

Session 8

UNFOLLOW

Everyone is invited to follow Jesus. It doesn't matter what you've done or haven't done. It doesn't matter who you know or don't know. It doesn't matter how much you've been to church or haven't been to church. Jesus offers an open invitation to everyone.

Jesus invites you to relationship, not church or religion. His invitation isn't about what you should or shouldn't do. It's an invitation to a personal relationship with an invisible God who revealed himself through his Son, who was a visible person: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Being a sinner doesn't disqualify you from Jesus' invitation. In fact, it's a prerequisite to being invited. Everyone who followed Jesus in the first century and everyone who has followed him since was a sinner.

Doubt doesn't disqualify you from Jesus' invitation. It's a prerequisite to being invited. Even Jesus' first-century followers—the ones who ate with him and camped with him, had face-to-face conversations with him, and witnessed him performing

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miracles—doubted right up to the end. Their doubts were only swept away when they saw him resurrected and were able to touch the nail wounds in his hands.

Jesus urges you to bring your sin and your doubt and follow him. He wants to lead you to a faith that overwhelms fear. Why should you be afraid when the God who created the universe knows you and cares about you? We can face crisis and trouble fearlessly with a confidence in God that allows us to overcome our circumstances.

That's where Jesus leads ... if you'll just follow.

In this final session we're going to talk about an extraordinarily important question. It's important because somewhere along the way in every single person's faith journey is a temptation to hit the "Unfollow" button. If you haven't faced this temptation yet, you will. And when you do, you need to ask this question before you unfollow Jesus.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What is the most valuable thing you learned during this study?

What is the most challenging principle to apply?

VIDEO OVERVIEW

For Session 8 of the DVD

John's gospel records an event in which Jesus miraculously fed five thousand people with five small barley loaves and two small fish. Afterward, the crowd was so amazed that they wanted to immediately crown Jesus king. But Jesus got into a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee to a town called Capernaum. He began to teach in Capernaum, but some of the people who had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand showed up and started stirring up the crowd. They wanted to see Jesus perform another miracle.

Jesus decided to use this moment as a creative teaching opportunity. He explained that he fed them bread and fish, and now they're hungry again because that's how our bodies work. A meal doesn't satisfy us forever. But God can provide food for our souls that fills us up forever. And then Jesus said this:

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

John 6:53-54

It should come as no surprise that this had the effect of thinning the crowd. What Jesus said sounded like cannibalism. It sounded

sacrilegious. It certainly wasn't something they wanted their children to hear.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

John 6:60-61, 66

"Disciples" here doesn't refer to the Twelve but to the larger crowds that had been following Jesus around the countryside, listening to his teachings and seeing him perform miracles. Suddenly, they weren't on board anymore. They were beginning to hit the Unfollow button. They loved the miracles. They loved the healing. They loved the excitement. They loved the thought that Jesus might proclaim himself king and overthrow their Roman occupiers. But the stuff about eating his flesh and drinking his blood was too much.

Jesus knew the hearts of people, so he paused in his sermon, turned to the Twelve, and asked them if they were going to leave him too. Were they going to press the Unfollow button?

This is a relevant question for us too. Regardless of how long we've followed Jesus, the day will come when we're tempted to unfollow. You may think it'll never happen to you, but it will. It usually comes during a time of transition, temptation, or trouble. It may be when a job moves you from a familiar city to one that's unfamiliar. Transition shakes up your life. You're tempted to press Unfollow. It may be that your faith begins to get in the way of a romantic relationship or makes you feel guilty about your weekend fun. Suddenly, Jesus is in the way. He's inconvenient. And you're tempted to press Unfollow. Or it may be that you face financial challenges and following Jesus isn't helping. In fact, at least in the short term, it's making things worse. You're tempted to press Unfollow.

But in that dramatic moment when Jesus asked the Twelve if they were going to leave him too, Peter said something brilliant. That's a big deal because most of the time in these situations, Peter said the wrong thing. But this time he asked a question that cut to the heart of their dilemma, and it cuts to heart of our dilemmas when our faith is shaken. It's this:

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6:68-69

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No one else offers what Jesus offers. Peter could remember when he was on a fishing boat with his father, and Jesus came along and asked Peter to follow him into a life of greater purpose. Peter was invited into the story of God. He was invited into history. If he left Jesus, where was he going to go? Would he go back to being a fisherman? Would he go back to a small life, disconnected from God grand story? In that moment, regardless of the thinning crowds and the weird things Jesus had just said, Peter remembered that he'd been given the opportunity to follow the Savior of the world. How could he turn back?

MOVING FORWARD

Transition, temptation, and trouble always create questions.

Where's God? Why would God allow this to happen? Why didn't God come through for me?

It's okay to ask those questions. God is big enough to handle them. But it's a mistake to step away from Jesus just because you have questions and the answers aren't immediately apparent. After you've considered all of the questions and sorted through all the options, ask yourself another question. Ask the question that Peter asked:

To whom shall I go?

Salvation is free. Following Jesus will cost you something. But refusing to follow Jesus could cost you *everything*.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

"We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6:69