

# FOLLOWING JESUS

## PLANNING GUIDE

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important decisions that you'll make in this life is deciding who you'll follow. Who you follow determines the quality of life on earth and the life after. There is no greater life than the one lived Following Jesus! It is a life where you lay down everything, only to find you have more than you ever could have thought or imagined.

*Following Jesus* is a 4-week sermon series built to strengthen and encourage new and seasoned believers in their walk of faith. Each week covers a core theme of discipleship like knowing Christ and the Word, the importance of church community, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Having a strong foundation in the truth of discipleship is imperative as we lay down our lives to follow Jesus.

Every sermon in this series is fully customizable so you can tailor it to fit your church and your context. All the media included in this kit has been professionally made by one of the industry's top producers so that the visual presentation is as powerful as the sermon content. It is our sincere hope that your church community will grow in maturity and discipleship through the *Following Jesus* series.

# WELCOME

## GET ACQUAINTED

This kit contains everything you need to plan and host a powerful four-week sermon series. Included here are practical resources for promoting the series, powerful visual aids, and editable sermons to help reduce and focus your preparation time.

### INCLUDED RESOURCES:

- 4 Customizable Sermons
- 4 Sermon Bumper Videos
- 1 PowerPoint Template
- 1 Facebook Promo Video
- 1 Sermon Series Countdown Video
- 1 Sermon Series Planning Guide
- 4 Social Graphic Images



# GET STARTED

## PLAN

A great campaign begins with prayer and planning. This section of the guide will help you think through the steps and strategies needed to maximize the *Following Jesus* series within your context.

- 1. Pray.** Begin by asking God to direct and inspire your plans for activities and events connected to the *Following Jesus* series. Pray that He will move within the hearts of your members and your community to bring people to a place of deeper trust in Him and commitment to His design for their lives.
- 2. Read.** Read through the sermons and other resources in this kit and watch the video clips. Giving yourself a good overview of the available resources will help you as you communicate with your leaders and plan your events.
- 3. Cast Vision.** Meet with your leadership team and cast a vision for how you believe the *Following Jesus* series can affect your church and your community. Consider using the promotional materials in this kit, as well as prayer and discussion to help excite your team and create a unified vision.
- 4. Engage Your Leaders.** The *Following Jesus* series will provide ministry opportunities across all areas of your church, so plan to meet with all your ministry leaders to ask for their help and support. Be sure to listen to their ideas, suggestions, and needs in order to make this a meaningful campaign. Encourage your leaders to make the events and themes of the *Following Jesus* series a focused priority and to pray for the services and outreach plans. Keep communication channels open to help all your ministries work together and support the overall goals of the church through the events you plan. Some of the leaders you'll want to coordinate with include:
  - **Teachers:** The *Following Jesus* series will likely stir up some important questions for members of your community about what it means to live on mission for God, or how they can best follow God's calling on their life. Be sure to connect with a handful of mature believers in your church body ahead of time who will be available to meet with others in a more personal setting. They can provide a listening ear, prayerful support, and sound advice.
  - **Parking, Greeters, and Ushers:** Plan for additional church service attendees during the four-week sermon series. Make sure you have sufficient volunteers and parking spaces.
  - **Children's Ministry:** Since you will have new families visiting your church, you can also plan on having more children in your children's ministry. Talk with ministry leaders about lesson plans, visitor gifts, and information packets for visiting parents, as well as childcare volunteer requirements. See the Host section for more information.
  - **Small Groups:** If you plan to invite visitors and church members to sign up for small groups during or after the four-week *Following Jesus* sermon series, make sure to talk with your small group leaders in advance. Encourage group leaders to prepare ways to communicate the small group opportunities and to register those interested. Encourage them to welcome new members and to be prepared to integrate them into their groups smoothly.
  - **Assimilation:** Talk with your assimilation team about plans to follow up with visitors through phone calls, emails, letters, and visits. See the Follow Up section for more.
- 5. Create a Detailed Plan.** Use this guide, as well as the kit resources, to create a detailed plan and schedule that includes action steps, leader responsibilities, and deadlines specific to your church.

**6. Partner with Other Churches.** An individual church reaching out to the community can have a transformational and lasting impact. But if one church can make a difference in a community, imagine the possibilities when multiple churches work together! The resources and potential in the church are immeasurable if we are only willing to join together as the whole body of Christ and invite entire communities to church in a unified effort. The *Following Jesus* series is an ideal opportunity to join with the broader Christian community in your area to accomplish something bigger together than you can alone. Churches that have teamed up for similar campaigns have experienced the benefits of unity, bonding formed around a common cause, greater media exposure, and continued, long-term partnerships. Here are some tips for a successful partnership:

- **Form a prayer team.** Allowing a way for representatives from each participating church to pray together creates unity and commitment throughout the community.
- **Establish an area coordinator.** This person is not necessarily a pastor, but will be the point person for the planning and logistics of the event. This person will be responsible for coordinating the roles of each church, which should be put in writing and distributed to help everyone share the same expectations.
- **Engage senior church leaders.** Inspirational vision casting by respected leaders in the church community is vital. Pastors listen to other pastors, so it is important to engage them in the conversation about the series and ask them to leverage their influence with other senior pastors in the community. Start with churches you already have a relationship with and work out from there.
- **Establish regular communications.** Make sure all of the partner churches know the best ways to communicate with each other. Distribute a contact list to everyone involved, with guidelines for how interactions can best take place.
- **Promote together.** Working together will help pool resources, as well as present a unified message to the community. Partner to promote the event using tips from the Promote section of this guide. As a partnership, you may consider putting up citywide billboard(s) and creating one Facebook page for the whole citywide movement.

