

A CALL TO DIE. A CALL TO LIVE.

FOLLOW ME



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PLATT

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INTRODUCTION

“Follow Me.” Jesus spoke those words two thousand years ago to a group of fisherman, and they answered. They followed, and they changed the world. Today, Jesus is still speaking those words to us. Will we answer? Will we follow?

This call to follow Christ is inevitably a call to die. That’s been clear since the beginning of Christianity. In the footsteps of Jesus, the first disciples found a path worth giving their lives to tread. Two thousand years later, I wonder how far we’ve wandered from that path.

Somewhere along the way, amid varying cultural tides and popular church trends, it seems we’ve minimized Jesus’ summons to total abandonment. Churches are filled with supposed Christians who seem content to have a casual association with Jesus Christ and to give nominal adherence to Christianity. Scores of men, women, and children have been told that becoming a follower of Jesus simply involves believing certain truths or saying certain words.

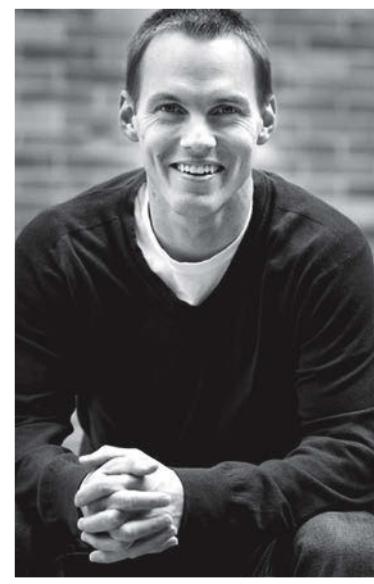
This is not true. The call to follow Jesus is not simply an invitation to pray a prayer; it’s a summons to lose your life.

That’s why I’ve written this study. In a previous book, *Radical*, I sought to expose values and ideas that are common in our culture (and in the church) yet antithetical to the gospel. My aim was to consider the thoughts and things of this world that we must let go of in order to follow Jesus.

The purpose of this study, then, is to take the next step. I want to move from what we let go of to Who we hold on to. I want to explore not only the gravity of what we must forsake in this world, but also the greatness of the One whom we follow in this world—for there is indescribable joy to be found, deep satisfaction to be felt, and an eternal purpose to be fulfilled in dying to ourselves and living in Him.

Are you ready to answer the call?

THE AUTHOR



David Platt is the lead pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. He is also the author of *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Multnomah, 2010) and *Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God* (Multnomah, 2011). A well-known expositor, Platt holds three advanced degrees, including a doctorate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Platt's first love in ministry is spreading the gospel by making disciples. "I believe that God has uniquely created every one of his people to impact the world," he says. "God is in the business of blessing His people so that His ways and His salvation might be made known among all peoples." To this end Platt has traveled throughout the United States and around the world, teaching the Bible and training church leaders.

GETTING STARTED

BEFORE THE SESSION

- Set up DVD player and cue DVD
- Provide: Follow Me student books, Bibles, and pens for each student

THE SESSION

Each session is divided into the following sections:

- **Start (5-10 minutes)**

This section contains a brief summary of what the students will be discussing in each session. Present this material by summarizing the content, reading it aloud or selecting a student to read it aloud, or directing students to read it silently. Briefly discuss the introductory content. Don't linger too long over any questions that arise at this point; the goal is simply to get conversation started.

- **Watch (10-15 minutes)**

Show the video for the session. (The videos average 14 minutes in length, including a two minute introduction.) Instruct students to follow along and fill in the viewer guide section of their student book. The viewer guide will help students key in on the core concepts in the video. After watching the video, lead students in a brief discussion of what they heard. Many of these points will be elaborated on in the next section.

- **Respond (35-40 minutes)**

Follow the directives in the leader guide, encouraging group participation and dialogue. The questions are designed to foster participation by all students. Many questions are subjective in nature, seeking feedback based on everyone's life and experiences.

This section includes paragraphs of content from the student book. Use this content to help explain the questions or enhance your discussion.

- **Summarize (5 minutes)**

This section will include a closing application or challenge, an encouragement for the next session, and a prayer suggestion.

AFTER THE SESSION

Encourage students to continue their study during the week by using the devotions in the REFLECT and PREPARE sections of the student book. The first devotion will point them back to the truths they learned in the group time, while the second will prepare them for the next session. Email students later in the week to follow up and answer any questions they may have about the assignment, as well as to encourage them to read the introduction to the upcoming session before the next meeting.

THE PERSONAL DISCIPLE-MAKING PLAN

The activities in the ENGAGE section of each session will introduce aspects of the Personal Disciple-Making Plan. The plan will be discussed at length in the optional seventh session. If you don't choose to use the optional session, students can complete the material as a personal study.

• WATCH (15 MIN.)

Play the session 2 video and instruct their student book.

What three truths are found in as branches?

