



Follow

Practicing the Ways of Jesus

Lent and Holy Week 2025

Follow



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DATE	PRACTICE	SCRIPTURE
March 5 (Ash Wednesday)	Solitude	Mark 1:32-39
March 9	Sabbath	Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6
March 16	Prayer	Mark 11:22-25
March 23	Fasting	Mark 2:18-22
March 30	Scripture	Mark 7:1-13
April 6	Community	Mark 2:2-12
April 13 (Palm Sunday)	Generosity	Mark 11:1-11
April 17 (Maundy Thursday)	Service	Mark 14:17-26
April 18 (Good Friday)	Witness	Mark 15:16-47

What does it mean to Follow?

Who do you follow? We ask that question of social media (from Instagram to TikTok to LinkedIn), influencers, celebrities, athletes, journalists, authors, artists, musicians, and podcasters. Some folks we follow are people we look up to, respect, admire, and perhaps want to emulate. Others we follow we simply find interesting, captivating, or exceptional—we might not necessarily want to be like them, but we revere who they are or what they have accomplished.

Jesus is someone we might find ourselves wanting to both emulate and revere. And yet, sometimes the spirit is willing yet the flesh is weak. Our best intentions to follow Jesus sometimes take us as far as becoming casual observers or fairweather fans. Yet, what we don't recognize initially is this: when we don't follow Jesus or cease following him, we most certainly begin following somebody else, or at least something else. As Bob Dylan said, "You gotta serve somebody." He might as well have said: "You gotta follow somebody."

John Mark Comer, in his book, *Practicing the Way*, the book from which we built this Lenten Series (Thank you, John Mark!), describes being a follower as being a disciple. He puts it like this: "The question isn't, *Am I a disciple?* It's, *Who* or *what* am I a disciple of?"

What does it mean to Follow Jesus?

Following Jesus can take on different forms. Jesus can be followed as a wise teacher, a rabbi in whom we can find sage advice. Jesus can be followed as a social activist or community organizer, one who lifts up those on the margins and creates communities of awareness and love. And yet, to take Jesus at his word in Scripture is to follow him, not merely as an altruistic teacher of wisdom, but as the Chosen One, the Messiah who comes as both Lord and Savior, God incarnate. To follow Jesus on Jesus' terms does not mean Jesus isn't a wise teacher or moral exemplar; it means He is so much more.

The longer we follow Jesus, the more fully we recognize that the reward for following Jesus is... Jesus! We grapple with Jesus' ultimate claims for supremacy over all persons, places, things, and ideas in our life. We don't follow Jesus to bring us joy or happiness or meaning or purpose or security or comfort or even for a life that simply feels safe, good, and predictable. We follow Jesus for... Jesus!

Practically speaking, this pursuit of Jesus is placed, in Comer's book, in the context of following a rabbi. To apprentice under a rabbi was to organize one's life around three driving goals:

1. To be with your rabbi
2. To become like your rabbi
3. To do as your rabbi did

In our vernacular, for growing Christians, this means...

1. To be with Jesus
2. To become like Jesus
3. To do as Jesus did

Why is Lent a good time to focus on Following Jesus?

Throughout much of the church's history, *Lent* has been broadly observed as the season of forty weekdays and six Sundays leading up to Easter. In the Middle Ages, the English word, *Lent* (meaning "spring"), was adopted for this spring season, a period of preparation for Easter via self-examination and contrition, ushering in a season of spiritual renewal.

Some Christians may hold an aversion to Lent for a couple of reasons. Some view Lent as commending a legalistic approach to life. Lenten practice is seen as an external, behavioral modification of the self through rigid discipline or denial: "Aren't Christians saved by grace after all?" Others are bothered by the rituals of Lent—things like ashes, candles, and darkened rooms, all of which create a mood of somber lament: "Aren't we past the sad, empty rituals of religion anyway?"

