

Following Jesus with No Excuses

Evangelism Sermon and Study Group Lesson

By Mark Snowden



This sermon was developed for use with “The Macedonia Project,” a five year plan to mobilize healthy churches from across Missouri and have them “come over and help” churches in Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas. It is done in collaboration with the GPS 2016-20 emphases on Personal Evangelization and Starting Something.

Introduction: Scripture: Luke 9:57-62

Imagine Jesus enters this place. Who would you want to hear preach—Him or me? I would want to hear from Jesus, too! Praise God that we have His teachings in the Bible. We can trust that Jesus is speaking right now. In Jesus’ ministry, many people followed Him. Jesus invited some to follow Him and Him alone. Some did; some didn’t.

Charles Lowery, a Christian comedian, gave this illustration in *SBC Life*: A little boy came home from church and played in the creek behind their house while his mother prepared lunch. What he didn’t know is that his parents had invited the pastor and his wife to Sunday dinner that day. Before long, the little boy came running into the kitchen holding a limp frog. He said, “Momma, momma, I found a frog! I kicked it. I poked it. And I jumped on it!” Then the little boy saw the preacher and said, “And then the Lord called him home.”

How is it that we can act one way at church and another way on Monday morning?

This sermon prepares you to get rid of excuses that can fall short of being a genuine follower of Jesus. Spiritual transformation is required to shift our way of thinking – our worldview – to align with obedience to Jesus and Him alone. We can act like a Christian, have the same values as Christians, and know what is expected of us and still not be a genuine follower of Jesus!

1. Luke 9:57-58 – Behaviors

Examination: The man wanted to follow Jesus. He knew Jesus could heal the sick, feed multitudes, and cast out demons! What a great guy to align with! The man meant well to say he’d follow Jesus “wherever.” He was giving up everything in His mind. But He was also relying on Jesus’ safety net.

There are many who desire to align with the church. New business clients! More voters for the cause! Dating potential! Social networking! Help in times of trouble! Childcare!

But the Lord reminded the man that just wanting to be around Him wasn't enough. There was no security—no health and wealth were promised. Spiritual transformation is required to follow Jesus that prioritizes Him above everything else.

Interpretation: A young lady in China showed up at a registered church and told its leader that she was now a Christian and wanted to be part of his church. The wise pastor asked an important question, “What is it in your experience that has led you to think that you're a Christian?” The girl's countenance fell. She said, “Can't you tell? I'm wearing Levi jeans made in America and a Mickey Mouse t-shirt from America. See? I'm a Christian!”

Application: Our churches have raised up a generation of institutional Christians. They know what to wear to look presentable. They know how to run the church to keep it open. However they do not understand for the need to go beyond their own comfort zone! Jesus calls us to transform lives and communities with the Gospel! Are you a church member that shows up a few hours each week and then lives apart from what the Bible says? It's not about just acting the “right” way, it's about following Jesus with no excuses.

2. Luke 9:59-60 Values

Examination: Jesus invited people to follow Him. The Gospels list many accounts, especially for calling His Twelve Disciples. And in verse 59, Jesus is still at it. He didn't make a pressured invitation. He just invited people to follow Him. Is there a difference between inviting people to follow Jesus and inviting people to church? We can do all the inviting to church possible, but people need to be invited to follow Jesus!

Interpretation: There was a campaign by a large religious group that posted banners saying, “Come back to church this Christmas!” What a difference if they had been invited to come to Jesus. Jesus is enough!

The response given to Jesus was friendly and seems to be fairly responsible. He was concerned about the death of his own father! That's a great value. It's good character. But we get a different response from Jesus! Jesus recognized that the man's father was not dead and wouldn't likely be dead for many years. In Jesus' time, not being present at a father's death could result in being cut out of an inheritance. It's like being cut out of a will today. A blessing and a financial legacy was at stake.

Application: Rick Warren, pastor, Saddleback Church in Orange County, Calif., was a vocal leader that led the county to pass Proposition 8 that marriage was between a man

and a woman. The Mormons and Muslims supported Rick's lead. Had they suddenly become born-again followers of Jesus? No. They just shared similar values.

Jesus nailed the guy for his excuse. Spiritual transformation prioritizes Jesus not only above everything else, but it requires action. Not just cheesy goody-two-shoes behaviors that lack substance, but an active lifestyle that evangelizes, converts, and disciples. It transforms lives and communities with the Gospel. All the time. As you go. Whoever. Wherever. It's not about just having good quality values that make the "right" decisions, it's about following Jesus with no excuses.

