



More Secrets
from the
Ancient Paths

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More Secrets from the Ancient Paths
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This book is dedicated to my wife, Melody.
*I cannot imagine what this journey would have been like
had you not been by my side.*





“FOLLOW ME!”

MARK 1:16-20

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.



The path leading down Mt. Arbel seemed harmless enough. By the time we had reached the Galilee, our group had logged so many miles, we didn't think twice about heading toward the northern slope of the great cliff. It was simply another hike on another day of a great hiking adventure. Our guide was leading the way, and we were following. If he chose the path down the northern slope, then so would we.

We had followed our guide for many miles in the foothills of Judea. We had followed again in the great wasteland of the Negev Desert. We had followed to the top of Ein Gedi's most dramatic waterfall and deep into Wadi Zohar. We had explored the great canyons of Qumran, climbing the hills as if we were hiding some Dead Sea scrolls of our own.

Everywhere we had gone, on every day of this adventure, we had followed without question. Though it exhausted us, we had not complained about the difficulty of the hiking or the brutal heat.

We had been warned what to expect, and each one of us had voluntarily chosen to be a part of the experience. That's why we followed so obediently, learning more every day of what it was once like to follow a rabbi in the land of the Bible.

Now we were following on Mt. Arbel.

The wide plain on top of Arbel offers an incredible view of the Sea of Galilee. We don't know if Jesus ever climbed Arbel, but it's easy to imagine him praying alone there. The view of coastline communities like Capernaum and Magdala is unmatched. And as the Bible tells us, Jesus often withdrew to lonely places for prayer¹ and at least once prayed the night away on a mountain.²

The testimony of the hikers in our group? Arbel is plenty lonely. It would have made a great place to pray. And it's *definitely* a mountain.

On this hike, we had climbed to the top, reflected on the price of desperate prayer, and started down on the northern slope.

This particular path was new to me. Though I'd climbed Arbel before, I didn't know it was possible to descend the dramatic cliffs on the

¹ Luke 5:16.

² Luke 6:12.

northern slope. Not being very fond of heights, I'd never even looked into the possibility! With every step toward the edge, the path seemed to shrink. At one point it was no wider than the width of my boots.

Had it not been for the steel rope attached to the rocks, it would not have been possible for most of us to have even attempted such a descent. We held tightly to the cable, inched along the path and found ourselves practicing the principles of desperate prayer.

To say that it was a frightening experience would be quite the understatement.

So why were we hanging on to the side of a cliff?

Because our leader had chosen the path.



As those of us in the rear made our way down, it helped to see that a great number of our group had successfully managed to finish the climb without falling to their deaths. It also helped not to have an option of turning around. If we chose not to follow, we'd lose our group for the rest of the day. That was a price none of us were willing to pay.

It was a lesson I would never forget. If you're going to be a disciple, there is no voting on the path you choose. If you're going to follow, there's no stopping the journey just because it might be a bit frightening. You'll rest when your rabbi rests. You'll leave when your rabbi leaves. You will go where he goes, do what he does, and store away every lesson for the day when you'll lead your own disciples.

On the path of discipleship, it has always been this way.

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How did Jesus put it?

“Follow me!”

It's the simplest of invitations and the most basic of instructions. It is incredibly short on details of what will come next. Arbel looms over his shoulder even as he speaks. The lake stretches out before him as he calls you. There is no telling where he'll take you. And that's a literal statement. If you decide to follow Jesus, *Jesus will not tell you* where you're going. Ever.

If you follow, you might be forced to climb the mountain. You might get into a crowded boat that might or might not stay afloat in a storm. You might be challenged to walk on water!

If you don't follow? Jesus will never force the issue.

Jesus doesn't force anyone to be a sold-out, all-in, walking-with-Jesus disciple. This is a journey for volunteers only.

Questions? There are dozens of them! “Where are we going, Jesus?” “How long will we be there?” “What will we do?” “How are we going to pay for this?” “What shall I tell my family?” “Will this be safe?”

In the meantime, Jesus is walking down the path. He offers no answers to all those incredibly important questions. He doesn't even appear to notice that we have questions. He is simply walking.

At any point along the way, Jesus is likely to turn around and see who's behind him. Need a simple definition of what a "Jesus follower" is? This is it. If Jesus sees you when he turns around, you've made the cut.

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If, at this moment, you find yourself trying to explain how you've managed to follow Jesus without actually following, we might have a problem. Why do we look for loopholes in such a simple contract? What is it about "follow me" that could be so hard to understand?

The path stretches before him, and it beckons us. The only way to discover what lies ahead on your particular journey of faith is to follow. The only way to head down a new road is to stop traveling on the old one. The only way to discover the treasures waiting for us is to let go of the ones already in our hands. The only way to discover the thrill of what Jesus has planned for us is to overcome our fear of the unknown.

