

Becoming A Follower of the Rabbi

In the time when Jesus walked among us on earth a highly regarded profession was to be a rabbi. A rabbi was an authority on the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. Rabbis memorized the Torah word-for-word and could explain its meaning, teaching it with full authority. Rabbis also had young boys as students who studied diligently under them, in hopes that they would someday become a rabbi themselves. In the New Testament Jesus is referred to as rabbi 14 times and as a teacher 40 times.

If a rabbi was considered the most honorable role of its time, could you imagine yourself having the privilege to be a student of Jesus Christ? Not only did Jesus Christ *know* the power of God's Word, He literally *had* the power. He had authority over wind and the waves, healed people, brought the dead back to life, performed miracles and rose in victory from the grave. We have the hindsight to know that Jesus is God, who lived among us, so we know how He wants us to live our lives. And, He knows the future. With that in mind, why wouldn't anyone want to be a follower?



Our church recently completed a 40 day study called the "Red Letter Challenge." The red letters refer to the actual words of Jesus Christ printed in the Bible with red ink. The idea of the Red Letter Challenge is that it is not enough to just know what Jesus said. The challenge is to put His words into practice in our lives. As we all are aware, "knowing" and "doing" are entirely different. Jesus didn't give us guidance on how to live our lives so that we would be knowledgeable and just cheer others on. He told us these things to change *our* lives and that of others.

Some of his teachings are easier to follow – to actually do -- than others. I have many friends who are service oriented and seek ways to help others. Jesus said, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45). Some people find it difficult to part with their hard-earned money, while Jesus said to give sacrificially. The hardest for many of us is to tell others about Jesus Christ. Yet, Jesus gave instructions to His followers, the disciples, in the Great Commission. *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation* (Mark 16:15). For some of us this may be difficult but you can be assured that Jesus will be with you every step of the way. Jesus wants us to step out of our comfort zone and share the gospel with others.

There are five overall themes of the Red Letter Challenge:

- Being
- Forgiving
- Serving
- Giving
- Going

Each of the 40 days in the study offered practical action steps and suggestions of how we can put Jesus' words into practice today. Here are some examples:

- **Being** relates to being in God’s Word. How do we know what Jesus actually said unless we take the time to read His own words for ourselves? And attend church regularly to be strengthened by the message and to be in the presence of others who are worshipping.
- **Forgiving** talks about forgiving others who have hurt us, as we want God to forgive us. The Lord’s Prayer asks God to “forgive our trespasses as we forgive others who trespass against us.” What is often overlooked is the importance of forgiving ourselves. Most people find it easier to forgive others than themselves. Forgiving also speaks to not being judgmental of others, as only God can judge. In our culture of deep division we need that today!
- **Serving** speaks to helping others, especially those who can do nothing for us in return. *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’ (Matthew 25:40).*
- **Giving** includes not only money, but some practical suggestions are donating food and cleaning out our closets and giving them to area ministries to help the needy.
- **Going** stretches us outside of our comfort zone to encourage others in the faith. One suggestion is to be a mentor to others or seeking a mentor to help you grow. Going also seeks opportunities to talk about Jesus – to our family, friends and neighbors. Jesus has chosen you to speak for Him. When He recruited His disciples He told them, *And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He says this to you, too. And what did they do? And they left their nets at once and went with Him (Matthew 4:20).*

Admittedly, these description are an over simplification of a wonderful, comprehensive study into Jesus’ teachings.

The challenge goes beyond the 40 days of study. There is a day 41. At the end of the 40-day study we don’t just put the book down and say, “That was nice. What are we going to talk about next week?” Our life is a work in progress. As we learn about how Jesus wants us to live our life, Day #41 *is* the rest of our life. As we live out our future we will experience what God has in store for us. It is intended to be a life changing process that we can build on as we seek to become closer to God. I found some areas to be easier to do than others, but I am seeking to make progress in all areas. Being a follower of Jesus is a personal choice. God is speaking directly to you. It all comes down to love. God loves each of us. He wants us to share that love with others through Being, Forgiving, Serving, Giving and Going.

The 40-day Red Letter Challenge is a starting point. We don’t have to “have it all together” to get started. Jesus’ disciples didn’t have it all together but they grew in the presence of the Lord. You can, too. You and I can become disciples of Jesus.

Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it (Luke 11:28). Let us use the greater understanding from Rabbi Jesus and increase our intentional actions to put His teaching into action. The conclusion of day 41 in the Red Letter Challenge says, “When we follow Jesus and His words, we find the life we were made for.”

The Bible says: *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24).*

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord. We pray that we can learn and be more like Jesus as we seek to live out his teachings in our everyday lives. Amen.

This devotion is based on the [Red Letter Challenge](#), a 40 Day Life Changing Experience, written by Rev. Zach Zehnder. The book also includes access to a video series by Zehnder.