“COME CLOSE TO GOD  
AND GOD WILL COME  
CLOSE TO YOU”

# "HOW YOU SEE JESUS WILL AFFECT WHAT YOU RECEIVE"

## PROMOTE

- 1. Start Early.** Begin promoting the *Following Jesus* sermon series at least three weeks in advance. This will allow church members time to invite family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.
- 2. Cast Vision.** Good leaders are critical to the success of any effort. However, the impact of your event truly depends on the involvement of the whole church. Most members of a congregation rise only as high as the expectations set by their leaders, so cast a vision of complete participation. Help your congregation see that this is not just an opportunity for them to grow deeper in their trust for God. It is also a chance to throw open the doors of the church and welcome the people of your community to experience the love and truth of God. Ask everyone in the congregation to prayerfully consider how they can be involved in the outreach efforts, and whom they will personally invite to be part of *Following Jesus* campaign events.
- 3. Communicate with the Congregation.** Get your congregation excited about how God will shape and transform their lives through the series. Share details about the upcoming services and follow-up events. Also, ask for additional volunteers to act as greeters, childcare helpers, ushers, parking lot attendants, and hosts. Use your church newsletter, emails, announcements, bulletin inserts, etc., to inform and inspire your church members. Have each ministry communicate their volunteer needs so members can find the best place to use their time and talents toward this effort.
- 4. Equip Your Members to be Inviters.** While the promotional material will be helpful for the campaign, there is nothing like the impact of a personal invitation. Encourage and equip your members to invite their friends and family members personally.
- 5. Maximize Messaging.** Communicate your goals and plans in a wide variety of formats and channels to reach as many people in as many ways as possible.
  - **Get online.** Place a banner or button on your church's homepage and create a webpage about the *Following Jesus* series and your church's events using the provided social media images.
  - **Social media.** Announce the series on Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, etc. This kit contains graphics to make it easy to generate attention through various social media platforms. Create a Facebook event and ask each church member to like, share, and comment on the page. Encourage them to post photos of their small groups and favorite church activities.
  - **Send texts and emails.** Send announcements through your church email list that can be forwarded to others by members. You can also send suggested text and web links for church members to use to invite friends to the events related to the *Following Jesus* campaign.
  - **Post on community calendars.** Contact newspapers, TV and radio stations, local magazines, mail-out coupon flyers, recreation centers or clubs—anyone who posts a calendar of events. Be sure to include promo copy, as well as specific time, date, and location information.
  - **Get on the air and in print.** Ask local radio stations and newspapers to promote your events.

# HOST

Through the *Following Jesus* sermon series, you will have many unique opportunities to provide answers to key questions your attenders will have about the information they are hearing. For this reason, it will be important to plan ahead on how to capitalize on the interactions that await. Here are some tips to help you make the most of these connection opportunities.

**1. Get the congregation involved.** Whether they've been involved in promoting and inviting or not, it's important that all church members are engaged when it comes to church services based on the four-week sermon series. Creating a welcoming atmosphere in your church requires more than just the specific volunteers—encourage everyone to be willing and ready to welcome those who attend and connect to your church as a result of the *Following Jesus* series.

- **Invite ministry leaders to participate in the service.** Introducing ministry leaders is just one way people can find out about service opportunities. This allows visitors to identify key people they can connect with to continue their involvement with the church.
- **Host a ministry fair.** Let people know that the church is there to serve them, whatever their needs may be. Facing an emergency? Do they need someone to sit with the kids? Meals? Help moving? Let your congregation and community members know they can get in touch with a care committee member and get help from your church family. Be sure to include each ministry in the church: Nursery, Children's Church, Worship, Small Groups, and more. Ask ministry leaders to prepare handouts to give to those who are interested in finding out more or connecting with their ministry.
- **Create PowerPoint slides.** Use the PowerPoint template provided to add scripture or other important quotations to your sermons.
- **Promote on social media.** Encourage ministry leaders to blog or participate on your church Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or other social media outlets.

**2. Welcome visitors.** The *Following Jesus* series provides an amazing opportunity to welcome new individuals and families into the church.

