nothing of that. Jesus is both Savior and Lord from the moment you come to know Him. Now, do you know everything you need to know about Him? Nope. Not any more than the disciples did.

[42 : 41] You grow in that relationship. You learn to submit to Him more and more in different areas of your life where you may say at one point as you learn and grow, as you sit under the Word, as you come to Wednesday night and learn and grow, as you read the Bible, you say, you know what?

I didn't even know I needed to repent of that. But now I do. And then you repent of it and you say, alright now, what do I replace that with? what in the Scriptures do I replace that with so that I can be more obedient and please the Lord in how I live and speak?

See? We're constantly doing that. Repent, turn away from, and replace with. That's our life. So all I'm saying is, this was, because Jesus is doing the choosing and initiating, this was a response. This isn't something self-generated. They had to decide, but it was a decision based on responding to what Jesus was doing in their lives. So following meant being dependent on Jesus, whereas they were used to making their own way, in their own business, in their own life.

Now they're answering to Christ. They were slaves of sin, now they're slaves of Jesus. Boy, you want to trade that one for sure. That's a good trade. Where Jesus went, they went.

[44 : 03] What Jesus undertook, they became part of it. What befell Jesus, they shared in. So this is not half-hearted. This is more than a professing of Christ.

It's more than that. It is that. They're professing Jesus Christ, the Christ. That's true. But it was more than that. These men were being transformed into Jesus' image.

And it showed. It was demonstrated in their life. We're encouraged to carefully count the cost of following the Lord. You'll find that, at least in one place, in Luke 14, 28.

I'm not going to turn there for the sake of time. Luke 14, 28. Count the cost of following Jesus before you make the commitment. Because there's a cost. And then this one.

Your call to follow is permanent. Notice the text. They followed Him. In fact, it says in verse 18, immediately they left their nets.

[45 : 04] They left their livelihood to follow Him. In verse 20, immediately He called them and they left their father in the boat and went away to follow Him.

this is permanent. According to John 1, I'm going to go there real quickly. John 1, beginning in verse 35, again, the next day, John, that is, John the Baptist now.

We're not talking about John the Apostle who wrote this book. Again, the next day, John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples and looked at Jesus as He walked and said, Behold, the Lamb of God.

The two disciples heard Him speak and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, What do you seek? And they said to Him, Rabbi, which translated means teacher, where are you staying?

He simply said to them, Come and you will see. So they came and saw where He was staying and they stayed with Him that day for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

[46 : 22] So you see that? Simon is here with John the Baptist and he sees this happening and John the Baptist looks at Jesus and says, Behold, the Lamb of God.

Peter takes all that in. Then he found his own brother Simon and said to him, We found the Messiah or Andrew. Simon Peter's brother found him and said, Hey, we found the Messiah which translated means Christ.

Sorry, so I miss, Andrew saw all of this, told Peter. Peter sees all of this and he's saying, Well, what is this? So he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which is translated Peter. Now here's why I bring this up and this is why this is interesting. This is most likely a situation where Andrew, Peter, James, and John had already met Jesus and already spent some time with him prior to the event that we're reading about in Mark.

A few commentators said it could have been as much as a year prior to what's happening in our passage in Mark. Nevertheless, the point is these men had already met Jesus and already knew some things about him.

[47 : 34] So it's not like Jesus was just walking along the beach of the shore of the Sea of Galilee one day and looked out and saw these guys had no idea who they were. They had no idea who he was and he just said, Hey, you come follow me and they just got up and left.

They already knew about Jesus. They already knew some facts about him and some things that were going on. But this in Mark, is the permanent call. This is the one where he said, Now it's time. The time is right. Now you're going to come and follow me and be my disciples. Come on guys, let's go. It's time to get busy. And no hesitation in their life. And they followed him.

Jesus sees these men. He extends the permanent call. This is a lifetime. This is discipleship. And it changed their lives forever. They were never the same for having followed him.

It was an all or nothing proposition. There were no excuses. There was no haggling. No going back. So I'll put this up so you can see how I said it here. Jesus drew these men to himself while they were still in sinful unbelief.

[48 : 38] He didn't leave them in their sin. He chose to bring them to himself to forgive them. He chose to redefine them as his servants. I can't tell you how much these men were devout before Christ.

How much they were looking toward Messiah. How much they obeyed the Lord and all that. They were probably good Jews. In the sense good meaning that they were probably men who believed the truth of the Old Testament and tried to follow it as best they could.

All I'm saying here is Jesus saves people then and now in the same way he's always saved them. he finds sinners who are helpless. Isn't that what Romans 5 tells us?

While we were yet helpless sinners Christ died for us. That's right. And that's what he's doing here. He didn't come to these guys and say I'm going to tell you what this is the way it's going to work. For me I want to call you guys to be my disciples. But here's what we're going to do. I want you guys to go to Disciples Seminary for a couple years. Alright so go to we'll just put you in Jewish Disciple Seminary.

[49 : 47] You do that for a little while I'll come find you and then we'll get started. Alright I'm not knocking seminary. I've been three times. It's good. It can be very good if you go to the right one. All I'm simply saying is these guys didn't have to get a spiritual bath before Jesus came to spiritually save them.

He met them where they are. These are rough guys. Can you imagine their hands there? These are hard working men's men doing a hard job. Jesus said come on. I'm not interested in your intellectualism.

I want your heart. I'll teach you how to follow me. Come on. Let's go. Isn't that great? All of us we're all on that playing field. I just love I love preaching that and making that point so that everybody knows come to Christ.

Come to Jesus. Rich, poor, young, old, black, white. It doesn't matter. Come to Jesus. Bring your sin to Him and find what He does with it. Now I've got to say this to you.

