



**The Way-Paver Society**  
**Chapter 1**  
**Following Jesus**

Stephen Bly

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Janet Chester Bly

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## **What Does It Mean To Follow Jesus?**

Jesus said to his disciples,  
"If anyone would come after me,  
he must deny himself  
and take up his cross and follow me."  
Matthew 16:24 NKJ

### **Where Do We Start?**

So, you're a spiritual seeker. You may even have a passion to know what following Jesus involves. You're definitely not alone. You belong to a special select group of millions who walk this earth right now.

Start by learning the basics. Determine to be the best disciple possible. In this eBooklet, you will learn four secrets to spiritual success. Then consider the common obstacles to overcome. And don't forget to review the fine print cause.

### **Sally's Story**

Sally Stewart is serious about following Jesus. She is a young housewife and mother who quit teaching school when Brian was born. Sally's husband, Bill, is a fireman whose work schedule leaves Sally home alone several days a week. She wondered how she could follow Jesus. She wanted very much to get together with other young mothers to share problems, needs, and ideas.

She decided to start a weekly young mothers' group where both friendship and Christian faith could be freely exchanged. Her neighbor, Debbie, was interested too, even though she was not a professed follower of Christ. Debbie indulged in crafts of all kinds. The two concocted a plan to invite others over for craft projects and snacks with an occasional inspirational message by Sally. They spread the word around the neighborhood, put a notice in the weekly shopper and contacted the nearby preschool to put up flyers. On the first meeting date, six other gals besides Sally and Debbie showed up. But the morning turned into a disaster. Eight squirming, playful, and fighting cherubs ruled and reigned.

"Next week," Sally announced, "we'll get a babysitter for the kids."

Sally secured a Sunday School room at her church and someone to watch the baby and toddlers. The combination worked. The next week ten gals participated. Within three weeks, eighteen joined them. Most didn't attend church, yet they didn't seem to mind Sally's short devotionals. After one especially giggly session together, they tagged themselves the Happy Homemakers. However, eighteen women meant twenty-six children. Soon complaints emerged at church board meetings about the commotion and mess.

"It would be alright if there weren't so many kids," said one church member.

"It's not even a regular church program," another objected. "Sitting around pasting Christmas card holders and making photo albums doesn't seem like the type of program we should support."

The board voted the Sunday School room, otherwise only used on Sunday mornings, would no longer be available to the Happy Homemakers. Sally found another site for the nursery, but she felt she was doing outreach ministry that should be encouraged by her church. Following Jesus took her outside her church.

### **Don's Story**

Don is determined to follow Jesus, no matter what. He took several speech classes to fine tune his communication skills. His first attempt at public speaking was at the Christian Men's Club.

He related his story of how he came to Christ and changed his whole philosophy of running his hardware business. He worked on the talk for weeks. He carefully planned each story, illustration, and bits of humor. He practiced in front of a mirror being serious yet not looking uptight, being relaxed. He memorized the talk. A lot of prep, but he was determined to do his very best.

He could tell the audience really responded.

They cried when he wanted them to cry. They grinned when he wanted them to grin. They seemed to understand the main points and react to every story. When he concluded, they cheered and applauded with a good number of "Amens." Don felt a sense of satisfaction in doing something well for the Lord.

When he and wife Peggy left the Memorial Building for their car, clouds covered the stars. The parking lot shadowed darker than normal. He overheard a couple walking behind them.

The man said, "Too flamboyant and slick. You'd think he was trying to sell us a new lawn mower. Just another glory seeker jumping onto the gospel bandwagon."

Don was crushed. He shelved his speaking ministry for quite a long time. Trying to follow in Jesus' steps didn't turn out like he hoped.

Don and Sally over-succeeded. The aftermath confused them.

Following Jesus and finding success in ministry can sometimes make you suspect. Grow your church but don't super-size. Preach the Bible but watch out for shallow theology. Draw folks in but be wary of gimmick promotions. Praise God for conversions but keep it low key not phenomenal.

Spiritual success often draws criticism. But then, so does failure.

Aiming for ministry success isn't wrong. But negative responses easily derail enthusiasm when it's misplaced. When we leave out the spiritual purpose.

Why are you doing your ministry? For whom?

### **My Story**

Years ago I possessed the Great American Dream: loving wife, happy kids, challenging job, comfortable home. Yet a missing element gnawed at me. I felt apathy as I entered a rut, a cycle of week after week repetition. This is when I discovered God. Or should I say, He revealed Himself to me. He was what I lacked. I found Him through faith in Christ. I believed in God and the gospel of salvation He provided.