- **Create a warm atmosphere.** Loving others and extending grace should always be hallmarks of the church. They are especially vital when helping visitors feel welcome. Encourage regular attendees to greet visitors and to watch for ways they can assist them. Visitors may need someone to help them find the nursery, children's ministry rooms, and restrooms. Or they may just need a friendly smile to help alleviate any fears they have about coming to a new place.
- **Give visitors a welcome packet.** Welcome packets can include any assortment of items you feel will help others connect with your church. A simple pen and paper, a coupon to the church coffee cart, or a magnet with contact information and the church website can help visitors feel welcome. The goal of these items is to encourage visitors to learn more about your church.
- **Invite visitors to return.** This sounds simple, but issuing a clear invitation to return and become part of your church family is an important way to make visitors feel valued and welcome.
- **Connect visitors to a small group or Sunday school class.** New people will be more likely to keep attending if they can make a friend or two and feel like they belong quickly. Small groups or Sunday school classes are a great way to facilitate this connection.
- **Serve refreshments.** After the service, have a clearly marked area with drinks and snacks. Not only does this demonstrate that you value your attendees and their comfort, it encourages everyone to stay for a while and meet new people.

## FOLLOW UP

The *Following Jesus* campaign is sure to ignite new passion, interest, and opportunities for discipleship among your community. What may start as a simple sermon series may grow into an entire community transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ as your church body begins to live more and more on mission with God. Consider these follow-up ideas below and prayerfully plan how your church will continue the connections made through the *Following Jesus* series.

- 1. Plan and promote *Following Jesus* sermon series.** The four-week sermon series is intended as an invitation to church members and newcomers alike to embark on a journey of pursuing a deeper understanding of what it means to live God's calling for each of our lives.
- 2. Start small group studies based on the *Following Jesus* series.** Develop a small group curriculum around the *Following Jesus* series. Ask your small group or Sunday school leaders to commit to continuing the connections made through *Following Jesus* campaign events. Small groups provide the opportunity for relationship-building and hands-on application of the concepts introduced through the sermon series. If you plan to have small groups meet outside of regular church times, make sure to have a sign-up table in the lobby and online for people who would like to join a group. Encourage small group leaders to follow up immediately and provide dates, times, and directions to those interested. Encourage your leaders to explain church-related terms and difficult theological concepts. Simple tips like explaining where to find a verse in the Bible can help newcomers feel welcome and comfortable.
- 3. Create a variety of follow-up events.** Group events are a great way to facilitate relationships. Give your church family opportunities to meet and spend time with each other. This is where many newcomers will feel most comfortable, so invest in creating events that encourage true connection.
  - **Family Events:** It is important that visitors and regular attendees know that their family is welcome to serve together and play together. Visit [OutreachFilms.com](http://OutreachFilms.com) to see excellent movie night ideas or visit [OutreachSpeakers.com](http://OutreachSpeakers.com) to bring in a special guest to speak at your church. Plan events for couples (childcare provided), as well as whole family events—meals, celebrations with guest artists and speakers, baseball or softball tournaments, church picnics, creative arts programs, cookie exchanges, and community kids' days. These types of events allow people to get involved and spend time doing things together on an informal basis. And when you host events at locations outside of your church building, you help the church reach out to your community. Some people who still feel uncomfortable in a church service may be willing to attend a BBQ, picnic, carnival, or other fun event.
  - **Service Events:** Plan service events that meet a need in your church or community. Make it the kind of event where adults and children can invite their friends, and encourage families to participate together. Some ideas include filling backpacks for disadvantaged students, assembling and delivering gift bags to area nursing homes, serving meals at nearby homeless shelters, or doing cleanup (like picking up trash, planting flowers, etc.) throughout your community.
  - **Special Interest Groups:** Gathering people around a common interest is a natural way to help people feel comfortable and to connect. Plan activities that bring people together on a regular basis through their hobbies and interests: fishing, surfing, running, hiking, biking, scrapbooking, creating music, or simply sharing a meal or a cup of coffee. When planning outdoor interest groups or sports competitions, consider whether you will plan your own or form a group to participate in community teams. Either can be an effective way of engaging with others.

- **Recovery and Support:** Connect with trained counselors or group leaders in your church and consider offering recovery or support groups for individuals and their families who are facing challenges such as substance abuse, divorce, illness, grief, etc. Providing resources, as well as safe and supportive ministries for people to deal with their struggles, is of the utmost importance.

**4. Celebrate with Church Partners.** If your church partnered with other churches in promoting events surrounding the *Following Jesus* series, don't let those connections fade. Capture the excitement and take advantage of the momentum! After the sermon series, come together with your partner churches to share stories, pray together, and praise God for all He accomplished through your unified efforts. Keep in touch and continue to build on the relationships established. Brainstorm ways you can deepen your partnership and explore other ministry partnerships. Allow the *Following Jesus* series to become a launching pad for more collaborative community impact—wherever God leads you!

The *Following Jesus* series can be much more than just a sermon series—it can be the beginning of a spiritual transformation in your community that ushers in the advancement of God's Kingdom in the hearts of those who are currently far from God. We are joining you in praying that God will use the events surrounding this campaign in a deep and powerful way.

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