Oh, the struggle we have with the invitation to follow!

It takes a lot of courage to put down your nets and head down a path where there may or may not be a paycheck waiting.

Once, a young man came to Jesus with a desire to follow. This guy had his act together. Confident, young ... and wealthy.

Jesus challenged him to sell all his possessions and give the money away to the poor before following. Though he obviously believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the "rich young ruler" couldn't believe enough to have a yard sale. He couldn't put down his nets the way Simon Peter had when Jesus called him to follow. Admittedly, the new guy had far nicer nets. He had far nicer everything. Given the choice of following Jesus or keeping his money, he took the cash. He couldn't take the leap of faith.³

Was he a believer? He certainly seemed to be. And be sure to note that Jesus didn't condemn the man for walking away.

But there was a penalty for not following.

Can you imagine the day when the rich young ruler realized that he'd missed the most amazing three years of human history just because he couldn't part with his Rolex?

³ See Luke 18:18-25.



Those who *had* followed Jesus told endless stories of amazing miracles. The blind had been given sight. The lame could dance, and boy did they! Lepers were healed. Funerals were interrupted. Storms were silenced and food was miraculously multiplied. They had passed out miraculous feasts and counted a miraculous catch of fish. They had been face-to-face with things that could be explained in no other terms than to say that God himself had been with them.

This had changed those who had followed. Tax collectors and prostitutes came together to enjoy the feast of forgiveness and never returned to immoral lifestyles. Zealots – nationalists willing to kill for their political views – found that only love could change the world. Even a few of Israel's highly respected religious leaders were profoundly changed!

18 For one horrible weekend, the crucifixion seemed to bury the Jesus movement. But after a glorious Sunday morning in Jerusalem, the resurrection brought Jesus and his message roaring back to life.

Those who followed Jesus were there for all of it. They were eyewitnesses. They knew his gaze, the feel of his hand on a shoulder, and the embrace of his arms. They heard his wisdom and caught his contagious laughter. The passion they saw in his life soon burned in their own hearts.

This is the penalty of not following. Anyone who hadn't had the courage to follow Jesus when he was alive had missed the most amazing story in history!

Oh, the grief of missing a miracle. Oh, what *profound* grief at missing a lifetime of miracles!

The good news in this?

It's never too late to follow. It's never too late to see what the rest of today holds, if we would only follow.

The Gospel writers do not tell of a sparkle in the eyes of Jesus when he invited those first disciples to follow him. But it must have been there. A man talks with more than his words, you know. Something in his eyes told of an incredible journey that lay ahead. Something in his face hinted of an experience that simply could not be missed. Something in his smile convinced young men to lay down their jobs, leave their hometowns, and follow.

The first were fishermen. Simon, Andrew, James, and John were mending nets and marking time when Jesus showed up. They stank of fish and wet clothing. Their hands and minds bore the callouses of their work. It was good work. It was honorable work. It was the profession of their families.

Even so, something in them yearned for more.

"Follow me!" Jesus said. "You won't believe what's going to happen later today," the grin on his face seemed to communicate. "Want to be a part of it?"

They put down their nets and followed. Soon, their eyes sparkled, too.

It doesn't matter where you are. You can follow in prison as well as you can follow on the mission field. You can follow in an office, classroom or on the highway. You can follow while wearing military fatigues, hospital scrubs, or a clerical collar. You can follow while raising chickens, overseeing a bank or keeping preschoolers.

It doesn't matter what you've done. Prostitutes, politicians, and preachers have *all* learned that there's enough grace for all of us.

The only thing that matters right now is what you'll do with the invitation. The ancient paths are waiting. The invitation still stands.

Are you looking for a little sparkle in your own eyes? The words of Jesus are still hanging in the air, some 2,000 years later.

"Follow me!"



Make the Lesson Your Own

Where are you in this process of following? Are you just beginning your walk with Christ or have you been at it for years? Has it been a consistent walk with Jesus or a process that has known a few starts, a few stops, and a lot of start-overs?

Take time to reflect on the concept of following Jesus. Why do you think it's so difficult for most of us to overcome our fear of the unknown? Do you have a story of your own about following Jesus, despite your fears?

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Reflect on the stories from the pages of the New Testament of the disciples and other people who followed Jesus. Notice how simple it was for many of them to start following ... and how difficult it was to stay on the right path. It's certainly not unusual for followers of Jesus to make mistakes or act like non-followers. Is that part of your story, too?

Start a discussion with someone you know who's on the same journey. See how many parallels you can spot between your stories and the stories of the earliest followers. Before you wrap up the conversation, be sure to thank God for the amazing grace that makes room for imperfect people who still walk the path of discipleship!

