

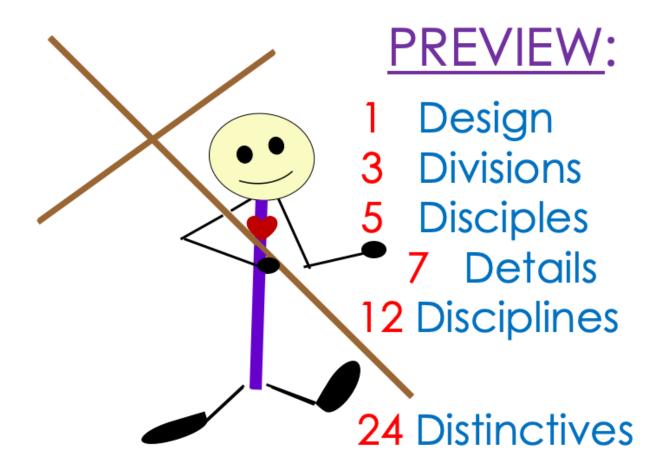
The FLOW

Adult CURRICULUM

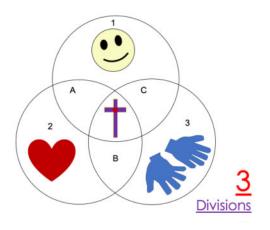
#36
Following By Faith
Acts 17:6

(Come And See Christianity book pages 99)

The FLOW



SECTION SIX: 12 Disciplines



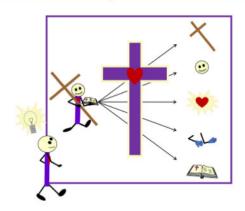


The Disciple's "Hands" put into action the truth & love of God's Word, God's will, & God's ways.

In short, when each Christian's Head, Heart, & Hands are united in purpose & power, the family of God is living as the Body of Christ!

24 Family Distinctives:





24 DISTINCTIVES:

The "distinctives" are

a family portrait... When you
add God's Word, God's Spirit,
God's Truth, God's love, and
God's people all together,
the distinctives are what we
look, love, & live like:-)

We are...



INTRO:

As we begin to **see the beautiful, biblical portrait of Christ's faith-filled family** defined and described by God's Word, will, and ways, it is critical to remember that the Holy Bible is to ALWAYS BE our ultimate source, authority, and interpreter in ALL things pertaining to one's understanding of reality and application of truth in love.

Remember,

The biblical Church is Christ's missional family... Moreover, God's Word reveals our Father's will and His family's ways.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <u>17</u>so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here are 24 defining & describing HANDS-on DISTINCTIVES of Christianity:

True Christians are biblically, miraculously, intentionally, missionally, and imperfectly...

- 1. Responding to grace
- 2. Repenting of sin
- 3. Trusting the Bible
- 4. Obeying God's Word
- 5. Growing in Christ
- 6. Living Spirit-led
- 7. Praying for guidance
- 8. Following by faith
- 9. **Dying to self**
- 10. Carrying our cross
- 11. BE-ing The Church
- 12. Loving one another (truly loving one another)
- 13. Equipping the saints
- 14. Exemplifying supernatural unity
- 15. Ministering as ambassadors
- 16. Discerning matters shrewdly
- 17. Worshipping God vertically
- 18. Experiencing Him horizontally
- 19. Proclaiming the Gospel (no matter what)
- 20. Fishing for men
- 21. Making discipled warriors
- 22. Winning spiritual warfare
- 23. Loving our King
- 24. Serving His kingdom

PRAYER:

LORD, we seek to bless You with all that is within us. Help us here, we pray, to be that blessing as we come to better understand You and Your eternal truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Help us to see with Your eyes and love with Your love, all that You would reveal to us through Your Word, Your will, and Your ways. May we grow in our grasp of Your realities, Your means of restoration, and Your mission of reproduction. In the holy name of Jesus, we pray. Amen and Amen

CONTEXT:

Macro

This lesson marks another major transition point in our curriculum's eye-opening explanation of Christianity. By way of review, we began in Section One with the reality of Almighty God having 1 Divine DESIGN (also known as a biblical worldview and the eternal application of Jesus Christ's Gospel). In Section Two, we addressed the 3 DIVISIONS (Head, Heart, and Hands) that make up the "being" in every human being. Next, in Section Three, we demonstrated how Christianity accounts for, defines, and describes all of humanity, every person, past, present, and future. We noted that all people can be identified as one of the 5 DISCIPLES – Lost, Lover, Learner, Leader, or Lifer. Moving forward, Section Four revealed, engaged, and explained the 7 fundamental DETAILS of God's Divine DESIGN... because we all need to know what we need to know. To be more specific, those seven truths are: The Foundations, The Framework, The Facts, The Fight, The Faith, The Family, and the truth about Forever.