Within a few months I quickly settled into another rut, although a sacred one. The cycle of meetings, services, and volunteer projects added many hours of activity but not the knowledge my life was worthwhile. I wanted to make a lasting impact on my community and world.

Ten years from now, would it matter I spent two hours debating the trustees over whether to put camel hide tan or avocado green carpeting in the youth chapel?

Would my "Jesus Saves" Christmas lights have any eternal value on my neighbor who struggled through a sticky divorce?

Would my screaming every Wednesday afternoon for fifteen fifth graders to settle down and memorize their Bible verses really have a lasting, positive effect on their young lives?

Perhaps. But I wanted to know. I wanted to invest my energies in a sure thing with eternal results. On the other hand, I didn't intend to abandon any regular duties or responsibilities. I wanted to follow Jesus, to do what He wanted me to do, to follow in His steps to where that lead me.

But where did spiritual ambition fit in? Was that acceptable, approved Christian behavior? I wanted my life to count. Or was I chasing a worldly mirage, a bubble that could explode in my face?

Humans long for significance. Sometimes that translates to the desire for public recognition. Or personal connection with people who give unconditional love and admiration. A God-given drive that should be fulfilled within God's purpose, it's often distorted with a grab for piles of material goods. Or a workaholic pursuit for career advancements. Even the passion to do whatever it takes to get others to love us.

Psychologists say essential to everyone's well-being is to a) find someone to love, and b) find something important to do.

I had the first need met. Now I faced the second in the spiritual dimension. Not wanting to get my attention off following Jesus and trying to preempt Him instead, I determined to look closer at His life example.

### **The Successes of Jesus**

Jesus had no fear of excellence. One of the most powerful and dramatic verses in the New Testament is Mark 7:37. An astonished, overwhelmed with amazement crowd exclaimed, "He has done all things well!"

"Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, 'We have seen remarkable things today'" (Luke 5:26).

After He looked up to heaven with a deep sigh, he went into action. He healed a deaf and dumb man. And He did it with incredible sensitivity, attentive to the man's needs, problems, and feelings. Like His heavenly Father in creating the world, before we messed it up with sin, what He did was deemed very good (Genesis 1:31). Doing good deeds overcomes evil.

Jesus aimed at high standards for each interaction, every act of kindness, and for any miracle He performed.

Jesus and His disciples and a mix of curiosity seekers attended a wedding celebration at Cana, a joyous occasion. With such a large numbers of guests, some unexpected, the host ran out of wine. At his mother's urging, Jesus turned the entire water reservoir of six twenty-five gallon jugs into very fine wine. That was at least 150 gallons, enough to satisfy the thirst of the whole village.

Jesus over-succeeded. He does all things well.

Later He faced the dilemma of feeding 5,000 hungry men and their families. In the miracle of the loaves they not only all received plenty of food, but leftovers filled twelve big basketfuls.

He over-provided. Jesus does all things well.

Once while He taught the growing crowds, He was rudely interrupted by the destruction of the ceiling above Him. The room hazed with dust as a paralyzed man appeared through a hole in the roof. Would Jesus heal the man brought to his attention by friends? That's what they wanted and all they expected. But Jesus had more in mind.

He startled with these words: "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Afterward the man was healed. Jesus knew his most critical need. He not only brought healing, but healing with a lasting spiritual purpose.

Jesus does all things well.

Jesus taught about what constitutes true greatness. Jesus' followers spent a lot of time arguing about which one of them was the greatest. They mentally divided up the spoils of the Kingdom. They argued over imaginary places of honor. Jesus confronted their ambition. He did not squelch it with blistering tirades about the evils of wanting to be great. He didn't force them to submit to a stringent discipline of forced humility. Instead He said, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Mark 10:43).

Jesus provided a basic blueprint for attaining spiritual greatness. To find success with a purpose, that is, spiritual greatness, is a basic drive in most people of faith. Like Sally and Don. Rather than trying to suppress that drive, Jesus channeled such motivations in the right direction. He provided principles and practical applications. For daily living. And to impact your world.

### **Be A Way-Paver**

The fiery prophet John the Baptist earned a national following in his time and inaugurated history's greatest movement. Courageous, noble, revolutionary, he operated from great conviction.

Jesus considered him a great man. He said, "Among those born of women, there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28). John rated as high as Moses, Elijah, and Daniel. Yet John's ministry lasted three years at the most. He never performed a miracle. His life ended with prison and beheading.

How come Jesus considered John a spiritual success? What was his secret to greatness?

**First**, he knew his life mission. He understood his specific task and how to do it. He preached a simple, direct, and clear message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

He offered no apology for his pronouncement. Though blunt, the statement was helpful and encouraging.

