

FOLLOWING JESUS

by Newman Hall

WHAT IS MEANT BY FOLLOWING JESUS?

Following Jesus resembles coming to Jesus, just as a long journey resembles the first stage of it. The two are similar, for every act of following is a fresh coming. They also coexist, for all who truly come, follow. Yet they can be distinguished in our minds, just as following a guide can be thought of as something more than first applying to him. When the tract of country through which we travel is difficult, dangerous, and unknown, it is essential that we secure the services of a competent person to show us the road and assist us in it. We put confidence in him and act on his instructions. We keep our eye on him, watch his steps, and tread where he treads. We do not venture from the path he takes, nor lag behind so as to lose sight of him; but we do our best to keep near him, and willingly rid ourselves of any unnecessary luggage rather than be left behind.

We have lost our way in a world of sin. There is a road through it to a world of perfect holiness and joy; but we cannot find this road, nor keep it when found, without a guide. God Himself undertakes to be our leader. In the Bible, loving and obeying Him is spoken of as following Him. Caleb and Joshua are commended because they “wholly followed the Lord.” We are told that David “followed God with all his heart”; and Elijah appealed to the Israelites, saying, “If the Lord be God, follow Him.” When Jesus called His chosen disciples, He said, “Follow Me,” and the sons of Zebedee left their nets, and Matthew rose up from the receipt of custom. They not only went to Him, but remained with Him. Their conduct while He was visibly on the earth was an emblem of what the disciples of Christ should do always after a spiritual manner. As the sinner earnestly seeking salvation is said to “come to Jesus,” in like manner the afterlife of those who are truly converted is spoken of as “following Jesus.” The disciples, grateful for the benefits they had received, delighting in His company, and conscious of their continued need of His help, followed Him bodily, journeying when He journeyed, rested when He rested, listened to His teachings, and rendered Him any service He might require. Just so they who have come to Him for salvation continue to trust in Him, and out of love to Him keep near Him in their thoughts, study His Word, imitate His example, and obey His commands. This is what is meant by the exhortation, “Follow Jesus.”

WE MUST FOLLOW JESUS, AS WELL AS COME TO HIM, IN ORDER TO BE SAVED.

There are some people who fancy they have come to Jesus and are Christians, who nevertheless plainly show that they do not follow Him. They think they are converted because they remember a time when their religious feelings were much excited. A sermon, or sickness, or the death of a friend, aroused them to pray for mercy. They soon felt comforted in the hope of pardon, made a public profession by coming to the Lord’s Supper, and then gradually settled down into their former state of indifference. They are, perhaps, now attentive to the outward duties of religion; but they have no more real love to God, earnestness in prayer, striving against sin, or diligent endeavor to glorify Christ, than before. Their only evidence of being Christians is an act of memory; not what they now are, but what they think they once experienced. A very common notion prevails that salvation means nothing more than obtaining pardon, finding peace, and getting to heaven. It is much more. It is deliverance from sin itself, an increasing conformity to God, and habitual enjoyment of communion with Him. Salvation is not secured once for

all, after which nothing remains to be done, by undergoing a certain process called conversion, any more than by submitting to a certain ceremony called baptism. We do not get to heaven as we travel by railway, having only to seat ourselves in the train, which then whirls us along without any further effort of our own. It is rather like a journey on foot which requires continued exertion.

Who would dream that he had walked from London to Edinburgh if he stopped at the end of the first mile? Or that he had climbed a mountain by merely standing at its base with one foot only on its craggy side? When Christ says, "Come unto Me," He is not standing still, but leading sinners up to God. If, then, we go to Him, but refuse to go forward with Him, we are left behind. True conversion is the first link, but not the chain; the title page, but not the book; without the sequel it is worthless, ridiculous. Salvation involves a constant reliance on Christ, and a patient continuance in well-doing. We must keep near Him as He leads His people onward to purity and bliss. We must follow Him, as well as come to Him; and we may be sure we have not truly come to Him, unless we do truly follow Him. We come to Him for salvation; but salvation is following Jesus! They are two names for the same thing, and cannot be separated. If we do not follow Jesus, we are not disciples of Jesus, we are not saved. He said: "If any man serve Me, let him FOLLOW ME." "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and FOLLOW ME." "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they FOLLOW ME." "If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed."

IMPELLED BY LOVE, FOLLOW JESUS

The followers of Plato, Aristotle, or Bacon, are not supposed to be influenced by any personal attachment to those philosophers. But the followers of Jesus are not merely admirers of His teaching, but lovers of Himself. Christianity is not a creed, but a devotion; not a mere approval of a theology, but intense affection for Christ. The assent of the intellect may suffice for the adoption of an intellectual system; but much more is required to secure a persevering course of sacrifice and toil. There must be heart impulses, as well as logical convictions. The gospel may be theoretically understood, defended, applauded, and yet fail of curbing our unholy propensities. The path by which Jesus leads may evidently be that of wisdom, yet without love to the Guide we shall be unwilling to encounter its toils. It was to secure this attachment that the Son of God became incarnate. His life among men, His toils, sufferings, and death, are calculated to secure that love which is the only adequate counteraction to the power of sin. He still exists. He still, in spirit, is among us. He is still what He was, and equally deserves our warmest affection. Unless in answer to the vital question, "Do you love Me?" we can reply, "You know all things, You know that I love You," we shall be satisfied with viewing through the eyeglass of the intellect the road by which His people travel but we shall ourselves refuse to walk in it farther than we can go without inconvenience. Love alone will prompt us to climb its rugged precipices, and wade its deep torrents; to surmount its toils, endure its privations, and conquer the many foes by whom its whole course is infested. Multitudes turn back because, though admiring Christianity, they do not love Christ, and therefore have not a sufficient motive for following Him in rough and dangerous places. The motto on the banner of these pilgrims who do press forward, is, "The love of Christ constrains us." This is the motive of all true obedience: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Among the English troops embarking for the East, a soldier's wife was detected clothed in military uniform. It was love that urged her to accompany her husband in all the perils and privations of the war. So the soul, wedded to Christ in holy affection, is prepared to follow Him "wherever He goes."