Like these men in our unbelief before the Lord Jesus opened our spiritual eyes to His truth and saved us from ourselves we also were living in the deceit and here's the important part of exchanging the truth of God for a lie so that we worshipped and served ourselves rather than God.

[51 : 06] We made an exchange a willing exchange. I'm going to live this lie in deceit instead of the truth of the Lord. You'll find that in Romans 2 and in Romans 1 where we're told that God's written the truth on our hearts.

He's written the truth about who He is in our hearts. We have to suppress that in order to live against it and that's what we do. Now here's what Jesus comes to do in that exchange that we've made of the truth of God for a lie that we follow.

Here's what Jesus does. Jesus changes our exchange. That is powerful now I'm telling you. Jesus changes our exchange. He delivers us from that deceit that's ruling our hearts in unbelief. When we're living in sin as unbelievers we're living a lie because now here's the hard part we are a lie. I'd be doing you a terrible disservice if I tried to make all of this about your behavior. Please listen to what your pastor is saying. We live a lie because we are a lie. We live out of our nature as unbelievers. We live what we are.

[52 : 16] Sin is not limited to what we do. Sin is also who we are sinners. And here's the beautiful part of it. Jesus Christ is the truth.

You are the lie. What does Jesus do? He gives himself as truth in exchange for yourself as a lie. Do you understand what's happening here? You're being reborn. Born again. You're being given new spiritual life. You become a new creature in Christ.

You take on a new spiritual nature in Jesus. And that ought to show, folks. We just can't have people coming here and getting comfortable living like hell out there and coming in here and calling themselves a Christian.

We've got to be careful to say, brother, sister, whoa, whoa, wait a minute now. Wait a minute. Do you love Jesus? Do you love what Jesus loves? Is that increasing in your life?

[53 : 17] Please don't miss Christ. We don't want to sit in here and make nice with everybody only to find out when they get to heaven that Jesus says, I never knew you. Depart from me. We don't want that.

And so we take this seriously. Jesus gives us Himself. A plan did not die on the cross. A person did. We get the person, not the plan.

I don't lead you to Christ by saying, here's the plan, believe in the plan. I lead you to Christ by saying, here's the person, believe in the person. And He will be Lord and Christ to you.

He will personally forgive you and come to live in you and give you new life and walk with you and love you and hold you dear to Himself and never let anything rob you of that eternal salvation that He gives to you freely in His name.

In that spiritual exchange, you are made alive in Him forever. forever. So let me say these things.

We are pursued by Jesus and we are pursued by Jesus so that we can have a relationship with Him as our Lord and Savior.

[54 : 32] You notice that I'm not up here preaching a religion to you. I am not up here preaching a denomination to you. I am up here preaching Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to you.

That's who you need. That's who I need. knowing Jesus by faith is the blessing of His truth and grace at work in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus moves us from self-centered to Savior-centered believing and living. Jeff goes from self-centered to Savior-centered in the way that I believe and live.

Jesus ministers to people through people. So I'll give you these three quick ideas. Jesus preaches His gospel of God and continues His ministry of changing lives by working through ordinary people like us.

People He's transformed and is continuing to transform by His undeserved love and favor in your life. That's grace. Undeserved love. That's His grace. Jesus also does this.

[55 : 39] He causes us to abandon what had killed us and deceitfully robbed us of life so that we can share in His life and pursue what is precious to Him.

What do I know? I need Jesus to tell me what's valuable in life. Look at what I was chasing before Him. I don't have a clue. And then finally, look at this.

And while, right here at the bottom, and while we learn to love Him as we walk with Him, we also come to learn what is truly precious in life. We learn to value what is valuable to Him.

And then finally this. Listen. Jesus teaches us to treasure what is worthy of Him. That's the Christian life. We are following Jesus as He teaches us to treasure what is worthy of Him.

If it's not worthy of Jesus, I want nothing to do with it. With my eyes, with my mind, my heart, my soul, my hands, my feet, the money that I make, if it's not worthy of the Lord, then it's not worthy.

[56 : 50] Our lives then serve the purposes of God to include our past, who we were. Our past gets redeemed. Your past is not the Lord of you if you come to Christ.

To include our present, who we are. Jesus is continually working in you. To include our future. He knows who we are becoming. And so our call to follow Jesus is for a lifetime and it's life changing.

So look, folks, let's not miss the true treasure of this life. Let's not allow ourselves to be distracted and discouraged and deceived from a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ as the precious person in our lives.

Let's follow Jesus, but let's do it together. Let's encourage one another in practical, loving, disciplined ways to grow up and become more like our Lord Jesus.

Look, folks, as Grace Church members, let's pledge together anew and afresh. We're going to make a concerted effort this year in the grace of Jesus Christ to encourage one another in growing up to be more like Jesus so that if we miss anything else in church life, we won't miss that one.

[58 : 03] We have got to refine ourselves in this effort to say, God, by your grace and love, help me to come to this place. Help me to be involved in the lives of these people in a way where you use me to help them become more like Jesus.

Let that be my heartbeat. Boy, what God will do with us and through us, what he's already done with us and through us in that regard.

Will you join me in prayer as we honor the Lord in this way? Father, we thank you so much for your faithfulness to us as our King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I thank you for the visitors here, new faces that I see in our congregation. I know that you brought them here for a purpose and you wanted them to hear this message, sing these songs and be a part of who we are, at least for this day.

And so I thank you, God, for their souls and I pray for them. Not knowing them, I pray for them. that they will learn to follow you in faithfulness, to love you with all of their heart, mind, soul and strength and to love their neighbor as themselves.

[59 : 10] And for those of us here at Grace who will continue on as members of this local assembly, help us to be faithful to your heart and to the cross, to the gospel for the sake of Jesus because we love you, we want to serve you and we praise you and have thanksgiving in our heart because you first loved us.

help us to follow faithfully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.