If you sailed down a river enjoying a pleasant picnic with good friends on a beautiful spring day, the anxious shouts of a bystander on the riverbank might be very annoying. If he shouted, "Stop! Turn around! Don't go that way!" you might shake your head in disgust tell your companions, "There's someone who really wants to spoil our fun. What an intrusive person."

Yet if he warned of a treacherous 100-foot waterfall just around the next bend, and you had sense enough to finally pay attention and paddle to shore, you'd consider that a very positive, life-saving warning.

With fearless, reckless abandon, John sent a pointed message to the religious leaders. He pronounced God's judgment against the Sadducees and Pharisees. He had a great desire for them to understand clearly what God was saying.

They trusted in their physical relation to Abraham to keep them in good standing with God.

They considered themselves special, chosen ones.

John told them, "You are no more chosen than the rocks beneath your feet. Humble yourselves instead."

He pronounced a verdict on Herod, king of Galilee, too. He called him to account for his immoral claims on his brother's wife. That caused immense repercussions. He was arrested and eventually beheaded.

Some might say he should have used more tact, however, John knew his message and his mission.

**Second**, John was great because he realized and respected his relationship to Jesus. He knew he was second fiddle, always would be, and settled in to that role. He gave everything to serve that purpose. Content in what he was made to do and be.

He said of Jesus, "After me comes One who is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals."

When they tried to confer upon him higher honor than was due him, he stated, "I am not the Christ...I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Even when it meant losing some of his closest followers, John did not hesitate to point them to Christ. He John was always aware of his subordination to the Lord.

**Third**, John refused to let personal desires divert him from his divinely called mission.

In John 3:22-30, the ministries of John and Jesus overlap. Both preached and baptized in the upper Jordan River valley. When John's disciples pointed out Jesus drew bigger crowds, John reminded them his job was to carry out his mission regardless of numbers of people involved.

"A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven," he said.

When John's followers began to follow Jesus instead, he rejoiced. That's the crux of his calling. Believing in Jesus wasn't enough. They must follow Him on a journey through rough patches and difficult choices. To go where He leads.

Jesus was the bridegroom and John the best man: "He must increase, but I must decrease." Jesus must increase to accomplish why He came into this world. To save and redeem us. To defeat the works of the devil. To fulfill prophecy. To bind up the brokenhearted and set captives free.

**Fourth**, he took his doubts and fear of failure to Jesus.

"And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them'" (Matthew 11:2-5).

From the dark dungeon where he'd been thrown, John needed to know he'd given the right message, sent the people to the true Savior. John was the way-paver. He preceded the Messiah. He paved the way for others to follow Jesus. And he wanted to make sure his life's work hadn't been in vain. He didn't see for himself the results: the miracles, the kingdom forming.

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

No matter your ministry, learn from John. Join this select society of disciples. Learn to be a way-paver.

### **The basic beginning.**

If you want to point others to Jesus, know the way yourself. Be able to explain the steps, the turning point, that brought you to Him. Show how you continue to learn who God is and daily follow Jesus.

Every time I drive through San Francisco I get lost. My otherwise keen sense of direction flails on the Oakland Bay Bridge. Or on the Peninsula. Or some mystery elsewhere.

I once asked a pedestrian how to get back on the freeway across the Golden Gate Bridge. He began with a complicated, "Up two signals, turn left, or is it right? Then down three blocks, hang a right past the tower, and two blocks or maybe six blocks north. You can't miss it."

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Well, I overheard the bellhop tell the man next to me in the elevator."

I didn't want hearsay. I wanted concrete, firsthand advice from one who had been there.

Any spiritual success with true purpose begins with knowing Jesus as personal Savior and Lord. Be able to explain your journey to Him. Point others to the trail. Practice relating the basic truths of the gospel.

If you can't figure where to begin, consider 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

-- Christ died for our sins.

-- He was buried and raised from the dead.

-- He appeared to many witnesses.

-- He appeared to me too.

Tell the sequence of events and what it means to you in your own words.

### **You want to be a way-paver?**

Make a list of at least five people you desire most to experience God's grace. Be specific. Do not put down "my friends" or "my family." List names.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now think of ways to remove any known obstacles that hinder their spiritual progress. What lies do they believe? What deception have they been taught? Is the barrier intellectual, personal, or social?

### **Raesh's Story**

Raesh Makil was a young Hindu student studying in our country. I wanted very much to have him find a relationship with the Lord. He heard the gospel message many times. I shared it with him again. I told him my personal testimony. Yet he was in no way ready to follow Jesus. He revealed a long list of personal hurts and hassles from his past. All he wanted to do was talk to someone who cared enough to listen.