BY THE AID OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, LOVE AND FOLLOW JESUS

If I cannot follow Jesus unless I first love Him, how can this powerful principle, this energy of Divine love, be produced and maintained in my heart? The apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Spirit, tells us that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us.” Salvation is a work done in us as well as for us. When we come to Jesus, He not only pardons our sins, but puts into our hearts His Holy Spirit, who kindly works within us to subdue our corruptions, by filling us with love to God. We never do a holy act, or think a good thought, but by the aid of the Holy Spirit. When we pray, “the Spirit helps our infirmities.” It is He by whom “we are sealed unto the day of redemption.” He resides in believers as an ever-present divinity in a holy, consecrated shrine, which He hallows and purifies, and where He is ever uttering oracular instructions, encouragements, and warnings. “What, know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” We are therefore exhorted not to defile that temple by any act displeasing to the indwelling Spirit. “Quench not the Spirit.” He keeps alive the flame of divine love in the heart, which would otherwise soon die out. He feeds it with fresh fuel; He pours oil on it to counteract Satan’s efforts to extinguish it. He is always fanning the heavenly flame, that it may give more heat and light, that we may increase in love and holiness. Quench it not by sin, by vanity, by neglect of prayer, by disobedience to the promptings of holy desire. “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.” He is a tender, loving Friend, anxious to do us good. He strives daily within us to increase our love to Jesus, knowing that thus alone shall we be prompted to follow Him. Let us not grieve this divine friend by opposing His kind efforts, by neglecting His considerate counsels. When He leads us nearer to Christ, let us never hold back reluctantly. When He whispers that any act is sinful, or at least dangerous, and likely to hinder us in following Jesus, let us at once abstain from it. We grieve Him if we do not value and rely on Him. Let us, then, earnestly implore His assistance in resisting all that is evil, and in practicing all that is good. Especially let us daily implore Him to fill our hearts with the love of Christ.

“O You to whom all desires are known, cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love You. O Holy Spirit of God, my Counselor, my Sanctifier, my Comforter, my kind, my wise, my powerful Friend, make my heart more and more Your temple. Sanctify it by Your presence, and drive out of it all sin. Make the holy flame of love to Jesus burn brighter and brighter, until I glow with its heat and am radiant with its light. Take of the things of Jesus and show them unto me. Reveal to me more and more His beauty. Show to me more and more how much I owe Him. Fill me with admiration and gratitude towards Him until love to Him is the law of my being, urging me daily to follow Him more and more closely, and enabling me to say, ‘The love of Christ constrains me to live not to myself, but to Him that died for me and rose again.’”

BY CONSTANT RELIANCE ON HIM, LOVE AND FOLLOW JESUS

Personal religion has two aspects, dependence and obedience. We rely on God and we glorify Him; we come to Him for all things, and we render back the fruits of His own gifts. We follow Jesus by keeping in constant exercise both these duties. If we would love Jesus in order to follow Him, we must renew every day the act of coming to Him. We have fresh sins every day to be forgiven; fresh temptations every day to be overcome. We need constantly to have our hearts purified, the work of the Spirit of Christ within us carried forward. We need an ever renewed assurance of our pardon, our adoption, our complete salvation. We can only obtain this by coming again and again to Christ. Cherishing an increasing conviction of our

own utter worthlessness, let us daily bring our heavy burden of sin to Jesus; let us daily seek to be afresh sprinkled with His atoning blood; let us daily present our prayers to Him as the great High Priest by whom alone they are rendered acceptable with God. Thus will He, who in Himself is “altogether lovely,” be constantly before our minds, stirring up our admiration; while the new benefits unceasingly received from Him will feed the flame of gratitude.

When Bartimeus was restored to sight, he felt such love to his Benefactor, that he followed Jesus in His journey. So, in proportion as we obtain from Christ those spiritual blessings which far exceed any bodily cure, we shall feel that we cannot be happy unless we are near Him. If, then, we would be animated by the love which will impel us to follow Jesus in the path of obedience, let a sense of our deep necessity prompt us to follow Him in the path of dependence. Shall we not love Him from whom we daily receive inestimable benefits? Let us by faith draw near to Him, and gaze on those features in which divine majesty and human sympathy so marvelously meet. Let us contemplate daily His holiness and tenderness, His perfect obedience and His sacrificial death. Let us feel each day “Jesus is my Savior, my Friend, my Brother. For me He toiled, and groaned, and died; for me He rose, for me He intercedes. He has with His own blood washed away my stains. He has again said to me, ‘Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.’ He still clothes me in His own white robe; He bids me rest upon Him in all difficulties; He assures me He will never forsake me; He promises that He will hereafter take me to dwell with Him forever. If thus we habitually follow Him by a renewed act of coming to Him for the supply of our needs, may we not expect that, in answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit will shed abroad His love in our hearts? Shall we not “love Him because He first loved us”? Thus loving Him, we shall be eager to follow Him in the way of obedience as well as of dependence, saying, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?”

FOLLOW JESUS AS YOUR TEACHER

The followers of Christ are designated in the New Testament as disciples, or learners. If diligence is shown by the followers of the great leaders of human thought, who are personally unknown and liable to error, much more earnest should we be in learning of Him “whom having not seen we love,” and whose instructions are never mingled with error, for He is divine and infallible. He instructs His followers by the Scriptures which “holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and is “able to make us wise unto salvation.” He has commanded us to “search the Scriptures.” The Bible then should be the constant companion of all who follow Jesus. A day should never pass without our reading some portion of it; not as a task to be hurried over, but as a letter from a dear Friend, to tell us about Himself, assuring us of His affection, and directing us how to please Him. Let us come to it, not to confirm our own opinions, but to make our opinions bend to its teaching. Let us value not only what agrees with, but what is opposed to our wishes; our earnest desire being to know the will of Jesus in all things. He also teaches by His Spirit influencing our minds— not to supersede or add to the Bible, but to enable us to understand and love what it reveals. To know it in the heart as well as in the intellect, we need divine teaching. Let us, then, earnestly pray that He would “open our eyes to behold wondrous things out of His law.” We may gain assistance from the sermons, books, and conversations of good men; but we must only follow CHRIST. All men may err. Every church is only a collection of men capable of mistakes. We must, then, follow Jesus. How much more union would there be among His disciples, if, instead of making men their leaders, saying, “I am of Paul and I of Apollos,” they would all be more anxious to follow Jesus.

Gracious Teacher, help me to follow You, as a humble and diligent learner of the truth. May Your Word be a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Make me to understand the way of Your precepts. Incline my heart unto Your testimonies.

FOLLOW JESUS AS YOUR RULER

A chieftain's followers are those who obey his commands. Jesus, in like manner, requires from all who follow Him, unquestioning and cheerful obedience. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say?" If I have come to Christ as the Captain of my salvation, I am no longer my own master. I dare not do as I please. I dare not exercise my own discretion as to whether or not I will perform His bidding. As the soldiers of an army promptly obey the general, though they may not understand the reason of his orders, and even when they fancy he may be in error; so must I do whatever my Commander requires, without questioning His reasons, and even when my foolish, unbelieving heart may suggest that it would be better to do something else. Moreover, whatever I possess is His more truly than it is mine. I dare not use my time, property, talents, just as I like. I am "not my own, but bought with a price." I must no longer ask what will be most easy, pleasant, profitable, or respectable; but what will be most in harmony with the will of Jesus. I must be willing to make any sacrifice, and to displease my friends, rather than disobey Him. I must endeavor to act according to His commands, not only on great occasions, but in all the little circumstances of daily life. I must remember that if He is always near me to do me good, He is also watching my conduct, and looking for proofs of my fidelity and love.

The language of my heart should therefore continually be, "Lord, what will YOU have me to do? Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good, lead me into the way of uprightness. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law, yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of Your commandments, for therein do I delight." To assist us in thus obeying Him, Jesus has given us His own example. To this the reader's attention will now be directed.