Then, in Section Five, which we just completed, our focus shifted from HEAD based truths to 12 HEART shaping exercises or disciplines - each having the potential to strengthen one's personal relationship with Christ, His Church, and their collective mission: <u>bringing God glory by finding & growing more glorifiers.</u>

We used the acronym J.E.S.U.S.'S. P. S.W.O.R.D. to outline and harmonize a biblical, missional, and intentional methodology for growing in God's love - & His loving witness. The 12 HEART DISCIPLINES are: Journaling... Eating-nothing (fasting)... Scripture-intake... Understudy of Scripture... Stewardship... Solitude... Prayer... Serving... Worshipping... Outreach... Relationships... and Development.

Now, our curriculum and study will transition to The HANDS. This is where *Christians demonstrate to the world that Christ is in their worship & witness.* Whereas our time spent in the HEAD sections (1-4) focused on the truths that Christians need and seek to LEARN, and our concentration on the 12 HEART DISCIPLINES of section 5 helped us to grow in God's LOVE, our sixth and final section will walk through the 24 DISTINCTIVES, which explain & exemplify how Christians are to faithfully LIVE... and fully BE The Church... together – all by God's grace & ALL for His glory!

God's Word puts it this way:

"Let us not love with word and tongue but in action and truth." – 1^{st} John 3:18

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. – Acts 2:46-47

I. DISTINCTIVES are FRUIT:

It is important to realize that God's miraculous and authentic **Christian DISTINCTIVES** are the FRUIT of saving grace and faith (Ephesians 2:1-10). As Jesus described in John 15, people can do nothing outside of their abiding in Him and obeying His Word, will and ways. In short, there will be no fruit unless one remains attached to and provided for by the true Vine and divine Root. With that said, a cautionary note is worth sharing here, beware the counterfeits that abound around the world. **Plastic fruit is deceptive vs. DISTINCTIVE!**

Galatians 5:22-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

II. DISTINCTIVES are FAMILY:



DISTINCTIVES, by definition, are those "distinguishing characteristics that are notable for having a special quality, style, and/or attractiveness" (Dictionary.com).

When it comes to God's family, the true Church, each Christian and their individualistic DISTINCTIVES are as unique as their potential. At the same time, in the same way that a billion unique snowflakes can be combined to make a single snowstorm, or countless swatches of scrap fabric can be sewn together to make a single quilt, so it is with God's family. The LORD creates His Christian family with a both/and combination of DISTINCTIVE uniqueness, as well as DISTINCTIVE love and defining unity.

Christianity's DISTINCT family (ecclesia) has a DISTINCTIVE unity (koinonia).

"By this all people will know that you are My disciple, if you have love for one another."

— John 13:35

"The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

III. DISTINCTIVES are WITNESS:

The most biblical and healthy understandings of Christianity will include an embrace of two overarching and DISTINCTIVE purposes. Namely, per God's Word, will, and ways, every Christian has received miraculous, saving grace, as well as the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to:

1. Bring glory to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

2. BE Christ's witness.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, **and you will be My witnesses** in Jerusalem (locally), and in all Judea and Samaria (regionally), and to the end of the earth (globally)."

God's DISTINCTIVE people have been filled with His Holy Spirit for the express purpose of living DISTINCTIVE lives. When the world sees the LORD's loving family living out their divinely empowered and God-honoring worship, work, and warfare, the resulting fruit will serve as a faithful witness, built with supernatural, grace-based, and missional DISTINCTIVES.

"God created me—and you—to live with a single, all-embracing, all-transforming passion—namely, a passion to glorify God by enjoying and displaying his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life."

- John Piper

The Christian Distinctive

What distinguishes Christianity from all other religions is that it is a *revealed* religion. Christianity is not about our search for God or our means of finding him. Christianity is not a religion that works its way upward. It is all about God coming to us — God in grace making himself known to us and making a way for us to enjoy fellowship with him.

And so, at the very heart of Christianity is, simply, a message — a message from God to us about what he has done to bring us to himself.

If Christianity is distinctively revealed religion, then it is also uniquely *authoritative*. It does not offer itself as the best and highest of human thinking about God or even the best or most successful of human efforts to know God. It professes to be nothing less than the unique word from God, his very own self-disclosure and the record of the actions he has taken in Jesus Christ to bring us into fellowship with himself.