So, that's what I did.

For one long weekend and through several letters and phone calls, he spewed it all out. Then one night I received a call from Raesh. He stumbled into a church meeting in his city that evening and finally surrendered to Jesus. The big obstacles and heartaches removed, he made his way to the Lord God.

### **Some Common Obstacles**

What keeps people from a true vision of who Jesus is and wanting to follow Him?

~~ Complexity of life

The simple, rural, slow-pace existence eludes many. We live on the run. Run to school. Run to work. Get to meetings on time. Fix the downed computer. Rush through dinner. Race across town. Collapse in bed. We feel a step behind. Staying ahead seems to burst just as its in our grasp. No time to consider the soul and spirit, life and death.

"I'm just too busy." It's like writing a will. "Oh, I really need to do it. I will someday. Honest. But I'm so tied up with other things right now. It will have to wait."

~~ Guilt

"If you only knew how rotten my past is." I'm too bad. There's no hope.

Or their life's been so good, why should they have all that and heaven too? What about the starving and homeless? And all those who've never heard about Jesus? Why should some hear the truth and others never do?

~~ Aimlessness

"I'm too ill...or too broke...or too confused to think about it right now." Can't think clear. Don't feel good. Nothing to offer God.

Contentment with hopes and wishes rather than plans and action are enemies to being a way-paver. Aimlessness strikes against relationships. That is why some go nowhere. It plagues careers and work habits. The aimless need a plan.

~~ Half-heartedness

"I really don't know enough about it." And really don't care.

More than education is needed. A kick in motivation will help. Prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit required.

~~ Doubt

"I know better than to believe all that mystical religious stuff."

They've been conditioned to disregard or debunk matters of faith by philosophies taught based on human traditions and worldly principles that set themselves against God's truth claims (Colossians 2:8).

Some are tapped out spiritually. Disbelief slows down consideration of truth or pursuit of what's real now and what's ahead in the future. When a believer promises them the moon, they want to touch and test a piece of Grade A moon rock. Lead with logic and reason to break through fuzzy thinking.

~~ A Faulty Lifescope

"What difference will it make, anyway?" Start with...abundant life here and Get-Out-Of-Hell free card there.

A long-range thinker will push for excellence in every part of life. Including the spiritual sphere: body, mind, soul and spirit.

Terri and Jeannette grew up together. They shared classes from the fourth grade through high school. Then Jeannette was killed in a car accident. Terri attended the funeral. As she stood by the grave she wept, more for herself than Jeannette. "It could have been me. Is that how life is meant to end? A polished wooden casket lowered in a dark, muddy hole? Is that all there is?"

Was Jeannette only a physical organism that had now disappeared as though she never existed? The thought plagued Terri. Until she lost her best friend, Terri preferred gratification and comfort while starving her soul. She realized at a gut level she lived only for herself. Jeannette's death threw her a huge curve. But where to go from here? She needed a way-paver to come alongside.

What are the barriers to seeking Christ those on your list bear?

### **Fine Print Clause**

Caution. Joining the Way-Paver's Society requires diligence, discipline, integrity, and singleness of purpose. You may have to go against the current, sacrifice time, give up something. Some sincere folks may misunderstand what you're trying to do.

Keep your own self cleansed within. Quickly confess sins and faults to God and ask for forgiveness. Every sin is based on belief in a lie, so sift it out. Be willing to obey Him, no matter the cost.

Way-paving involves a constant process in some cases. And lots of time. Some suggestions for dealing with those God brings to you.

Encourage setting priorities. To do those things in life they'll regret not doing.

Reason with them. The gospel message makes sense. It is rational.

Explain as many times as needed the steps to following Jesus.

Push them off dead center. Don't let them sit there and rot.

Assure them they can come to God just as they are.

Listen to all their heartaches, failures, and worries.

Come alongside and help them back to health.

Show by action your complete trust in God.

Challenge them to a faith commitment.

Love them with God's kind of love.

### **Come Alongside Another's Ministry**

John was the advance man. He gathered and prepared the crowds and turned them toward Jesus.

In the days of the circus coming to town, the most important person was the advance man. He arrived in town a week or two early. He made sure the posters got put up. He secured the proper permits. He sent publicity to the newspapers. He did all he could to build anticipation of people for the great and glorious day of the circus arrival. If he did his job right, the streets lined with cheering crowds. Almost everyone in town appeared, except the advance man. He hurried to the next town to arrange for the following week's performance.

Are you paving the way for another's ministry?