FOLLOW JESUS AS YOUR EXAMPLE

An artist's followers are those who imitate his style. Jesus "has set us an example that we should follow His steps." As all rules are better understood when accompanied with examples, He visited this world to furnish an illustration of the perfect law of God. In the human life of Christ we see the holiness of Deity developed in the relationships, duties, and trials of humanity. Let that life be our study. A painter will place before him some fine production of his master's skill, gazing at it from day to day, until its forms and tints are transferred to his own canvas. His first efforts may be very rude, and so inferior to the original that it would be difficult to trace any resemblance. But he is in earnest, and by persevering efforts he daily makes some advance towards the perfection at which he aims. So let us place before us the life of Christ, and endeavor to produce something like it. The more our mind is fixed on Him, the more successful we shall be.

We must not look too much even to the example of good men. Their excellence is only an imperfect copy of the divine Original. When men are our models, we are in danger of imitating their blemishes as well as their beauties. Let us, then, copy direct from the Master Himself. Let us act as He acted; and in

case of doubt, let us consider how He would have been likely to act, had He been in our circumstances. It is a lofty standard; but the higher the mark, the higher the arrow will fly, though it may not reach so far as we desire.

Our first efforts in copying after Christ may be very clumsy, and our fellow men may see nothing in our poor daub resembling the perfect copy before us. But Jesus will kindly encourage every sincere attempt; not condemning our work because done in a bungling manner but assisting us daily to make some progress, until at last “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Blessed Savior, help me to imitate the perfect pattern of Your holy life. Diligently watching Your footsteps as my Guide, may I tread in the same, fearing to venture where You have not trod, and never hesitating to go where You have led. Thus enable me, not in profession merely, but in daily conformity to Your own example, to be Your follower.

IN RESISTING TEMPTATION WE FOLLOW JESUS

This life was intended to be one of trial. The temptations of Satan, injuries from men, and afflictions from God, are tests of faith which will be unknown in that world where conflict shall be forgotten in victory. In the endurance of each description of trial, Christ has set us an example. At the outset of His ministry, He was tempted by the devil, as if to show that the adversary who “goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” especially assails the soul when beginning to follow Jesus. The first temptation was unbelief; the second, vain confidence; the third, worldly ambition.

There are three stages of temptation. The young Christian is first allured to turn aside from duty because of its toils and perils; then, to be proud of his strength, and court danger; then, to forget his spiritual calling, and to lust after worldly things. When apparently abandoned in the desert to the pangs of hunger, Jesus was tempted to distrust the care of His heavenly Father, and to escape appointed suffering by turning stones into bread; but He repelled the suggestion by the truth, that “man lives not by bread alone, but by every word of God.”

Thus when we are in some desert place of temporal affliction or spiritual distress, Satan often tempts us to doubt the love of God, to provide for ourselves in any way that offers to escape from the difficulties of a religious life, to avoid inconveniences by unlawful acts, and thus to turn what God intended to be stones into bread. But the follower of Jesus will say, “Comfort is not necessary for me; reputation, friendship, life itself is not necessary; but the favor of God is. It is His word or will which alone gives bread its power to nourish; and if He whose word is thus mighty is with me as my Friend, I can be in no danger. I can be saved without enjoying peaceful circumstances; but not without obedience to the will of God. I can do without bread, but not without Christ. If I follow Him, He will take care of me, and soon bring me out of the desert into ‘a wealthy place.’ But if not, I am safer and happier fasting with Him in the wilderness than feasting with Satan in the midst of splendor.”

When Jesus stood firm against unbelief, Satan tempted Him to the opposite extreme of vain confidence. “True, You can live without bread. God can preserve You without the precautions which others feel necessary. Show still further Your faith, by casting Yourself from this lofty parapet of the temple in the certainty of reaching the ground unhurt.” But Jesus, who never doubted that He would be sustained in the desert where He had been summoned by God, refused to place Himself in danger to which He was allured by Satan. “I may without any doubt believe the promise while obeying the

command of My Father; but it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'; and I must not test His care of Me in a presumptuous and unbidden courting of peril."

Thus, when Satan, unable to sink us in the quagmire of doubt, raises us to the pinnacle of vain confidence, and assures us that we are so protected by the grace of God that we may expose ourselves to dangers which would be destructive to others, let us, following Jesus, reply: "God will preserve me in the path of duty, whatever the danger or difficulty; but I must place myself in no perils to which I am not clearly called; I must beware that I enter not into temptation; I can do nothing of myself, and He has only promised to support me so long as I follow where He leads. 'I must not tempt the Lord my God.'"

As Satan afterwards promised to give to Christ "all the kingdoms of the world" in return for an act of homage, so there is scarcely a day in which the followers of Jesus are not tempted to obtain worldly advantage or personal gratification by some violation of conscience and the Word of God, which is always more or less a bowing down to worship Satan. Let us, as followers of Jesus, at once say to the tempter, "Get behind me, Satan. The world would be too dearly bought by the slightest homage paid to you! You are my worst foe, and every gift of yours is a curse to its possessor. To Christ alone I bow; from Him alone will I receive gifts; I worship the Lord my God, and Him only will I serve."

Jesus repelled the temptation at once. He did not look at the forbidden fruit. They who begin by looking, seldom end with longing, but go on to pluck and to eat. If we would not eat and die, we must shut our eyes and turn away. Thus did Jesus. The "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," was His victorious weapon, and "it is written" repelled every thrust of the great enemy. Thus let us lay up God's Word in our heart, that we may not sin against Him. Let us keep this matchless sword bright by constant exercise. Let us "put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day." We shall prove the truth of the promise, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"; and we shall share in the consolations of our divine Leader, of whom we read that when the temptation was finished, "angels came and ministered unto Him." He Himself, the Lord of angels, will minister unto and comfort all who, following Him, valiantly resist the wicked one.

IN ENDURING INJURIES, FOLLOW JESUS

We are constantly liable to ill-treatment. Much we bring on ourselves; much may be undeserved. Our property may be taken from us, our character slandered, our peace disturbed. We are apt to retaliate, not only when great wrong is done us, but in the trifling events of daily life. A hasty word, even a look, is enough to rouse some people's wrath. The angry speech, the haughty glance, are at once returned. We are prone to be soon angry, to think the worst of our enemies, and to be slow to forgive. Totally different was the conduct of Jesus. Throughout His life He "was despised and rejected of men," yet He still went about doing good. He provoked no one, yet was the constant victim of hatred and insult. He persevered in efforts to save those who persevered in endeavors to injure and slay Him. And on the cross He prayed for His murderers, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

His conduct in this respect is distinctly held up for our imitation. "If, when you do well and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were you called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." This spirit He inculcates on all His followers. "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are the peacemakers." "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you." Thus His apostles also taught,

saying, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, kindness, patience, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you, so also do you." "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." "Recompense to no man evil for evil; dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves. If your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink."