One of Rudyard Kipling's characters declares, "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone; He don't obey no orders unless they is his own." That is to say, human religions lack authority — they form their own ideas and "discover" their own beliefs.

By contrast the Christian is "under orders," because unlike human religions, Christianity is a revealed religion — divinely revealed. We Christians are not our own touchstone of truth, and we do not confuse our ideas about God with His own self-revelation. We learn truth about God not from "inner lights" within ourselves but from God's own objective Word.

And apart from this external authority, there is no Christianity. This, at bottom, is Christianity's leading distinctive.

And so, we Christians prize Scripture as God's Word. We joyfully submit to it. And we enthusiastically proclaim its message of grace in Jesus Christ to the world.

- Dr. Fred Zaspel

"Faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Message

God has a perfect plan!

God also has an unequaled power & an unstoppable people (to the extent that His people are in fact HIS people [see 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 and 1 John 2:19], empowered by HIS Spirit [see Acts 1:8 and 1 John 4:1], who are <u>FAITHFULLY</u> FOLLOWING the full context and proper interpretation, as well as the divinely designed application of God's Word, will, and ways). In short, when the mission, measure, and ministry goals of God's people are unified in simple, loving, biblical obedience, the grace and glory of Almighty God will be displayed and exemplified by His people – locally, regionally, and globally.

To place this missional message into the framework of our curriculum and lesson, take note, when imperfect but passionate Christians are actively and accurately FOLLOWING Jesus BY FAITH, their God-honoring light and fight (see Matthew 5:14-16 and 1 Timothy 6:12) will BE at its best! In such times, the world's ignorant will be informed, the skeptics will see proof, the hurting will be helped, the hopeless will get hope, the Christian(s) will be inspired, and God will be glorified!

To that end, those who learn, love, and live to BE worship-full and FAITH-FILLED FOLLOWERS of Jesus The Christ, per God's Word, will, & ways, exemplify the witness of The Messiah's miraculous missionaries, those who were sovereignly-selected, set apart, & sent out as His saved, sacrificing, & sanctified servants. Such authentic and devoted disciples are supernaturally appointed to BE the Almighty's aroma (2 Corinthians 2:15-17), His army (Ephesians 6:10-20), as well as His personally, biblically, & missionally empowered ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Biblical faith produces biblical following and biblical following proves biblical faith... ALL by God's grace & ALL for God's glory!

BIG IDEA: FOLLOWING BY FAITH is the Christian's grace-based declaration,

explanation, and witness to their biblical obedience and loving

Christ-likeness - no matter what!

PREVIEW:

- 1. FOLLOWING
- 2. BY FAITH
- 3. NO MATTER WHAT!

TEXT:

Acts 17:6

<u>6</u>And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These **men who have** <u>turned the world upside down</u> have come here also...

1. FOLLOWING

Illustration:

"Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It's simply taking God at His Word and taking the next step.

– Joni Erickson Tada

"Without faith a man can do nothing; with it all things are possible."

– Sir William Osler

Explanation:

FOLLOWING is a loaded word with multiple missional implications.

For example, in light of Christ's clear Matthew 4:19 calling ("Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men"), we can see that biblical FOLLOWING includes but is not limited to:

GRACE	Our following of Christ is the fruit of His grace.
SELECTION	Christian following begins with biblical election.
RECOGNITION	Jesus is LORD! He is the true Christian's LEADER.
HEARING	Following Christ requires hearing God's Word(s).
SUBMISSION	Biblical following requires holistic surrender.
OBEDIENCE	Following is faith & grace based, biblical obeying.
SANCTIFICATION	Following Christ refines Christians & the Church.
ACTION	Following is a verb for the Head, Heart, & Hands.
DEDICATION	Biblical following involves ongoing commitment.
MISSION	Christian following has micro & macro purposes.
CHARITY	Following is sustained by God's loving charity.
GLORY	Biblical following aims to bring our God glory.

The road that leads to heaven is risky, lonely, and costly in this world, and few are willing to pay the price. Following Jesus involves losing your life and finding a new life in Him.

- David Platt

Jesus says, "I want you to follow Me so fully, so intensely, so enduringly that all other attachments in your life look weak by comparison.

- Timothy Keller

You cannot be Christ's servant if you are not willing to follow Him, cross and all.
What do you crave? A crown? Then it must be a crown of thorns
if you are to be like Him. Do you want to be lifted up?
So you shall, but it will be upon a cross.