Here's some ideas that may spark others...

Is your car crammed each Sunday as you go to church?

Do you volunteer to babysit so others can enjoy a deserved break?

Do you donate time to your church office so church leaders have more time for prayer and the ministry of the Word?

Does someone need a substitute backup for a Sunday School class?

Have you invited the children on your block to your house for a teacher to present a kids' Bible class?

Can you offer building skills to enlarge space or make rooms more practical to use or comfier?

List names of people near you with prominent, busy ministries:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Surmise your abilities. What can you do?

Ask first. What do they need? What would be of true help and not hinder?

What date can you begin?

Keep in mind at times the best thing you can do to serve another is stay alert and wait for a summons.

### **Focus The Honor Where It Belongs**

Any accomplishment goes to God.

We are not asked to do good works in a closet. Even way-pavers will often be seen by others. Jesus knew that. He instructed His disciples in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Don't worry if your good works get attention. But give God the glory. Some ways to do that...

#### **A. Keep your eyes on heaven.**

It's the old look-up-to-the-sky-and-others-will-stop-and-look ploy. Find ways to keep focused on Jesus. Others will tend to follow your lead.

For instance, when Mrs. McPhail heaps compliments about your beautiful flower arrangement in the church entry hall, reply something like this, "Isn't it wonderful how God made such perfect blossoms?"

**B. Remember your part is only one facet of what God is doing in the situation.**

Don't allow yourself or anyone else to view your actions as having greater value than their actual worth. Whenever someone makes a point of how much his non-Christian neighbor enjoyed the Bible study you led last week, mention also your gratitude for the ministry of hospitality of those who opened their home. Indicate too his own part in outreach in bringing his neighbor to the study.

#### **C. Welcome a sensitive, loving critic.**

Pay attention to those who will honestly evaluate your actions. Value the discerning who are not afraid to point out failures. Force yourself to assess the truth in it beyond the smart of emotional hurt. We all need trusted bubble-poppers to keep pride from swelling.

#### **D. Collect praise bouquets and daily release them to the Lord.**

Corrie Ten Boom did that. She accepted praise and admiration as graciously as possible. She enjoyed the fragrance and beauty for a moment. Then each night she gave them back to God before they faded and wilted.

Again, being a way-paver is not easy. Nor is the commission meant to be temporary. It's an ongoing life-style of hard work. With great rewards. One good thing, the duties can be done in the midst of most any lifestyle. Enroll in the exclusive Way-Paver Society to experience success with an eternal purpose.

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### **Dig Deeper:**

For individual or group study...

Carefully read chapters Mark 1 & Mark 7. Ask the Holy Spirit to clear your mind and help you understand how this applies to you.

### **Interact With Jesus:**

- Engage the vivid, detailed, action-packed Book of Mark. It's all about Jesus. Read each part as though you were there.
- Follow Jesus through the scenes and details. What is He doing? Write down what you might...smell? Hear? See? Taste? Feel?
- How would you explain the responses of those around Him? Would yours be the same? Why or why not?
- John the Baptist preached "the Kingdom of God is at hand." How would you describe the Kingdom of God?
- In Mark 1:8-12 God affirms Jesus as His beloved Son. Do you have any doubts about who Jesus really is? What would it take to prove Himself to you? How would you describe the work of God's Spirit with both John and Jesus?
- Mark 1:22 relates the people were astonished at the strength of Jesus' teachings, that He taught with such great authority. What import do Jesus' words have in your life?
- Jesus prays alone early in the morning (Mark 1:35-37). Why do you think He needed to pray? And why be alone?
- In Mark 1:38,39 what was Jesus' mission? Was it to heal everyone sick around Him or to deliver an important message? What do you think yours is?
- In Mark's time, the government was corrupt, their culture hostile to all they believed. Try to imagine what it would be like following Jesus under those conditions. How will you keep strong?
- What do you think is Jesus main objective in what He does?
- What are you learning about following Jesus?
- Share an aspect of one of these stories with someone else, how it impacted you.
- Pick out a verse or passage to memorize.
- Get active. What's the next thing He's leading you to do? Today? This week?

~~~~~The End~~~~~

**Following Jesus** paperback edition available here:

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## About the Author:

**Stephen Bly** (1944-2011) served 36 years as pastor for churches in California and Idaho. He graduated M. Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He also authored and co-authored with his wife, Janet, over 100 books of nonfiction and fiction for adults, teens, and kids. ***Following Jesus*** was edited and adapted from *Radical Discipleship* (Moody Press, 1981) by Janet Chester Bly.

Stephen was also a Christy Award winner and finalist for his inspirational westerns.

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