It is taken for granted that a follower of Jesus must not do injury to others; must not deceive, defraud, overreach, provoke, or slander them. But how often we forget that we are to imitate Him in enduring injury. When a Christian gives way to a hasty or unforgiving spirit; when he is made angry by a trifle, and cannot put up with the least affront; when he is prompt to revenge and slow to forgive a fault; how greatly must the spirit of Jesus be grieved, His own soul be injured, and observers be repelled rather than attracted by a religion so sadly misrepresented.

Meek and gentle Jesus, help me, imitating Your example, not only to abstain from whatever would be injurious to others, but to be patient under wrongdoing, to be willing rather to suffer than commit unkindness; to be slow to wrath; to render good for evil; to be prompt to forgive; and thus to prove to all men that I do indeed follow You.

IN SUFFERING AFFLICTIONS, FOLLOW JESUS

"We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom." Christ Himself said to His followers, "In the world you shall have tribulation." Sometimes those who best serve Him are the greatest sufferers. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens." When sorrows come, we are apt to doubt the faithfulness of God. Unbelief suggests, "God has forgotten me, or has ceased to love me. His promise fails. How harsh of Him to afflict me thus. I have far more than my share of trouble. Why are others dealt with so much more mildly? Surely no good can come out of this, but only misery and discouragement. I do well to murmur. Patience is impossible. My prayers and faith have all been in vain. I am no better off than those who never trusted in God; no, many of the wicked are far happier and more prosperous than I."

But the spirit of Christ prompts His true followers to say in reply, "Shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil? Is not the evil itself a good when He appoints it? May I not be sure it is sent for some kind purpose? To wean me from the world, to lead me to Himself, to exercise my patience, to strengthen my faith, to give me opportunity for cherishing a submissive spirit? Have not all His people suffered affliction? No strange thing has happened to me. I may think that my trial is too heavy, or that some other trial would have been better; but does not He know best? The nature, the measure, the duration of my sorrow are all regulated by Him who cannot err or be unkind. Ought I not, therefore, to love His will, as well as submit to it, remembering that I am but a foolish child needing much discipline to train me for heaven, and that, like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him."

How did Jesus act? Though requiring no trials, as we do, to purify Him from sin, His life was a continued course of enduring afflictions. He came to do the will of His Father, and though with a sensibility both to bodily and mental anguish which, perhaps, has never been equaled, He said, "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" And when His agony in the garden was such that His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, and He prayed fervently that the bitter cup might pass from Him, He added, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done."

Let us follow Jesus. We are not forbidden to feel our trials. This is natural. This is human. Christ felt, and groaned, and prayed for relief. But let us ever prefer God's will to our own; let us pour our sorrows into His ear, and then say, "Not my will, but Yours be done." And if the cup we have to drink is very bitter, let us remember that it was not so bitter as was His whom we follow. That sweetens ours. And as infinite love and wisdom prepared our bitter draught of sorrow, let us say, as Jesus did, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?"

IN HABITUAL AND EARNEST PRAYER, FOLLOW JESUS

Jesus of Nazareth, in a still higher sense than Enoch, "walked with God." He was mysteriously one with the Father; but His human spirit held unceasing communion with the divine. Besides His habitual frame of mind, He devoted special seasons to worship and spent whole nights in prayer. He taught His disciples "always to pray and not to faint"; encouraged them by the promise, "Ask, and you shall receive"; and inspired them to teach all men to "continue instant in prayer."

Prayer is essential to piety. Of ourselves we can do nothing. Not a stain can be cleansed, a temptation resisted, a duty performed, unless "mercy and grace to help in time of need" come from God in answer to prayer. Religion is a cold, dead formalism without prayer. The fire of divine love goes out unless prayer feeds it with fresh fuel. As a branch we wither, unless by prayer we abide in Christ, the living Vine. Let us, then, cherish at all times a prayerful spirit, avoiding whatever tends to injure it. In all we do, suffer, or enjoy, let us look up to God.

The heart may pray when the lips are still. In the midst of bustle, aspirations may ascend to the ear and heart of our Father. Nothing which concerns us is too trifling to be made a subject of prayer. "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." But we should also have special seasons for devotion. Public and social prayer is a solemn duty and a blessed privilege. But as there is danger of being satisfied with the outward performance, let us be especially careful that our hearts ascend with every request.

Private prayer is still more essential, and more in danger of being neglected. Jesus said, "When you pray, enter into your closet, and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret." Every Christian should make conscience of being alone every day with God. This should be felt as the first of all duties, the chief of all privileges. To this everything else should give way. Whatever our duties, whatever the demands on our time, let us never spend a day without prayer. If we have no time for it, we should make time. Let it be taken from pleasure, from labor, from social communion, from sleep.

Let us pray, not in a hurried, formal manner, to satisfy conscience and to feel that a necessary task is done; but as children, to open our hearts to a loving Father, and to seek strength whereby we may endure the trials, perform the duties, and gratefully enjoy the blessings of each day. We are never safe when we neglect prayer; but, like a man without his armor, we are exposed to every weapon of the foe. We depart from Christ, instead of following Him, every day we spend without earnest prayer. They who turn back altogether, begin their declension in religion by neglecting prayer. Lord, teach me to pray— to pray and not to faint— to pray without ceasing; to walk with God, and thus to be a follower of You.

IN PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF YOUR STATION IN LIFE, FOLLOW JESUS

Some have thought that they could better serve God by giving their whole time to devotion in a cloister, than by engaging in the ordinary duties of life; but Jesus sets us an example of a life of prayer combined with activity. The worship He paid to God only qualified Him for better fulfilling His relationships to men. While a child, "He was subject unto His parents"; from which we may learn that we are to act in conformity with the duties of our station, whatever that station may be. As children we are to "honor our father and mother." As parents, to "provoke not our children to wrath, but to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." If masters, to give to those who are under us "that which is just and equal." If servants, to be "obedient to our masters, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of God."

Christianity, instead of absolving us from the duties of life, enjoins our performance of them as essential to a true following of Jesus. Until thirty years of age, Jesus abode with His mother and her husband, who was a carpenter and, no doubt, shared his toil. Throughout those many years, He showed that there is dignity in all useful labor, and by His own example taught impressive lessons of industry, of unostentatious obedience, and of glorifying God in obscurity.

As His followers, we should make our religion bear upon our daily duties. In order to show our love, it is not necessary to do some great thing, to perform some act of penance, or to abandon our station in life to preach the gospel. We may glorify God by contented, cheerful industry; and however humble and obscure our lot, we may feel that work is worship, when done with a desire to please Him. Thus all Christians, however high or however low their station, should follow Jesus every day in the thoroughness, the diligence, the uprightness, the cheerfulness, the whole spirit and manner with which they perform their ordinary duties.

Let none suppose that offering prayer can be a substitute for industry and integrity; and that if they attend to the forms of religion, they may be lazy, or fraudulent, or severe, or discontented, or negligent in the common things of life. True religion should influence our conduct throughout the day. We must be "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," if we would in all things follow Jesus.

