INTRODUCTION:

Walking Like Jesus



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By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. – 1 John 2:5–6



When I was young, my favorite movie was Star Wars. I enjoyed the epic battle scenes, the great special effects, the many interesting and amusing characters, and the classic story of good defeating evil. But most of all, I loved Luke Skywalker. I loved that this seemingly unimportant young man from a rather unknown planet, with some training and a lot of luck, saves the entire galaxy from the worst of evils.

I owned all the movies as well as many toys and books. I even had Star Wars bed sheets and wallpaper. I watched the movies so many times that I knew the entire script word for word – especially everything Luke said or did. One of my favorite activities was to dress like Luke Skywalker and to force my younger sister to dress as Princess Leia; we would run around the house ridding it of the dark side. I sought to walk like Luke, talk like Luke, and think like Luke.

The truth is, whether we realize it or not, we all become like the people we fix our eyes upon.

John reminds us that "whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." We can only begin to live like Jesus as we come to Him, listening to Him and looking to Him (Hebrews 12:2). Practically, this means learning all that Jesus said and did, making our days full of activities that remind us of Him, and seeking to imitate Him more and more in compassion, righteousness, grace, and holiness.

This is discipleship at its very core: keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus and attaching our lives to Him so that we begin to walk like Him. This is the goal of the Christian faith and the path by which we fully experience God's salvation.

This is not something we are capable of doing on our own, nor is it a way of earning God's love. It can only happen through the grace of God, as we abide in Jesus and are empowered by the Spirit, in response to the love He has already given and the work He has already accomplished. From beginning to end, He is the power behind our growing into the likeness of His Son (2 Corinthians 3:18). But this does not mean there is nothing for us to do. We are called to come to Him and experience His grace, to listen to His word and respond, and to seek His help together with the community of believers. We are not saved by discipleship, but for discipleship.

Unfortunately, we often make Christianity too small of a thing. We reduce it to a teaching, a philosophy, or a set of truths. And so we make the goal of our faith simply the transfer of right information. While our faith is certainly concerned with truth, it is also about a radically new way of living and a complete change of identity.

This transformation is so complete that Jesus calls us to die to ourselves and live for Him (Mark 8:34–35). Paul describes it as putting off our old self and clothing ourselves with a new identity and new way of life (Colossians 3:5–14). James warns us that when our faith does not shape how we live, but remains only a statement of belief, it is a dead faith (James 2:14–26).

Discipleship, then, is the process of learning each day to follow Him as we gaze upon Him and learn from Him. It is not only for leaders or especially committed Christians – it is essential for everyone who would follow Jesus.

This is what we need most of all, because only Jesus' way of life leads to abundant life (John 10:10). It is also what the world needs from us. As Dallas Willard writes:

> *The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.*[1]

It was fun as a child to pretend to be Luke. But as I have grown older, spent time getting to know Christ, and sought to fix my eyes upon Him, I have learned that there is truly no better life. Becoming a student of Jesus leads to abundant life – it leads to purpose, hope, and joy. Nothing else in this world can compare. I have come to believe that the greatest pursuit in our lives is to know Jesus as we follow in His footsteps.

A WORD ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book grew out of years of working with university students in the United States, Bulgaria, and across Europe. It began as a simple resource in Bulgaria, after I invited a group of students to meet in pairs for discipleship and they told me they did not know what to do when they met.[2] After watching how it was used – and noticing what was missing – I developed it into the book you have now.

Following Christ is a journey and an adventure. It is a journey filled with moments of great joy and awe as we continue to get to know Him and His ways. But following Him is also countercultural. It is neither popular nor easy. On the whole, our peers, professors, and employers will not encourage us to live a life of true discipleship. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves following the masses rather than Jesus. He is leading us in a radically different direction than the ways of the world.

This book was written to help us as we seek to become disciples of Jesus. It is especially written with university students and young adults in mind, helping us consider what it means to walk like Christ in this season of life. At the same time, anyone who wants to follow Jesus more closely is welcome to walk through it. My hope is that it will encourage you to continue following Him throughout your life.