1. As a disciple of Christ, you are
As His disciple, you remain in Him

Note the sections of the leader guide bordered on the left with a gray bar. This content is from the student book.

SESSION 1

THE CALL

MAIN POINT: Students will clearly understand what it means to follow Jesus.

• START (5 – 10 MIN.)

Welcome students and make sure everyone has a student book. Briefly discuss the content of the following introduction to the session, “The Call.”

THE CALL

Four fishermen stood by a sea in the first century when Jesus approached them. “Follow Me,” He said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” With these words, Jesus beckoned these men to leave behind their professions, possessions, dreams, ambitions, family, friends, safety, and security. He bid them to abandon everything. “If anyone is going to follow Me, he must deny himself,” Jesus would say repeatedly.

In a world where everything revolves around self—protect yourself, promote yourself, preserve yourself, take care of yourself—Jesus said, “Slay yourself.” And that’s exactly what would happen. According to Scripture and tradition, these four fishermen paid a steep price for following Jesus. Peter was hung upside down on a cross, Andrew was crucified in Greece, James was beheaded, and John was exiled. Yet they believed it was worth the cost. In Jesus, these men discovered a love that surpassed comprehension, a satisfaction that superseded circumstances, and a purpose that transcended every other possible pursuit in this world. They eagerly, willingly, and gladly lost their lives in order to know, follow, and proclaim Him. In the footsteps of Jesus, these first disciples found a path worth giving their lives to tread.

Two thousand years later, how far from this path have we wandered? Somewhere along the way, amid varying cultural tides and popular church trends, it seems that we have minimized Jesus’ summons to total abandonment. Churches are filled with supposed Christians who seem content to have a casual association with Christ and seem content to give nominal adherence to Christianity. Scores of men, women, and children have been told that becoming a follower of Jesus simply involves believing certain truths or saying certain words. But this is not true. Disciples like Peter, Andrew, James, and John show us that the call to follow Jesus is not simply an invitation to pray a prayer; it’s a summons to lose your life. There is more to Jesus than the routine religion we are tempted to settle for at every turn, and experiencing biblical discipleship begins with answering the call.

Invite students to share what it meant for these four men to follow Christ. What did they leave behind? What compelled them to go? Don’t linger too long over any questions that come up at this point; the goal is simply to get conversation started.

•• WATCH (15 MIN.)

Play the session 1 video and instruct students to follow along with the DVD viewer guide in their student book.

When we come to Matthew 4:19, we see Jesus saying to four fishermen, “Follow Me.”

Who is the “Me” that’s going to be followed here?

Jesus is worthy of far more than church attendance and casual association.

He is worthy of total abandonment and supreme adoration.

What does the word “Follow” mean?

To live with radical abandonment for His glory.

You become a follower of Jesus, and you lose your life as you know it.

We live for one thing: to honor the King.

To follow Him is to live with urgent obedience to His mission.

Every follower of Jesus is a fisher of men.

Every disciple is a disciple-maker.

Briefly discuss the key points of the video. Can we be followers of Christ and still look like the rest of the world? Why not? How do we know whether we are truly following Him?

•• RESPOND (35 – 40 MIN.)

Lead students through this portion of the study, encouraging group participation and dialogue. Use the content before and after the questions to enhance discussion. Some of the questions will be personal in nature and will challenge students’ understanding of what it means to follow Christ. Allow students to wrestle with these questions while providing an atmosphere for healthy discussion.

When it comes to answering Jesus’ call to follow Him, we discover that what He’s really asking is for us to give up everything—literally, life as we know it—and die to ourselves. As we read about the first disciples of Jesus, it becomes abundantly clear that they were willing to walk away from everything that was familiar and natural to them.

Call on a student to read aloud Matthew 4:18-22.

Discuss responses to the following questions in the student book:

What was Jesus’ specific statement to Peter, Andrew, James and John? How did they respond?

As students complete the following activity in the student book, list answers on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Use the examples given to get started.

In the column on the left, make a list of the things the fishermen left behind according to Matthew 4:18-22. In the column on the right, list what each thing represented.

Left Behind

Boats
Nets/Fishing/Job
Family

What It Represented

Profession/livelihood
Livelihood/money/security
Love/safety/security

Point out that the disciples left behind not only their comfort, but careers, possessions, families, friends, safety, sin, and ultimately their very lives. When they decided to follow Jesus, life as they knew it was never the same again.

What's changed in the 2000 years since Christ called those first disciples? Does Jesus still call us to leave everything behind and follow Him? Think about Christians today. Is it possible that we've begun to settle for routine religion rather than really living for Christ?

Discuss responses to the following questions in the student book:

What excuses do Christians today often make that keep us from leaving everything behind as we answer Christ's call?

List people you know who have committed their lives to following Jesus. What have they left behind?

Are you willing to do the same? Why or why not?