IN DOING GOOD TO OTHERS, FOLLOW JESUS

The whole life of Christ on earth was an unwearying course of benevolence. He "went about doing good." While performing the great work of redemption, He was never too busy to attend to the inferior needs and sorrows of men. None were too insignificant or degraded for His compassion. He not merely showed mercy to those who came in His way, but He sought out the most sorrowful that He might comfort them, and the most wicked that He might lead them to repentance. He taught that it is "more blessed to give than to receive."

In the parable of the good Samaritan He showed that all whom we can help are our neighbors, and that we should "love our neighbors as ourselves." In the parables of "the talents" and "the pounds," we are taught that all we possess is entrusted to us, only as stewards, who must give account to the great Master at the last day, when not merely the openly wicked, but the "unprofitable servant," will be driven from His presence. In describing the final judgment, He speaks of those who did not feed the hungry and clothe the naked as having neglected Himself.

The apostles, instructed by His Spirit, gave similar precepts to the church: "Bear one another's burdens." "Weep with those who weep." "Do not be weary in well-doing." "As you have opportunity do good unto all men." "Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his

compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?" "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

As followers of Jesus, we are to obey and imitate Him in benefiting the bodies and the souls of men. All can do something. Even a cup of cold water will be accepted, if we have nothing more to give. A single word or a silent look on the side of goodness, when we can do no more, is regarded with approval by our Leader. Opportunity and ability are the sufficient summons, and the only limit of duty. If I can, then, as a Christian, I ought to seek the happiness of others, to cheer the sorrowful, to support the needy, to raise the fallen, to save sinners from the error of their way. Jesus expects His disciples not only to receive, but to disperse His gifts. If, then, I am living a merely selfish life, without any efforts to make my fellow creatures happier and holier, can I be one of His followers?

BY CULTIVATING THE MIND WHICH WAS IN CHRIST JESUS, FOLLOW HIM

We have seen how the mind of Christ was exhibited in various outward actions. There is not space in this little book for additional illustrations. But all is comprehended in imitating His spirit; for if our inward thoughts and feelings are like His, our outward words and actions will be so also.

His mind was HUMBLE. And the apostle Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant." Pride is the parent of numberless sins. High notions of what we deserve from God, or from men, produce impatience, discontent, envy, anger, strife, and all uncharitableness. Lord, give me a humble heart. Conscious that I deserve nothing good from You, may I receive joys with thankfulness, and sorrows with submission. In lowliness of mind help me to esteem others better than myself, that I may never vaunt myself over the lowliest of my brethren, and that I may bear with meekness whatever may look like pride in them, making charitable allowances for their treatment of me, and remembering what daily chastisements I deserve for my own sins against You. Thus may I be a follower of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart."

His mind was PURE. He was not only "undefiled and separate from sinners" in His actions, but sin itself had no place in His soul. We cannot conceive of Jesus encouraging one evil desire. He abstained not only from all indulgence, but from all thought of it. Lord, give me the blessedness of the "pure in heart." Help me to "hate vain thoughts." May I "set no wicked thing before my eyes." "Make clean my heart within me, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me." Make the fountain pure, that the stream also may be undefiled. "Cleanse the thoughts of my heart, by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit."

His mind was AMIABLE and ATTRACTIVE. Some people who profess to be very pure, are also very stern; but Jesus was purity and loveliness combined. There was nothing repulsive in His temper and deportment. The chief of sinners could approach Him without fear. Excepting the hypocrite, He had a kind look and a word of encouragement for all. His presence made sunshine everywhere. The law of kindness was on His lips, and the manner of His conferring a boon was as strong a proof of His benevolence as the boon itself. Oh, let this mind also be in us.

Help me, Lord, to show that Your religion makes men pleasing as well as pure. Let my piety be attractive. Let love to You evidently inspire me with love to all my fellow men. Help me at home in the family as well as in the world, with my most familiar friends as well as with strangers, in those little words, and looks, and actions which make up the greatest part of life, to prove how lovely goodness is. Let a morose temper, a stern look, an ungentle tone, a repulsive assumption of superior virtue be far from

me. Help me, as Your follower, to cultivate not only whatever things are just and true, but “whatever things are lovely and of good report.”

TAKING UP THE CROSS, FOLLOW JESUS

In imitating the example of Jesus, as set forth in the preceding pages, we shall continually do violence to our own carnal inclinations. This will often be difficult and painful. But self-denial, or cross-bearing, is a necessary and unavoidable condition of following Jesus. He frequently and most plainly forewarned His disciples of this. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” “He that takes not his cross and follows after Me, is not worthy of Me.” A condemned culprit, on his way to crucifixion, was compelled to carry the transverse beam of his own cross. This was a mark of ignominy, as it would be now for a criminal going to the scaffold to wear the rope by which he was to be suspended. Carrying it was also painful and laborious, when the condemned person was weakened and lacerated by the scourge. Thus “bearing the cross” signifies enduring difficulties, pains, and reproaches.

It is evident that we cannot be Christians without self-denial. The gospel saves us by delivering us from sinful indulgence, and therefore giving up that indulgence is a self-denial involved in the very nature of salvation. A sick man, in being cured, must take up his cross by drinking the bitter medicines, submitting to the painful operations, and confining himself to the spare diet ordered by his physician. And it is impossible that we can be saved by the Physician of souls without giving up whatever causes disease. He saves us in sickness, but it is only by delivering us out of it, and therefore we must give up whatever nourishes it. Sinful habits, however inveterate, though they cling to us as a part of ourselves, must be broken off.

Christ taught how severe yet how necessary such self-denial is, when He said, “If your right hand offend you, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell.” We are to follow and obey Christ at any cost. If He requires it, we must be willing to give up property, friends, reputation, life itself. And if, by refusing to do this, we show that we love anything whatever more than Jesus, He tells us that we cannot be His disciples. His followers in former times were often called to suffer severe persecution. Many pined in prison; many were “tortured, not accepting deliverance,” if a condition of that deliverance were a denial of their Lord; many died at the stake, rejoicing in Jesus while tortured by the flames. Though we are not exposed to such sufferings, yet by faithfully following Him we may incur derision and hatred, injure our worldly interests, offend those on whom we are dependent, and grieve and alienate our best friends.

The cross we have to bear may sometimes be a most heavy one; but we must not hesitate to take it up. It is most true that wisdom’s ways are “ways of pleasantness”; pleasantness super-excellent, but withal, of such a kind as can only be known by those who are willing to bear the cross as they journey. Not equally at all times, not similarly in all cases, but every follower of Jesus may be quite sure that in his way to heaven he will often have to imitate a cross-bearing Savior. Try not, then, to discover some favored path in which you will not be thus burdened. “Let your eyes look right on.” No bypath is safe. A road without a cross should at once make you suspect it is not the true one. Only the strait and narrow road leads to heaven, and when the cross lies in the way, we must be prepared to carry it. Let us not drag it along after us unwillingly. This will displease our Lord, and really give us more trouble in the end. Rather let us

place it promptly on our shoulders, and press on with it after Jesus. He taught His disciples that they must "count the cost" of serving Him. This we have done. Our deliberate conviction is, that the honor of following Him, and the gifts He bestows, are beyond all price. They would be infinitely cheap if we had to give up the whole world and a thousand lives in order to possess them. How willingly, then, should we pay the trifling cost which fidelity sometimes entails on us.