You may not realize it now, but the patterns and habits you form during these years will have a lasting influence on how you live. For this reason, it is worth taking time to think

deeply about the questions of discipleship raised in this book – and how you will choose to follow Jesus each day.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each chapter of this book includes a Bible study, an essay to discuss, a memory verse, and activities designed to help you put into practice what you are learning. My prayer is that this study will be more than an intellectual exercise, but that it will help you learn to live and walk more like Jesus as you take practical steps in discipleship.

The material is designed to be used in small groups with one or two other believers. Jesus often called and sent out His disciples in small groups, and there is a natural assumption that we will follow Him in the context of community. With a small group of committed friends or discipleship partners (see Appendix 1), you can pray for one another, encourage one another to take real steps of faith, and share how God is at work in your lives.

Three key practices will help you learn and grow as you use this book:

Look deeply into Scripture. As much as it depends on you, come to each passage open-minded and ready to learn. Do the hard work of asking the passage good questions and seeking God's word for you. Keep your heart soft to Jesus and to what He is saying to you.

Be honest and vulnerable with your discipleship partners. Use this opportunity to be real with one another. Share your real joys and struggles. Being honest and vulnerable is a risk, but it is well worth it. We gain real friendship and help on our journey of faith only as we are honest with one another.

Choose to act. These studies will accomplish little if you do not act on what you are learning. Make it a priority to discuss how you will practically and purposefully respond to each lesson – and then do it! Better yet, when possible, do it together! Be bold in your application and experience the abundant life that Jesus has for you as you follow Him.

I have found it helpful when everyone comes prepared by studying the passage, reading the essay, and thinking through the questions before meeting together. Use the margins or a journal to note what stands out, what challenges you, and what you would like to discuss further.

The goal of these studies is not simply to learn, but to be transformed. For this reason, there is no need to rush. It is possible to work through one chapter a week, which fits well within a university semester. However, I have observed that most people find it helpful to take one chapter a month. This allows time to prepare, to meet and discuss what you are learning, and then to apply and practice the exercises before moving on. Some groups have even met two or three times for the longer or more challenging chapters.

My prayer is that this book will encourage you to follow Jesus more closely and that you will experience the life and joy that are found in walking with Him.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 JOHN 2:5–6

By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Take time to read "Appendix 3: Memorizing Scripture," where you will find helpful ideas for how and why we memorize God's word. As discipleship partners, seek to learn these words together and allow them to take root in your lives.

- What do you understand from these words? What might it mean today to walk as Jesus walked?
- What has been your experience in learning to walk like Jesus? In what ways are you growing? What might help you continue to grow in this?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

DISCIPLESHIP PARTNERS

Take time to read "Appendix 1: Discipleship Partners," and then discuss together:

- What do you understand about discipleship partners?
- Have you had relationships like this before? What were your experiences, and what did you learn?
- What are your hopes and expectations for your time together as you read this book?

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

As you begin meeting together, it can be helpful to spend time getting to know one another more personally. Share about your journey of faith and the experiences that have shaped you.

You may find it helpful to map out some of the key moments in your life. Consider reflecting on the following:

Past

- Significant events in your life (both positive and difficult)
- The people who have shaped you
- When and how you became a follower of Jesus

Present

- Activities and relationships that are most significant to you
- Areas of life that are bringing joy or that you are finding difficult

Future

- Two or three hopes or goals for the future
- Two or three current prayer requests

PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Take time to pray for one another. Ask God to help you grow into people who walk like Jesus, and to use your relationship as discipleship partners to help one another grow as His disciples.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your faithfulness in our lives and for all that You have done in us. We are grateful that You have shown us the way to abundant life. We pray that Your Spirit would fill us, empower us, and guide us so that we might live today as Jesus did. We pray this for Your glory. AMEN.

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[1] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (HarperCollins, 2009), xv.

[2] The first draft built on material from the Bible and Life conference of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.