3. Luke 9:61-62 Beliefs

Examination: Saying good-bye to one's family before leaving on a journey was immediate, fairly quick, and sought to obey the Law of Moses. Exodus 20 lists the Ten Commandments. The fifth one in says to honor ones' parents. The guy was sticking to not just cultural traditions, but it can be argued that he was merely Law-abiding.

Interpretation: Spiritual transformation means understanding that Jesus transcends culture and law. Evidently the man had already begun to follow Jesus. He was already down the road if he was near Jesus. Jesus gave him a quick proverb that could be said this way, "If you've committed to something and are in the middle of it, you can't turned back unless you want to be unfit for the kingdom of God." We know this is not talking about losing one's salvation, but counting the cost of discipleship. Have you just jumped onboard hoping for a happy life?

Application: By the time that Jesus said this to the man, He had already taught that to follow Jesus means to deny "self" and to die daily (Luke 9:23). The man that Jesus had encountered had already put his hand to the plow. He had committed to following Jesus and had taken the first steps toward Jesus. But he expressed a desire to hold back, go back, and renege on his commitment. He was driven by what he had been taught were "right" facts, but following Jesus requires no excuses.

Closing

When the sermon began, each of you let me know that you would rather hear from Jesus rather than me. And I agreed! However, if Jesus finished speaking and walked out the front doors of this church, would you follow Him? Men, would you turn to your wives and say, "I don't know where we'll stay, but we'll be with Jesus!" Women, would you turn to your husband and say, "Let's tell everyone about Jesus!" And students, would you say, "Whatever it takes, I will never follow anyone but Jesus!" The Good News is that when we follow Jesus He is *with us* from then on! Make that decision right now to follow Jesus with no excuses.

Invitation Hymn:

Softly and Tenderly (Jesus is Calling)

Small Group Study Guide**“Following Jesus with No Excuses”**

Bible Truth: Each of us need to get rid of excuses that can fall short of being a genuine follower of Jesus. Spiritual transformation is required to shift our way of thinking – our worldview – to align with obedience to Jesus and Him alone.

Issue: We can *act* like a Christian, have the same *values* as Christians, and *know* what is expected of us and still not be a genuine follower of Jesus!

Get Started: If you asked a man on the street to describe a good Christian, what would they say? (Allow time for responses.) Explain that today’s lesson deals with what it means to be a genuine Christian.

Context: Introduce the Scripture by explaining that Jesus had begun His ministry. He was preaching and had called many to follow Him. By this time He had chosen 12 men as His disciples, but there were many others who traveled along as part of a group wanting to be with Jesus.

Scripture: Luke 9:57-62: Read the entire passage through or tell it as an accurate Bible story.

Study: Engage everyone in discussion using these open-ended questions.

Head (facts):

- Encourage the group to tell the story section by section. Encourage them to not only learn the story, but to tell it to someone else in the coming week.
- What was each man willing to do in order to follow Jesus?
- What was Jesus’ response each time?

Heart (inspiration):

- Pray for God to lead and inspire each participant with His Truth!
- What are some key roles at this church that people are involved in? If someone is an active member at church, does that make them a Christian?
- Is it possible to act in a certain way that makes people think you are a Christian?
- What are a few key issues that you think Christians should be concerned about?
- Is it possible to vote in a certain way or advocate a certain position that makes people think you are a Christian?

- Ask for volunteers to identify several key Bible facts that a person should know in order to be a good Christian.
- Is it possible to know everything in the Bible and still not be a Christian?
- What are several things that Jesus said were needed to begin following Him? (*no security or even a place to stay, risking personal loss such as an inheritance, telling others about the kingdom of God, perseverance, etc.*)
- A definition of following Jesus is “someone who has a personal, obedient, and lifelong relationship with Jesus.” What does that relationship look like in the real world where you live?
- What makes a person to be a genuine follower of Jesus?

Hands (personal application):

- Why do you go to a ballgame? How important is your identity with the team?
- How would someone know that you are a fan of a certain sports team?
- What does it take for you to be a genuine follower of Jesus?
- How does this change your perspective on trying to be good enough to be saved? Having the right character qualities for God to love you? On being knowledgeable enough to make an informed decision?
- What changes do you need to make in your own life? In your relationship with Jesus? Do you need to surrender everything to Jesus in faith? (*Offer to meet with them after the session to discuss their decision.*)
- Who do you know that needs to turn everything over to Jesus and follow Him just as they are?
- Will you tell this Bible story to someone this week? (*Hold them accountable!*)

Memory Verse: And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23 KJV).