In this "cross-bearing" we have the example of Jesus. When He went forth to be crucified, He carried His cross until He fainted beneath its weight. And this was only an emblem of His whole life, which was one constant career of self-denial. The cross we bear is inseparably connected with our own salvation. Though love to Jesus should animate us to carry it, it is our own interests which are promoted. But the cross He bore was for our benefit, not His own. He enjoyed the perfection of all blessedness before He came to dwell with men. It was not necessary for Him, as it is for us, that holiness and happiness should be obtained by a course of self-denial. It was on our account alone that He bore His heavy cross; to atone for our guilt, and animate us to overcome evil. His cross was far heavier than ours. On Him was laid the iniquity of us all, yet how cheerfully He bore it. Our cross, however heavy, is lightened and becomes endurable by His. Let us, then, keep our eye fixed on a cross-bearing Savior, and not murmur or be surprised that we also have to deny ourselves. Rather let us expect it every day. Let us feel that we cannot be right if we are strangers to it. Self-indulgence and Christianity cannot coexist, for, once more to quote the words of Jesus, "He that takes not his cross, and follows after Me, is not worthy of Me."

FOLLOW JESUS AT ALL TIMES

Some people follow Jesus only now and then. They are religious at intervals, but not habitually. They sometimes seem to run in haste after Jesus, and then stand still. In their eagerness, they appear to condemn the slower pace of others; yet it is evident that the patient plodders make much more progress, and soon leave them far behind. For those who follow by fits and starts do not renew their journey from the place they had reached before, but from a point much farther off. While they thought they were only standing still, they were really slipping backwards. Our religion should be a steady flame, always burning and giving light, and not a fitful meteor, startling beholders for a moment, but going out in darkness. We should every day of our lives be making some progress, quietly following Jesus without any pause; and never think we can stand still because we went a long distance some time ago, or because we intend hereafter to make up for lost time. It is not a few extraordinary feats, a few very long days' journeys, that Christ requires; but that every day we should be making some advance, every day be drawing nearer to Him, and becoming more like unto Him.

Some people are very religious when affliction comes. Disappointments, losses, vexations, drive them to devotion. From a sickbed they send up many earnest petitions. At the side of the grave where they have deposited a dear friend, they are conscious of deep religious feeling. This, however, passes away with the sorrow that awakened it. But the true Christian follows Jesus earnestly in times of joy as well as of sadness, in the sunshine of prosperity as well as in the tempest of trial. Some people seem to think that there are times for religion to be diligently cultivated, and other times when it may be laid aside. We ought to be very thankful for special religious privileges, and seasons set apart for acts of direct worship, both public and private, should be valued as the most precious hours of life; but let us never suppose that if on Sabbath days, and during stated times of worship, our hearts are under holy influences, at other

times Jesus may be banished from our minds altogether. He should always be in our eye, and in His footsteps we should on all days and at all times of the day, endeavor to tread.

FOLLOW JESUS IN ALL PLACES

Religion is often spoken of as if it were essentially distinct from business, politics, innocent recreation, and other “secular” engagements. A certain territory is marked out for its occupation, while all other places are regarded as beyond its legitimate sphere of operation. But Christ requires us to follow Him everywhere; not only in the church, but in the exchange, the shop, the factory, the parlor, the kitchen; not only where we are surrounded by fellow disciples, but in general society, and in the company of those who are ignorant of and dishonor Him. Everywhere we should exhibit our true character, and be ourselves. If, then, religion is a part of ourselves, if it blends with our very being, we cannot but take it with us wherever we go; but if it is only something outside of us, a creed, a profession, a periodical sanctity, it will be laid aside just as a man takes off an outer coat when he feels it inconvenient.

Alas, there are many who put aside their Sunday religion during the week, just as some people put by their Sunday dress. Not so the true follower of Jesus. Love to the Savior is the ruling principle of his heart, and therefore it will influence his conduct in every place, enabling him to “use this world as not abusing it”; to be in it, without being of it; and to pass through it, not merely without contamination, but purifying it as he goes along.

Suppose, however, we are walking in some path where we try in vain to follow Jesus; suppose our circumstances have brought us into a road which bears no traces of our Leader’s feet; how are we to do in such a case? At once abandon that path. It cannot be a safe one. At any cost forsake it. Every Christian should ask himself in all his business engagements, in all his social enjoyments, Can I follow Jesus here? Can I seek His blessing here? Can I promote His glory here? We should ask this for our own selves, without judging for others. I have no need to determine whether my neighbor can follow Jesus in a certain path, but can I? For anything I know, a road may be safe for him which is dangerous for me. The example of no other Christian is to be made by myself an excuse for walking one single day where I cannot follow Jesus.

And whenever we are even in doubt, let us stop. It cannot be wrong to go no farther when we are no longer sure that Jesus is before. From how many temptations shall we be saved, if, instead of asking, “Is this absolutely wicked?”, we honestly inquire, “Can I follow Jesus here, and enjoy His presence and blessing? Without this I dare not venture to go one step.” But while no inducement of worldly pleasure or profit should allure us to any path which Christ has not trodden, no danger or difficulty what ever should make us hesitate when He beckons us onward. May we be among those who are redeemed from among men, who are not defiled by sinful indulgence, and of whom it is written, “They follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”

WHEN THE WAY IS ROUGH AND DANGEROUS, FOLLOW JESUS

There are many variations in the Christian’s path. Sometimes it is smooth and flowery, with sunny slopes, and sylvan shades, and prospects which entrance the soul with loveliness. There are seasons when no doubts perplex the spirit, and when our circumstances in life are in harmony with duty, so that the right

path is an easy path. But this is the exception. Often the road is steep, craggy, and beset with foes. Sometimes it is a “Hill Difficulty” throughout, and Apollyon stretches himself across the way aiming his fiery darts at the pilgrim. Then some bypath attracts us by its pleasantness, while Satan whispers that a thorny and painful road cannot be the true one. But Jesus never promised to lead us only in smooth places. It is not necessary that we should always rejoice, but it is necessary that we always follow. “Wherever He goes,” rough or smooth, there we also must go.

Sometimes the path seems positively impracticable; but our duty remains the same. If Christ is in advance calling us, we must not hesitate. Let us obey, and impossibilities will vanish as we advance. The children of Israel, when pursued by Pharaoh and hemmed in between the mountains and the sea, were commanded to “go forward.” What! Towards the water, which they had no means of crossing? “Go forward.” And they did so. Then it was that the impossible road became plain and easy. Even so, in the face of what to our unbelief seems utterly to block up the way, let us “go forward.” God will make every duty practicable. Christ will enable us to travel along any road in which He leads. We shall always get into greater difficulty by leaving the path of duty, which is always, in the end, the easiest, however rough it may appear, even as it is the only safe one, whatever the foes that haunt it.