- Charles Spurgeon

Application:

The holy and holistic call to FOLLOW Christ FAITHFULLY includes the Christian's Head, Heart, & Hands. Do not miss the Lord's Divine Design being put on display in the humble harmonizing of Christianity's mandate for biblical learning, loving, and living (1 Timothy 4:16). When one weaves the words of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 together with those declared by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, the biblical follower's Head, Heart, and Hands come quickly into focus. Praise God, His Word here is simple and straight forward. The Christian's Head must be FOLLOWING God's full context, biblical truth. Their Heart must be FOLLOWING in and with Christ-like love. And finally, the Christian's Hands are to BE doing God's "good works" (Ephesians 2:10), as opposed to merely thinking about or talking about such things... "Let us not love in word or tongue but in action and in truth" – 1 John 3:18

Consider this biblical application to the biblical call to FOLLOW Christ:

1 John 2:6

Whoever claims to abide in Him must walk as Jesus walked.

We need to highlight one other obvious observation regarding Christianity's FOLLOWING BY FAITH, one that is sadly, even tragically, often overlooked. What is this obvious yet overlooked application? Get ready... Followers follow. True followers truly follow. It is that simple. At the same time, the inverted contrast is also every bit as obvious & every bit as overlooked... Non-biblical followers.

The next logical, even typical question... one often asked by those looking for exceptions, excuses, and/or loosening loopholes... is simply this: *How can I know if I/we/they am/are actually FOLLOWING Christ?*

Here again, the answer is short & succinct. Those who FOLLOW Christ are living and loving in FAITHFUL obedience – not perfectly... but biblically & passionately. That is, those who truly FOLLOW Christ will live with Him & His "few" on the "narrow way" (Matthew 7:13-14). His real & godly FOLLOWERS will also be committed to their cross-carrying (Luke 14:27) and in their "love for one another" (John 13:35). Those who don't have genuine Gospel FAITH... won't FOLLOW Christ to the end, NO MATTER WHAT. Keep in mind, these standards & indicators were declared by Christ to be nonnegotiable, defining characteristics of those who are... &/or are not, His FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS.

"Because Jesus walked such a long, lovely path utterly alone, we do not have to."

– Jeffery E. Holland

2. BY FAITH

Illustration:

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

- C.S. Lewis

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." – <u>Hebrews 11:1</u>

"You do not need a great faith, but faith in a great God."

– J Hudson Taylor

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls." – 1 Peter 1:8-9

"Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time." — Oswald Chambers

Faith is a reality and it reaches out to facts that are more solid, more real, more substantial, and more eternal than anything registered by our physical senses.

– John Phillips

Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'" – <u>Matthew 17:20b</u>

Explanation:

In a world that is overrun with countless forms of corruption, counterfeits, and cheap imitations, the need to authenticate & prove what (or who) someone or something is has become essential when dealing with matters of high value & deep substance. Think about it... in the same way that "motive matters" (and reveals the "why?" or heart behind a movement), the same can be said about the "how?" that is involved. In other words, to paraphrase the old adage: "the ends don't justify the means," reader be warned, when it comes to FOLLOWING Christ, "methodology matters."

Any form of or foundation for FOLLOWING Christ that is not BY FAITH is faulty and will be found damnable by Jesus on Judgement Day. As hard as that truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) is to hear, countless souls (many of which who build their spiritual houses on the sand of church properties) eternally & desperately need to hear it. **Here is our LORD's way of saying it...**

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

23And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

"Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light."

– Helen Keller

Application:

"Faith must trample under foot all reason, sense, and understanding."
- Martin Luther

"'Go,' said Jesus. 'Your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road." – <u>Mark 10:52</u>

"Faith begins with a backward look at the cross, but it lives with a forward look at the promises. — **John Piper**

3. NO MATTER WHAT!

Illustration:

Winners never quit and quitters never win.

- Vince Lombardi

"...you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." - <u>James 1:3</u>

Faith is a powerful force, and it speaks the language of the spirit. When you are possessed with the spirit of faith it changes the way you see things, and how you speak about them.

- David Odunaiya

"To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.

- Thomas Aquinas

Explanation:

"NO MATTER WHAT!" can be seen and declared as a battle cry... as a personal promise... as an ideal or aspiration. Given Christ's call and charge to His Church, such unwavering devotion in the context of eternal worship and spiritual warfare is more than fitting - - it is the fruit of FAITHFUL loving and a FOLLOWER's living. At the same time, in the rawness of reality, it can also be reduced to a cheap wish, a broken promise, &/or an empty, deceptive response that is designed to manipulate... Jesus said beware & BE ready!