When we really begin to look at what Jesus meant when He said, "Follow Me," we will discover far more pleasure to be experienced in Him, indescribably greater power to be realized with Him, and a much higher purpose to be accomplished for Him than anything else this world has to offer. And as a result, we will all—every single Christian—eagerly, willingly, and gladly lose our lives to know and proclaim Christ, for this is simply what it means to follow Him.

HOW DO YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Think about that question, "How do you become a Christian?" What comes to mind when you think about responding to Jesus' invitation to follow Him? How would you tell someone to begin following Jesus? Is it really as simple as walking an aisle and praying a prayer?

Call on a student to read aloud Matthew 4:18-22 again, then discuss responses to the following question:

Why do you think Jesus called Peter and Andrew to follow Him rather than just agree with certain truths about Him?

Sadly, today we have subtly and deceptively minimized what it means to follow Jesus. We have replaced challenging words like, “Leave everything and follow Me,” with trite phrases like:

- Ask Jesus *into your heart*.
- Invite Christ *into your life*.
- Pray this prayer after me, and you will be saved.

Should it alarm us that the Bible nowhere mentions such a prayer? Should it concern us that nowhere in Scripture is anyone ever told to ask Jesus into their heart or invite Christ into their life?

Discuss responses to the following questions in the student book:

How can these simple phrases lead to a misunderstanding of following Jesus?

Is it possible to profess Christ without knowing Christ? Explain.

Call on a student to read aloud Matthew 7:21-23, then discuss questions to the questions that follow in the student book:

According to this passage, who will enter the kingdom of heaven?

Why will Jesus say to some, “Depart from Me”?

These are truly difficult and challenging words from Jesus. There will be many who have believed they were followers of Jesus that will stand face-to-face with Him only to be told that they do not really know Him. Because of this, we should be very concerned about what the Bible does say about following Jesus.

RENOUNCE YOURSELF

Discuss what it means to repent. According to the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, repentance “occurs when a radical turning to God takes place, an experience in which God is recognized as the most important fact of one’s existence.” Is repentance the same as regret over the realization that you’ve done something wrong? Why or why not?

In Matthew 4:17 Jesus begins His ministry on earth proclaiming, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!” The word “repent” means to confess your sins and turn from them. Repentance is a rich biblical term that signifies an elemental transformation in someone’s mind, heart, and life.

When people repent, they turn from walking in one direction to running in the opposite direction. From that point forward, they think differently, believe differently, feel differently, love differently, and live differently.

Discuss responses to the following questions in the student book:

Have you chosen to follow Jesus? How did that journey begin for you?

In what ways have you begun to think differently, believe differently, feel differently, love differently, and live differently?

As students complete the following activity in the student book, list answers on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Use the examples given to get started.

Write one response in each of the following categories below (examples provided):

My life before repenting

- Thinking: How can I help myself?
Believing: I believe in my own abilities.
Feeling: My feelings drive my actions.
Loving: I love myself.
Living: I live for self and success.

My life after repenting

- How can I help others?
I believe in God's ability.
Jesus determines my feelings
I love God and others first.
I live for God and His glory

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN?

What was special about Peter, Andrew, James, and John that warranted Jesus inviting them to follow Him? Point out that Jesus didn't call these disciples because of who they were, but in spite of who they were. This same story is shared by every man and woman who has followed Jesus since that day in Matthew 4.

"How do you know that you are a Christian?" Or, "How do you know that you are saved from your sin?" The most common replies to these questions from professing Christians are, "Because I decided to trust in Jesus," or "Because I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart many years ago," or even "Because I have given my life to Jesus." Such responses are not wrong, and I assure you my aim is not to be the word police, but I do want to offer what I hope is a healthy reminder that you and I are not saved from our sin primarily because we decided to do something however many years ago. Instead, we are saved from our sin ultimately because Jesus decided to do something two thousand years ago.

Lead the group through the following material carefully. These are difficult truths and students may need time to grasp the content.

But surely the searching love of God must be believed and received. God is not the only one working in salvation, is He? A man or woman must choose to accept or reject the mercy of God in Christ, right? Absolutely. The mystery of God's mercy in no way negates the nature of man's responsibility. But the only way we can seek Christ in our sinfulness is because Christ first sought us.

Discuss responses to the following questions in the student book:

Why is it important to recognize that Jesus initiates our salvation, and not us? What is our responsibility regarding salvation?

How do you know that you are a Christian, saved from your sin?

• SUMMARIZE: (5 MIN.)

Direct students to the pull-quote at the end of this section in the student book. How does this statement summarize what we've studied today? Are you ready to answer Jesus' call to follow Him no matter what the cost?

When we are gladly willing to lose our lives to know and proclaim Christ we have answered the call to follow Jesus.

Encourage students to follow up this session and prepare for next week's study in the coming week by completing the devotions on the REFLECT and PREPARE pages of the student book, as well as the ENGAGE discipleship activity.

Conclude, praying as a group that God will make clear what it truly means to be a Christian and that He will lead students to decide to let go of life as they know it and follow Him.