



FOLLOWING JESUS

DISCIPLE-MAKING and
MOVEMENT-BUILDING

A YEAR DEEP IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

PETER ROENNFELDT

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“Jesus had an intentional strategy for making disciples. In *Following Jesus*, Peter Roennfeldt takes us on a remarkable and insightful journey through the life of Jesus, revealing the essential components of His disciple-making strategy. You will discover that this process was simple, relational and reproducible. Having had Dr Roennfeldt as a tour guide in Israel and attending numerous seminars by him on this theme over the years, I know that this practical study guide will inspire, equip, challenge and encourage every follower of Jesus to be a disciple-maker. Whether you use this material devotionally, as part of a small group, a seminar or as a sermon series, you will see the need to make discipleship the basic operating system of the church once again.”

—Simon Martin, Church Growth and Mission Director, South England

“Many have decided to follow Jesus, but not many are able to describe how they were discipled. Only a few have been trained to disciple others. *Following Jesus* is one of the most comprehensive resources to help individuals and groups study the life of Jesus in a way that leads to a true learning experience in discipleship. We have translated this material into Finnish and many community Bible-reading groups have been using it in Finland. The feedback has been very positive.”—Atte Helminen, city pastor and coach, Helsinki, Finland

"In this era of ever-increasing complexity, it is refreshing to be held at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words. Like Martha of old, we are prone to get busy doing all the things we think are necessary to serve Him, but Mary was commended by Jesus for her choice to sit at His feet and listen. Peter has provided a tool to assist us to do just that with the focus on the person, passion and missional purpose of Jesus. I highly recommend this as a journey for all who seek to follow Jesus as their model in life and ministry.”—Bill Hodgson, *Power to Change*—church movements, SHIFTM2M

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Foreword

Following Jesus is what every person influenced by Jesus Christ is challenged to do. For some, it seems to come naturally but, for others, there is a tendency to stagnation, becoming a passive believer. All of us who are enthralled by Jesus want to be all we can be as genuine followers. But the questions remain: How can I be a real follower of Jesus? How long will it take?

In this book, Peter Roennfeldt uses the story of Jesus in the gospels to show the intentional journey that He took His original followers on. There were clear steps in His plan and He was patient. His disciples followed, fell back, got up and moved on again. In *Following Jesus*, we are invited on the journey into discipleship that Jesus led His first disciples in. We will read the book and the gospels, reflect and perhaps write on the meaning and application to our lives. That this book is insightful should not surprise us; Jesus is profound. It is also practical, as following Jesus has to happen in real life now. As we read, we too will progress, perhaps fall back, get up and try again as we follow Jesus. Jesus' love and presence will become more real and His desire for us to be all that we can will motivate us.

Peter Roennfeldt has experienced what he writes about. Peter has been a pastor, evangelist, leader, church planter, trainer, motivator, mentor, public presenter, coach. Above everything else though, he is a follower of Jesus. He has modelled the discipleship process with family, friends and

colleagues.

Peter has worked in Australia, the Pacific, Europe, Africa and the Middle East. He has travelled widely and shared his insights in most other parts of the world. He knows that the principles of following Jesus are applicable to illiterate subsistence farmers in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, sophisticated secular post-Christian professionals in the cities of northern and western Europe, nomadic Arab tribesmen in North Africa, and highly educated national and community leaders on the educational campuses and across the communities of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, because he has ministered to these groups and many others.

Peter's passion is for believers in Jesus to become fully mature followers who disciple others. This book will encourage us to follow the methods of Jesus as much as holding to the beliefs of Jesus. As we follow Jesus together, He will build a disciple-making movement across generations and people groups.

I have personally been blessed as I have been mentored by Peter in the past. More recently, we have talked and prayed together as we have trained others in the principles of following Jesus. I am still learning to follow Jesus more closely and this book will help me be more of who I want to be—and who He calls me to be.

Glenn Townend

Pastor, church planter, denominational leader

Experiencing His World

Many give Jesus little thought today, but 2000 years ago, He caught the attention of the masses, annoyed religious leaders and confronted politicians. When about 30, He stepped onto the stage from a small hilltop village of between 120 and 150 inhabitants,¹ bursting “the boundaries of all expectations”² and launching a countercultural movement that, within only three centuries, captivated millions across the Roman Empire.³ His commitment to upside-down values, status reversal and revolutionary teaching was breathtaking.

Jesus followed a simple process of disciple-making, radically different from the religious and political leaders of His time. He connected with people, often around food, met needs and equipped them as disciples—to do what He was doing.