WHEN THE WAY IS SOLITARY, FOLLOW JESUS

Fashion is powerful, and going with a crowd is pleasant. Many “follow the multitude to do evil.” Others delight to “go up to the house of God in company.” Some who seemed to be Christians when all around them were so, become worldly among new friends, proving that when they seemed to be following Jesus, they were only following their fellow men. And even true disciples are in danger of being discouraged when “the ways of Zion mourn.” When iniquity abounds, when it becomes singular to be an earnest Christian, when we feel we are almost alone, we are apt to become fainthearted. But we must remember that Christianity is not made true by the number of its adherents, and that the narrow path was never to be known by its multitude of travelers. Rather, we are told that “few there be that find it.”

Blessed Lord, let this be enough for me, that You are traveling in the road. Why should I wait for or lean on others, when I have YOU before me. Oh, help me to follow You, though all others should choose the broad way. It is enough if You will reveal Yourself to me; for the road will never be solitary when I can say, “You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

WHEN THE WAY IS DARK, FOLLOW JESUS

Sometimes the road is very gloomy. This may arise from constitutional temperament, and disease affecting the nervous system. Many Christians, under such an affliction, impute to the displeasure of God, or to their own wickedness, what the physician would try to cure by medicine. But the effect is the same, and the road is obscured by the “shadow of death.” This gloom may also arise from defective views, from weak faith, from the fatherly chastisement of God. We are led, for our good, through “the valley of humiliation.” Even here, Jesus has preceded us, exclaiming, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!” Let us follow Him. The darkness is painful, but cannot hurt us. We can walk through it towards the light. Let us, then, even when we walk in darkness and see no light, still stay ourselves upon God, and press forward after Jesus.

Sometimes the way is dark on account of our ignorance of what may be our duty hereafter. The mountain road is often hidden in deep ravines and behind projecting rocks. Mists also frequently hover over it, concealing from view all that is more than a step in advance. Some travelers stop, and try to ascertain in what direction the road will lead them. They will not proceed until they discover what course they will take tomorrow. This is not the method to solve the difficulty. Go forward to the darkness, and it will recede. The road is never so gloomy but that we can see one step. Let us take that, and then we shall see another. The longest journey was never taken by more than one step at a time. He who travels seeing his road a hundred miles onward, will reach the end no sooner than another who never sees more than a yard before him, but who never hesitates. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness."

FOLLOW JESUS COURAGEOUSLY

We should not merely follow Jesus when the road is rough, perilous, dark, and solitary; but we should do this animated by strong faith that He will enable us to master all difficulties and overcome all foes. There is such a thing as the courage of desperation, but Christian heroism mounts higher. If we had very faint hope of success, it would become us to say: "The way of holiness is the true way, the right way, the only way in which I can walk suitably to the purpose for which I was created. Reason, conscience, the Word of God, all tell me to walk here, because it is my duty. It is also my delight. Jesus deserves all my homage. If I may never hope to dwell with Him at the end of the journey, I will accompany Him as far as possible. It is better to travel a short distance with Him, and then perish, than with any other guide; and, by God's help, I will walk in this way until I die!"

But we are not driven to this extremity. Our helmet is "the hope of salvation." We follow one who "died to redeem us from all iniquity." His work would be a failure, He would not deserve to be called the Savior of sinners, He would not be divine, if any of His sincere followers were to perish. He Himself says, "They shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS, through Him that loved us." We shall not merely be safe at last, but be victorious; and not merely just gain the battle, but something more. We shall "come to Zion with singing." Not merely get into the city, but have an "abundant entrance."

This "full assurance" of the all-sufficiency of Jesus for our final perseverance, is the faith which "removes mountains." How they disappear before the determined and courageous pilgrim! Many were only clouds mistaken for "mountains," and vanish as we approach. Others, as we climb them, seem to shrink beneath our tread. Roaring lions are found to be chained, or they flee at our advance, or they fall dead by the thrust of the feeblest wielder of the sword of truth; so that timid disciples are amazed at their own successes, which would be unaccountable but for the great truth, "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Without Him, we "can do nothing"; but "we can do all things through Christ strengthening us." "Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain." Let us then press forward with confidence of success, as well as with determination of obedience. Nothing can be despaired of under the guidance and auspices of Jesus. "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge; therefore will we not fear."

FOLLOW JESUS CHEERFULLY

Religion is sometimes represented as a gloomy thing, whose disciples give up enjoyment for the sake of repayment hereafter. Sad mistake. We resign nothing that is worth keeping, and we receive in exchange what is infinitely more valuable than all the world can give. Are not the love of Christ, and the joys of following Him, better than all other pleasures? Never let the worldly think that we envy them. No, we are infinitely better off. Our pleasures are purer and deeper, as well as more lasting. The world knows not what true happiness is. They see what we lose, but not what we gain. Neither do they perceive the sting that is beneath what they enjoy. They deserve our pity, not our envy. The very poorest outcast, who is a Christian, is happier than the worldling.

Help me, O Jesus, to follow You, not as if I felt the way tedious - not as if duty alone, or the hope of reward, bound me to You; but as one who would not, if he might, follow any other. With sober joyfulness, let me keep near You wherever You lead, and whatever cross You give me to bear. Thus may I truly represent Your ways as "ways of pleasantness," and Your paths as "paths of peace."

FOLLOW JESUS CLOSELY

Peter "followed Jesus afar off" on the night when He was betrayed. What was the consequence? Peter denied Him. Had he followed Jesus closely, from the garden to the palace, he would not have thus fallen. Many think they can follow at a distance, yet with Christ in view. But how constantly is the peril of such a following seen in the departure of travelers altogether from the road. How soon is Jesus lost sight of, and then how easily the track is missed, and we wander about in doubt and peril. We may never find the road again. And if we do, we lose all the pleasure of His company. There are joys experienced by those who follow so closely as to hear all He says, which they know nothing of who are content to follow afar off. What prevents this closeness? Is it the heavy luggage or entangling dress of some sinful indulgence, some worldly compliance, which makes us lag behind?

Oh, then, let us at once cast it away, in order to follow Jesus closely. So closely should we follow, as to be able to touch Him, to take His hand, to lean on Him. David said, "My soul follows hard after You; Your right hand upholds me." Yes, we must follow so "hard after Christ" as to feel His right hand holding us up.

O You who said, "Without Me you can do nothing," help Your servant to follow You, supported and upheld by You. Let no interval be allowed between my soul and You. Teach me that I am never safe unless leaning on Your mighty arm. "Hold up my goings in Your ways, that my footsteps slip not."