Matthew 24:4b-14

"See that no one leads you astray. 5For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. 9"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. 10And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13But the one who endures to the end will be

Saved. 14And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

If I am going to know who Jesus is, I must obey Him. The majority of us don't know Jesus because we have not the remotest intention of obeying Him.

Oswald Chambers

Application:

People inside & outside the contemporary church culture are in dire need of hearing & heeding God's Word when it comes to "NO MATTER WHAT!" loving & living! In a very blunt & biblically affirmed way, the principle of perseverance serves as one of the eternal forks-in-the-road between heaven and hell. To say it differently, this lesson offers a loving litmus test & compassionate call to all those who are comfortable & complacent in church culture, who are not yet truly in Christ.

The lostness of these souls is evidenced in part by their defiant actions & faithless attitudes, both of which expose the lies of their lips through their living-lukewarmness & defining disobedience (Revelation 3:16). In the end, religious quitters will be revealed by their Christ-less, cutting & running, cowardice choices when things get hard. Please remember, especially if this seems like a difficult pill to swallow, it was Jesus who said there will be no cowards in heaven (Revelation 21:8) and, even more, it was Jesus who listed the cowards amongst some of the most horrific & vile sinners in Scripture.

Hebrews 10:36-39

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; 38but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." 39But we are not of those who shrink back & are destroyed, but of those who have faith & preserve their souls.

You can do amazing things if you have strong faith, deep desire, and just hang in there.

- Norman Vincent Peale

God has stepped in at the last minute more than once in history (remember Moses at the Red Sea?). And He can do the same for you. Keep turning the pages by faith and let the story play out to the end.

- Dr. David Jeremiah

CLOSE:

"Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." – 1 John 5:5

Anyone who has **believed** God to be miraculous, and prayed earnestly for a miracle, understands the complexities of living a life of faith while surviving the context of reality.

- Christine Trevino

This lesson has once again sought to unify & harmonize the truth & love of God's Word, will, & ways. FOLLOWING BY FAITH (NO MATTER WHAT!) shows the reader how and why defining terms like "FOLLOWING" must be done biblically & missionally. At the same time, we have seen that both motive & means matter when it comes to FOLLOWING Christ. Why? Because if one's FAITH is faulty, their FOLLOWING will also be, by definition, missing the mark.

Another fruit-checking aspect of Christianity is one's faithful longevity. Anyone & everyone who fails to cross their finish line, FAITHFULLY FOLLOWING and carrying their cross... loses their race.

Listen carefully. What is about to be shared cannot be overstated... As important & affirming as one's start of the Christian race is... as important as their journey with Jesus is throughout their race... without a miraculously empowered, Gospel grounded, grace-based, and blood-bought endurance... without the supernatural ability to persevere through persecution and life's deepest valleys... without the Gospel's promised push and power to get a person across life's finish line in a FAITHFULLY FOLLOWING reality IN-Christ... that person's race and soul will be lost for all of eternity.

Embrace the intensity of these truths. You & those around you need to have the implications & ramifications of this lesson resonate & germinate within you... so that Christ-like, empowered & impassioned, FAITHFUL FOLLOWING will flow out of you for the rest of your life. To God be the glory! Amen and AMEN

For What?

"Faith is living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."

Martin Luther

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." – <u>Hebrews 11:6</u>

"Faith is unseen but felt, faith is strength when we feel we have none, faith is hope when all seems lost."

- Catherine Pulsifer

So What?

"If you remove enjoyment of God from faith in God, it ceases to be faith."

- John Piper

We must learn to "fight the good fight of faith" ourselves, or we'll never develop our spiritual muscles. - Lilliet Garrison

Faith is the belief that God will do what is right.
- Max Lucado

Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed <u>life</u> and good works is a false declaration. – **Greg Laurie**

It is only because He became like us that we can become like Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

You find that the things you let go of while following Jesus were the things that were going to destroy you in the end.

Francis Chan

Now What?

"All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them."

– J Hudson Taylor

We must come to good works by faith, and not to faith by good works.

- William Gurnall

If you take a leap of faith without God telling you to do so, then you are jumping presumptuously in self-will.

- Adam Houge

If I am to wholly follow the Lord Jesus Christ, I must forsake everything that is contrary to Him.

A.W. Tozer

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, thank You so much for the Truth and Love of Your Word, will, and ways. Please help us to absorb and apply ALL that You have shared and commanded in the Bible. May our heads be infilled with Your defining Scriptures, for the express purpose of informing, inspecting, and inspiring our sanctified hearts and serving hands. In Jesus' name we pray.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen and Amen

Support Sermon: "Aiming For Upside Down"

Acts 17:1-9 October 25, 2015

Sermon Series: The Way Of God