Yet, we should not see Lent as an endeavor to win God's favor. Rather, Lenten practice is a heightened response to God's rescue and our favor in God's eyes through Christ. The Scriptures are full of *indicatives* (God loves you. God saves you. God forgives you.) followed by *imperatives* (So obey him. So walk with him. So be grateful). Lent trains us to respond to grace (the indicative) via obedience (the imperative). Lent should not be avoided for fear that it is legalistic. Rather, Lent should be observed as a season of amplified awareness of God's work on our behalf and the cultivation of our obedient response to that work.

And what might be said to those who ask, "Aren't we past the smells and bells, whistles and thistles, incense and nonsense? Aren't candles and ashes the relics of a bygone era? Mere objects that take up space in empty traditions?" Answer: "Absolutely not!" For we are creatures of habit who connect to tangible objects and expressions of faith. We are people who fully embody deep patterns, behaviors, and rituals—rhythms we might call "liturgies for living". To be human is not to be a mere bundle of nerves, a bag of hormones, or a brain on a stick. Rather, it is to be a fully embodied self that thinks, feels, and does—and often not in that order!

Think about the habits, patterns, and rhythms in your own life. What do you first do when you wake up in the morning? Or when you get to work? What do you feel on the commute home? What sort of smells do you love and of what do they remind you? Where do you go when you need to escape? What do you do when you need to feel released from anxiety or fear? What you think, feel, and do in these situations cultivates your "liturgies for living": Practices become habits become patterns become rhythms become liturgies for living. A practice is something you might try for 30-40 days, a habit is something forged in a season, a pattern is something that becomes almost subconscious for months, a rhythm is a valued cadence in your life that gets established for years, and liturgies for living are what form the decades-long trajectory of a life well-lived.

Good liturgies for living form and shape us in humanizing ways. Bad ones form and shape us in dehumanizing ways. Lent is a special season that trains our focus on the *how's*, *what's*, and *why's* of life. Lent allows us to center ourselves as we practice taking off vices and putting on virtues. This is what following Jesus is all about! And so, there is no better time than Lent to pick up these practices and give them a try!

What are the Practices we are exploring?

Lenten Practices, like New Year's resolutions, tend to start with our best intentions and fizzle out in the jumble of our old routines, business of life, and discomfort with change. This Lent we invite you to enter into these practices with a few guidelines:

Enter Prayerfully. Seek God's wisdom about how He might shape you during this season.

Enter Realistically. Change is hard, and most often comes incrementally. For this reason, we would recommend that you only adopt two practices from this list.

"Go with the Flow" and "Cut Across the Grain": Some of these practices match your temperament well, some of them do not. We recommend choosing one practice that aligns with how you're wired, and one that feels like a stretch.

Enter within a Community of Accountability. Share your plans with a friend, family member, or others in your Community Group. When other people are invested in your success, it helps you stick with it!

Keep a Follow Journal. As you participate in these two practices, along the way and at the end of the Lenten journey, consider the questions in the follow journal on pages 10 and 11. Write your answers down and share with a friend or in your community group.

Solitude

Solitude is a practice of withdrawal, in order to meet with Jesus.

Lenten Practice of Solitude: Set aside 30 minutes, twice a week, for solitude. Solitude involves withdrawing from two things: other people and distraction. It also involves being present to two things: your internal life and God's presence. This might be on a front porch, a park bench, or on a walk. During your times of solitude, set aside your computer, phone, headphones, and other noise, find a place of solitude, and rest in God's presence.

Sabbath

Sabbath is intentional pausing from work in order to rest, worship, and delight.

Lenten Practice of Sabbath: Each week, take a four-hour period of Sabbath. Open and close this time with ten minutes of prayer. During this time, refrain from doing work, either paid or personal. We also recommend refraining from using technology during this time. Use this time to enjoy nature, enjoy community, rest, and feel God's presence.

Prayer

Prayer is the practice of speaking to and listening to God.

Lenten Practice of Prayer: Each morning or evening or morning-and-evening, spend ten minutes in prayer, using the Lord's Prayer as a guide to prompt your prayers.

Fasting

Fasting is the practice of abstaining, historically this has been abstaining from food, though in recent times, other people fast from other things like alcohol, social media, or television.