Disciples are protégés, learners or apprentices who multiply disciples by following Jesus’ methods. They cultivate His movement, preparing people for His coming! The evening before His betrayal, He declared to His disciples: “If you have faith in me you will do what I have been doing” (John 14:12). And, following His resurrection, He said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21, compare John 17:18; Matthew 28:19).

To understand these words, we need to understand His world—the politics, territorial jurisdictions, the threats of jealous despotic rulers, together with the topography, geography, culture and religious practices of the society in which He lived. Where were the villages, towns and cities situated? How did people live? What were their homes like? How were they furnished? What clothes were worn? What food was eaten? How did families function? Who was related? What were their fears and concerns?

In this book, we will discover Jesus' world. This reflects my own research from regular visits to Israel since 1979, including a season at the Jerusalem Study Centre with Dr William Shea, only a block away from the Garden Tomb. But, more importantly, this book draws on the outstanding scholarship of Kenneth Bailey, Richard Horsley, Neil Asher Silberman, Craig Evans, Bargil Pixner, Peter Walker and others.

From sitting beside Jacob's Well, sailing on Galilee, walking the Wadi Qelt, climbing the Mount of Olives and the Tower of Ascension, and visiting the Temple Mount, my realisation grew that Jesus was not only the message, He was also the method for mission. I was confronted by His humanness. Favourite stories were radically revised, the mould into which Jesus had been shaped was broken, and my view of Him was challenged. The result: His life became my frame for evangelism and church-planting, for my disciple-making and movement thinking.

My basic premise

Jesus is our example in disciple-making and movement-building. It was not by chance that His movement went viral, so we will track His life as it unfolded, in sequence, to experience how He shaped disciples and cultivated a dynamic movement. All that is recorded by the gospel writers contributes to our understanding, with five phases in His journey providing our frame:⁴

1. Preparation: for a life of multiplication.
2. Foundations: modelling multiplication.
3. Participation: equipping for expanded outreach.
4. Leadership multiplication: through sacrificial love.
5. Movements: through Holy Spirit anointing.

On this journey, we should also expect to rediscover what church could be—simple, in the relational streams of life. Jesus questioned the motivation for much religious activity, so expect to be unsettled by His attitude to religion, but expect to resonate with the foundations, purpose and essence of church as He established it.

Above all, expect to be inspired and encouraged. The gospels provide the frame for a refreshing look into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Although fully God, His humanity is fully evident. His commitment to building His kingdom movement is inspiring and informative.

A gospel harmony

For this journey, along with your favourite Bible, I recommend using a “gospel harmony” such as R L Thomas and S N Gundry’s *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels* or Steven L Cox and Kendell H Easley’s *Harmony of the Gospels*.⁵ A harmony provides sequence to the events of Jesus’ life and ministry, bringing together the four gospel stories the Bible offers us. Various harmonies reflect differences in the order of events and some are referred to in this guide, but it is not our purpose to be definitive. Along with these guides you might read a life of Jesus, such as Jerry Thomas’ *Messiah: A contemporary adaptation of a classic on Jesus’ life, The Desire of Ages*.⁶ If you prefer the original, *The Desire of Ages* has the same chapter numbering, so you can easily adapt your reading to those chapters.

A rigorous but enjoyable journey

This is a rigorous transformational trek, rather than a casual stroll. It takes you through the whole account of Jesus’ life. This can be done as a lone hiker or a journey shared with others. You might take sections at a time, using these guides to research specific aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry. If you are working through this in a small group, you might want to commit to one section, perhaps take a break, then return for the next section. Or you might choose a section that is most relevant to your current experience or leadership roles. For example, Phase 4 might be used as a resource to explore the worldview and leadership principles Jesus used with His 12 apostles, or Phase 5 as a guided tour of Jesus’ passion week, from Palm Sunday to Resurrection Sunday. But, for the whole journey, these guides are written for:

1. Bible-reading and discussion groups. In such groups, each person reads

the gospel sections, working through a guide, then the group meets weekly for breakfast or in a café or an evening home group, to discuss the application of key ideas and principles. It is a long journey but participants get together at a time that suits them, for about an hour, inviting others to join. It is a great way to introduce friends to Jesus!

2. Pastors equipping movement leaders. Many ministry leaders and pastors are already using *Following Jesus* with their ministry teams. It is a year-long journey. Team members read the gospels, work through one guide each week, then take an hour at a weekly team meeting to discuss the implications for their lives, ministries and church.

