



A

SIMPLE PATH

TO

FOLLOWING

JESUS

RUSTY GEORGE

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# *Introduction*

Congratulations!

You just took a huge step in your life by deciding to follow Jesus.

Jesus said that whoever puts their trust in him will have eternal life.<sup>1</sup> Maybe you signified that by praying to ask Jesus to be the leader and forgiver of your life. Maybe you made a confession before others and said, “I believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>2</sup> And maybe you followed that up by being baptized into him.<sup>3</sup> At this point, we begin to wonder one thing . . .

Now what?

How do you follow someone you’ve never met or seen, or have yet to have a conversation with?

Is it even possible to be like Jesus?

What does being a part of the church have to do with this?

Over the course of this book, I want to show you how. Simple. Memorable. Doable.

I think you’ll discover that following Jesus may not always be easy . . . but it’s not complicated.

## CHAPTER 1

# Where's the Fine Print?

EVER WONDER IF THE DECISION TO FOLLOW JESUS comes with some fine print?

Like those medications you see advertised on television:

\*May cause anxiety, depression, an itch on your back you can't reach, fear of clowns, running with scissors, barking at the moon, and an unhealthy obsession with fire.

Obviously I'm exaggerating, but you get the point. Is choosing Jesus similar in that after making the decision to follow him, you're waiting for the fine print? "By the way, now you need to . . ."

\*love others, forgive those who hurt you, pray for those who persecute you, have joy, be patient, stay faithful, be gentle with your words, give to the hurting, tithe, live in peace, go to church every week, serve in your church, read your Bible every day, pray without ceasing, be kind to everyone on the freeway, don't drink, don't smoke, don't

go with girls who do, and confess your sins every night, for if you don't, you might wake up in hell!

We don't know what to do with all the things in the Bible that seem to be necessary, so we make them into a to-do list. Then we treat them as the way to get God's attention and favor.

For centuries, we've been trying to figure out how to get God's attention. And not only get his attention, but also his approval. It has driven some to exhaustion, others to disbelief, and some nearly mad. Is this really what Jesus intended when he said, "Follow me"? Is this what God had in mind when he said, "You will be my people and I will be your God"?

Sometimes people do seemingly crazy things to live out the fine print.

Cain and Abel had to be the first. They were the sons of Adam and Eve. They grew up outside of Eden and had never known what it was like to have walked with God in the cool of the day like their parents had. So getting God's attention and gaining his favor was something that was not only new to them, but also something they sought to attain. They each prepared offerings to be presented to God, but someone went cheap. Abel brought a gift that was both extravagant and intentional; Cain brought leftovers. Abel brought meat; Cain brought grain. (Is this proof that God is not a vegetarian?) Whatever the case, Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was not—telling us very early on that

there are right ways and wrong ways to try to connect with God.

The tower of Babel comes next. Was it pride or was it passion that caused these foolhearted people to decide to build a tower toward heaven? They wanted to make a name for themselves. They wanted to touch the sky. They wanted to be God-like in their presence and notoriety. Was this an attempt at immortality? At any rate, the metaphor is rather pronounced as an effort to be noticed by man, disguised as a method to reach God.

Fast-forward to the New Testament and you see the Pharisees taking things up a notch. They received the Old Testament law and made it their priority to be close to God. They kept the laws and then some. They had laws to keep the laws to keep the laws. These guys were the masters of overkill. No one would utter the name of God—Yahweh—so they shortened it to “Ya” (thus, Hallelu-Ya, or Hallelujah). When writing that name, they would write a letter and go wash themselves, then write another letter, repeat. I’m sure they were grateful God’s name was not Rumpelstiltskin. The problem with their way of life is they were so focused on the law of God they couldn’t see the Son of God when he arrived.

This strange collection of efforts doesn’t end there.

In AD 400 we learn about a man named St. Simeon, who was rather extreme as well. He joined a monastery at the age of sixteen, but even this proved to be too worldly, so he shut himself in a hut for three years and went the entire time of Lent without eating or drinking. After this, he moved to the

desert to “imprison” himself in a small cave. But too many people sought him out, asking him to pray for them, so he finally decided to withdraw as much as he could. He had a pillar erected fifty feet in the air, where he built a small platform and decided to live out his days up there in communion with God until his death. He stayed on the pillar for thirty-six years. And you thought the Sunday service was long. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Creative and painful ways to connect with God are not found only in the past, but also in the present. A man named Carl James Joseph from Detroit, Michigan, hit nationwide news when he began dressing like Jesus and carrying a cross down the street. Carl, referred to as the Catholic Pilgrim from Detroit, has been living without money and depending on the generosity of others for twenty years. Because of all this, he has been given the nickname “The Jesus Guy.” The Jesus Guy has now visited over twenty countries and has become a well-known figure in the old city of Jerusalem. When asked about his choice to do this, he states he simply wants to emulate his Lord.<sup>2</sup>

So is that what it takes to follow Jesus?

Around 730 BC, we are given a phrase from the prophet Micah who was trying to get God’s people to follow God again. They were God’s people, his royal priesthood, a holy nation, blessed to be a blessing, but they were living below their calling. They were consumed with hedonism, selfishness, and idol worship. They would drift into pits of despair, were obsessed with self-preservation, and wallowed in their

own fears and misfortune. It is into this setting that the prophet Micah is called to bring a word of realignment.

I wonder if you need to hear those words. Perhaps you are stuck in what seems to be an endless cycle of selfishness, despair, self-preservation, and exhaustion. Perhaps you know what it's like to be stuck in the performance trap of religious perfectionism. Maybe you're wondering if there is another list you've missed or another scorecard to fill out. What does it really take to get God's attention, to stay in God's good graces, and to live a life in the center of his will and blessing?

The prophet Micah gives Israel words that will be overlooked and passed over, but fortunately, passed on. And we learn what God does look at, how God does judge the heart, and what we should focus on. It's not another set of tasks to add to our already growing religious to-do list; rather, it's a statement that encapsulates the heart of God.

*Justice, mercy, humility.* Three words that can change everything.

Granted, following Jesus is not always easy, but it was never meant to be complicated.