

INTRODUCTION

Understanding faith requires us to follow Jesus and his new covenant command. In this section we will explore questions like, “What does it mean to follow Jesus?” and “What does God use to grow my faith?” Faith isn’t just a religious concept—and God has called us to follow him by faith. But what does this actually mean, and how do we continue to grow our faith and trust in him?

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

In **Matthew 28**, Matthew records what Christians call “The Great Commission,” in which Jesus gathered his disciples, giving them final instructions before he returned to the Father. It helps to imagine this moment on that hill in Galilee. You see, for several years, Matthew and the other disciples had literally followed Jesus throughout that same countryside, learning from the way he prayed, taught, and cared for others. They had enjoyed the benefit of his physical presence and power, and they understood that their faith was built on a willing trust in him. Dallas Willard says it this way;

*When Jesus walked among humankind there was a certain simplicity to being a disciple. Primarily it meant to go with him, in an attitude of study, obedience, and imitation ... One knew what to do and what it would cost....Though costly, discipleship had a very clear, straightforward meaning. The mechanics are not the same today. We cannot literally be with him in the same way as his first disciples could. But the priorities and intentions—the heart or inner attitudes—of disciples are forever the same... The disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like him. (Dallas Willard in *The Spirit of The Disciplines*, Harper & Row 1988)*

These men had seen Jesus crucified, buried, and resurrected. And then they had a short time with him again before he left the earth to return to the Father. Surely they clung to his final instructions as they wrestled with how to follow him going forward. We can cling to his words as well.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20)

Our task as Christians today is much the same as it was when Jesus’ disciples left that hill

INTRODUCTION

and began to follow him in a new way. We can devote ourselves to being like Jesus in the ways that we trust his power and authority, love those around us, share the good news of Christ, and grow in our relationship with him.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What is one thing you have been taught or exposed to about Christianity that doesn't reflect the version of Christianity that Jesus' followers describe in the New Testament?
2. If you had the opportunity to physically follow Jesus for a time (like his disciples did), what would you hope to learn from him or ask him? Is it possible that those questions might be addressed in a study of his life as presented in the Gospels?
3. Understanding faith requires us to follow him first. We understand more as we follow more closely. Are there any doubts, questions, or hesitations you feel right now as you think about growing in your faith? What is the most helpful way for you to address those thoughts as you pursue a relationship with Jesus?

APPLY IT

Willard says that, *"The disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like him."* Make a list of 10 qualities, values, practices, or behaviors of Jesus that you want to emulate. If you're stuck, go back to the book of Matthew and study some of the stories that Matthew tells about walking with Jesus.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION (IF DESIRED)

1. Jesus said that all authority on heaven and earth was his. How have you seen this concept of authority misconstrued in the church? What might change in the church or in the lives of Christians if we acted like we knew that all authority belongs to Jesus?
2. As you look around at modern culture, what influences of Jesus' teaching and way of living do you see? Do you think that society recognizes those influences as Christian? Why or why not?