FOLLOW JESUS OPENLY

It should not be a secret that we follow Jesus. Our religion should be of such a kind that it cannot be concealed. The spirit of a true follower of Jesus so differs from that of a lover of this world, that it cannot but be seen. If a band of travelers were passing through a town, you would notice a difference between them and the residents. We are travelers to the heavenly Jerusalem. Our treasure is on high. Our Leader is Jesus. Here on this earth we have no continuing city. If we are sincere, will it not be evident that "we are not of the world"?

It ought not to be necessary for us to say in words that we follow Jesus. Our whole spirit and conduct, our motives, tastes, habits, conversation, should all proclaim it. It is not necessary to say of a fragrant rose that it smells sweetly, when its perfume is filling the room. So a Christian's testimony to His Master should be unobtrusive, yet unavoidable. But, besides this, there is the duty of outwardly confessing Christ, by joining ourselves to His disciples in church fellowship, and by commemorating His dying love at the "Lord's Supper." We should do this in obedience to His command, to testify our love; to obtain the spiritual benefits to be expected in the use of all the means of grace; to be strengthened by the sympathies, prayers, and watchfulness of other Christians; to be identified with those who, whatever their imperfections, constitute the band of loving witnesses for Christ, and the upholders of His truth to the world.

Never let us be ashamed to confess Christ before men; but, knowing that no profession of religion will of itself make us Christians, although it does involve a solemn responsibility to live consistently, let us earnestly pray that we may be enabled, throughout our whole lives, to be faithful witnesses for the truth of the gospel, "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

INDUCING OTHERS TO JOIN YOU, FOLLOW JESUS

On our way to eternal bliss, we pass through crowds of idlers, or rather, we meet bands of travelers going the downward road. Shall we treat them with indifference, and say nothing to urge them to share our joys? They may be ignorant of their danger. Is it not inhumanity to leave them to perish? They may be hesitating whether or not to alter their route, and need only a word of encouragement. Is it not a part of the obligation under which we are placed when we come to Jesus, that we induce others to come?

According to our means, we should assist the religious enterprises of the day, curtailing unnecessary expenditure, to contribute to missionary, Bible, and tract societies. No Christian should be satisfied without having some share in these noble efforts to spread the gospel. And this ought not to be left to the excitement of sermons and speeches. Much less ought we to be influenced by what others give, or by what will be thought of us. As a solemn duty before God, we should set apart a portion of our income to assist in inducing sinners who are beyond our own reach to follow Jesus. However small our gift, Jesus accepts it equally with the largest, if it comes from a willing heart.

But none should be satisfied with serving God by proxy; and great societies, calculated as they are to do so much good, will be productive of great harm also, if their supporters imagine that their responsibilities to the souls of their fellow men are discharged on payment of their annual subscription. No; a money offering, however large, is the smallest part of what Jesus expects. We are personally to labor in inducing others to follow Him. Every Christian should be a missionary in his own neighborhood, endeavoring to "turn many to righteousness." This is the work of the clergy chiefly, but not exclusively; and every true minister of the gospel will rejoice to see the members of his flock laboring together with himself in trying to save the souls of men. You can assist in the Sabbath school; you can visit your poor and sick neighbors; you can distribute religious tracts; you can avail yourself of the opportunities which daily occur to say a word wisely and kindly for truth and Jesus, warning sinners of their peril, and encouraging them to turn to God; and all can employ a method of usefulness, more important than any other, for which no other can be a substitute, without which no other will be successful - the influence of a Christian spirit and consistent life.

Our benevolence should only stop at the ends of the world, but it should begin at home. And first of all, we should earnestly pray and strive for the salvation of our near relatives and friends. Not a day should pass without an effort to do good to some immortal soul. Oh, what happiness will it be if God enables us to lead others with us after Jesus. What worldly enterprise can be so worthy of our zeal? What other labor can have results so momentous and enduring? "He who converts the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

LOVING ALL YOUR FELLOW TRAVELERS, FOLLOW JESUS

The pilgrims along this road often walk in different companies. There is some little variety in their order of march, in their signal words, the banners, and the tunes to which they set their joyful songs. But the songs themselves are the same; and the banners, though they bear various devices, have the same cross surmounting them all. The variations are comparatively unimportant, while the Way, the Leader, the Home, are the same. Then let us love them all, in proportion, not as they follow us, but Christ. If any of them refuse to acknowledge us as fellow travelers, this must not lessen our love to them. If we see in them Christ's image, if they are following Jesus as their Guide and Savior, they are our brethren, though they may worship in different churches, and with different forms from our own. Let us rejoice in their holiness and usefulness, and ever be prompt to show that we love them as brethren. If we think any of them so in error as to hinder their progress and their usefulness, we should point this out to them; not in bitterness, or envy, or rivalry, but evidently from love to Jesus and to their souls.

Similarly we should be willing to receive such counsels from them, and regard this interchange of thought as only a proof of love. We should help all our fellow pilgrims, and never put a stumbling block in our brother's way. Those who are strong should bear the infirmities of the weak, and all should travel on together, rejoicing in love to one another and to Jesus. The more closely we follow Him, the less will our sympathy be limited to our own particular church or party, and the more cordially shall we exhibit as well as cherish the desire, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

IN HOPE OF DWELLING FOREVER WITH HIM, FOLLOW JESUS

How can we ever be parted from Jesus? If we cleave to Him in life, will He forsake us in death? Does a faithful guide abandon those whom he undertakes to lead, when they most need his presence? Does a true friend forsake, at their greatest extremity, those who trusted in his affection? Is not that the very time when he is most closely in attendance? Jesus says, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you." And if He helps us to follow Him here, in spite of infirmities, and temptations, and sins, shall we not much more follow Him where there will be no encumbrances, no difficulties, no foes? Yes, we shall indeed follow Him "wherever He goes," and therefore to heaven.

He said, "Father, I will that those whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am." His wish will be fulfilled, "That where I am, there they may be also." "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." There, too, we shall meet all our fellow travelers; those who have preceded us, and those who follow after. We shall meet again with long-lost friends, never, never to part. What joy will it be to rehearse with them the events of the journey, and to see how the path was strewn all along with mercies. How blessed will be rest after toil, safety after peril, victory after conflict. And then we shall in company follow Jesus

forever. He will still lead us into fresh pastures, to higher and yet higher regions of knowledge, purity, and bliss. No carnal desires will drag us down, no sinful habits will cling to and entangle us, the flesh will no longer lust against the spirit, and no enemies will beset the road, to allure us from it, or check our advance. We shall forever follow Jesus, forever beholding fresh beauties in His countenance, forever discovering new glories in His character, forever experiencing fresh raptures in His love. "In Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Blessed Jesus, let this glorious hope of being forever with You animate me now on my journey. You are leading me to immortality—immortality to be spent with Yourself. Every step I take brings me nearer to this perfection of holiness and bliss. With what alacrity, what earnestness, what closeness, what perseverance, what love ought I to obey Your gracious command, "Come, take up your cross, and follow Me."