Lenten Practice of Fasting: Each week fast from one meal. We recommend lunch. Rather than working through the time normally devoted to preparing and eating lunch, spend that time in prayer, thanking God for his provision. Enter into solidarity with those in our world who hunger, perhaps considering putting that saved grocery money into an organization or ministry that feeds the poor.

Scripture

Scripture is the practice of meeting with God through the reading of Scripture.

Lenten Practice of Scripture: Each day read one chapter of the Gospel of Mark. This reading pace will have you read through the book almost three times during Lent.

Community

Community is the practice of building deep relationships with others who are following Jesus.

Lenten Practice of Community: Each week, share a meal or beverage with a friend. During your time together ask the questions: Where are you finding the most joy in life right now? What is something that is causing you distress? How can I pray for you?

Generosity

Generosity is the practice of joyfully giving away your time, talents, and treasures.

Lenten Practice of Generosity: What do you guard most jealously? What do you hoard? Money? Possessions? During this Lenten season, make a weekly practice of giving them away. Donate money, leave extravagant tips, give away clothes, make someone dinner, loan someone your car, etc.

Service

Service is the act of putting others' needs before your own.

Lenten Practice of Service: Each day, replace one act aimed at yourself with an act of service. This could be buying a stranger's coffee, letting someone else merge ahead of you, doing someone else's chore, or asking someone about their day, rather than sharing about your own. It could also mean serving at the Care Cottage or some other volunteer opportunity.

Witness

Witness is the practice of telling others about your faith in Jesus.

Lenten Practice of Witness: Open the door to a spiritual conversation with three non-Christian people in your life by asking them the question: Did you grow up with a faith? Once you've asked the question, your only role is to listen well!

Practice 1: _____

What did I find “easy” about this practice?

What did I find “difficult” about this practice?

What did this practice teach me about myself?

What did this practice teach me about God?

Will this practice shape the way I live my life? If so, how so?
If not, why not?

Practice 2: _____

What did I find “easy” about this practice?

What did I find “difficult” about this practice?

What did this practice teach me about myself?

What did this practice teach me about God?

Will this practice shape the way I live my life? If so, how so?
If not, why not?

A few tips from John Mark Comer in his book, *Practicing the Way*

- 1** Start where you are, not where you “should” be.
- 2** Think subtraction, not addition. Let me say it again: Following Jesus is not about doing more, but doing less.
- 3** Take a balanced approach (Comer has a diagram of Alone, Abstinence, Community, Engagement on p. 210)
- 4** Take into account your personality and spiritual temperament. Work with your personality, not against it. If you’re more introverted and intellectual, carve out plenty of time to be alone, read, and think. If you’re more extroverted and action-oriented—go do stuff with other people.
- 5** Take into account your season of life and stage of discipleship. Life is all about seasons, and just as our schedules, budgets, and relationships change in various seasons of our journeys, so should our Rule of Life.
- 6** Keep a healthy blend of upstream and downstream practices. As a general rule, if you’re struggling with a sin of commission (a behavior you do and what to stop doing), you will need practices of abstinence. So, to overcome a porn addiction or gossip or compulsive shopping, emphasize fasting or silence or simplicity (respectively). To overcome a sin of omission (a behavior you don’t do that you want to start doing), you will need practices of engagement. So, to mitigate against apathy, for example, begin serving the poor. Of course, we all hate this, but the practices that are the hardest for us will likely be the most transformative. It’s just like the exercise mantra: Follow the pain. Yet at the same time (and we must embrace the both-and here), follow your joy.
- 7** Follow the J curve. Learning theorists point out that learning any new skill follows a J-shaped curve. When you attempt to grow in a new skill (from playing the piano to practicing Sabbath), you often get worse at it before you get better.

8 Do this in community. The current micro-resurgence of Rule of Life in the Western church is a joy to my heart. Unfortunately, it's mostly being run through the grid of Western-style individualism, with individual people writing their Rule of Life.

9 There is no formation without repetition. Change is all about consistency over time. Formation is slow, cumulative, and at times monotonous work.



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