3. Movement, mission agency and denominational leaders. For those with teams of ministry leaders and administrative personnel, *Following Jesus* provides a frame for a weekly worship and discussion time. All are encouraged to read the gospels, reflect on one guide each week, then participate in the group discussion. Or ministry coordinators and pastors in networks or denominations could use the guides in daily devotions, then be invited to a number of retreats over a year to integrate insights into their movements.

Journal your journey

This book invites, encourages and even expects you to express your own responses, thoughts and feelings. The questions are not rhetorical; the notes are not prescriptive of an expected answer! Rather, you are encouraged to clarify your own journey with Jesus.

For those who are minimal writers, we have included a small amount of space after each question and at the end of each guide to record responses in just a few words. But for the full and deeper experience with this book, we recommend that you take up the habit of journalling as you work through the life and ministry of Jesus.

To do this, get a notebook—it might be a good-quality journal or a cheap notepad. Or you might open a new document on your computer or tablet. Settle on a system of identifying your notes with the guide numbers used throughout the book, and record what you discover, see, experience and

care about.

As you read, give time to each question and record what is important to you. The questions are a prompt to reflect! And, of course, write down the questions that come to mind as you are working through these guides. Some of these might be answered as you progress further; other might be valuable to raise with friends you are sharing this journey with; and still others might be questions that you will continue to wrestle with.

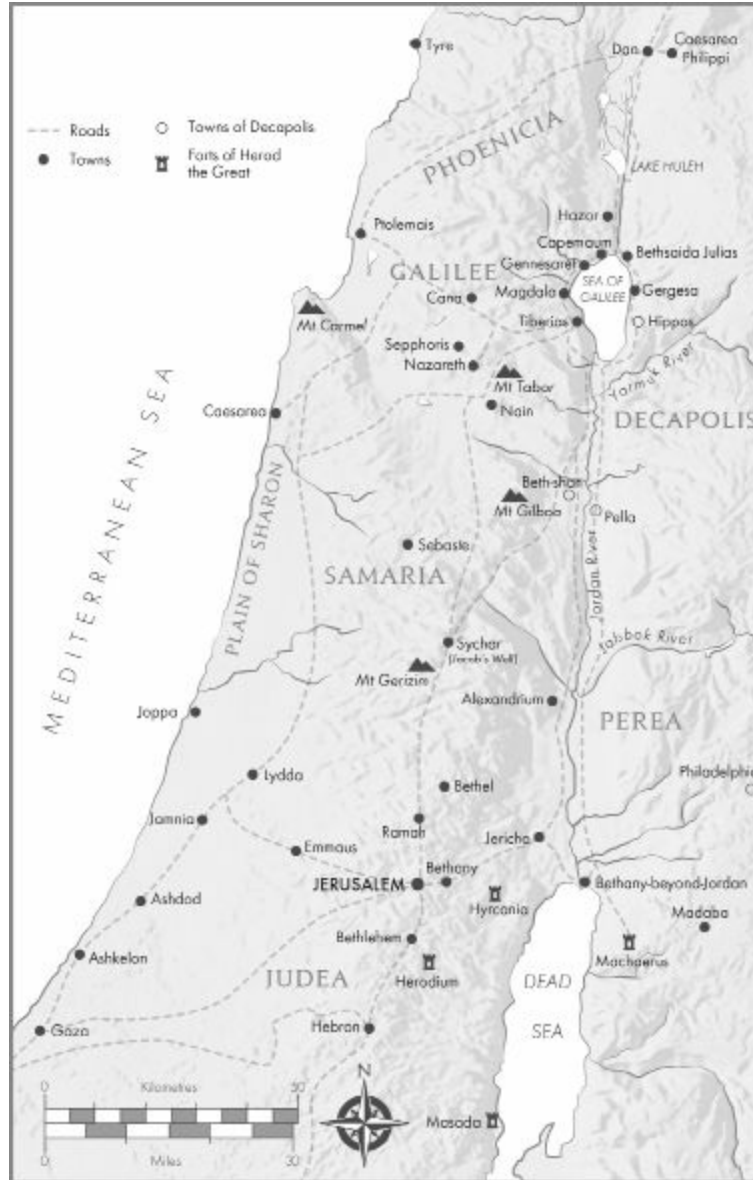
Writing will convert the jumble of extraneous ideas or thoughts floating in your mind into coherent insights, values and action plans. Jesus calls us to dig deep, but also to act—to make disciples who make other disciples! Writing clarifies which ideas are most important to you. So don't skim. Make this a year deep in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Share the journey

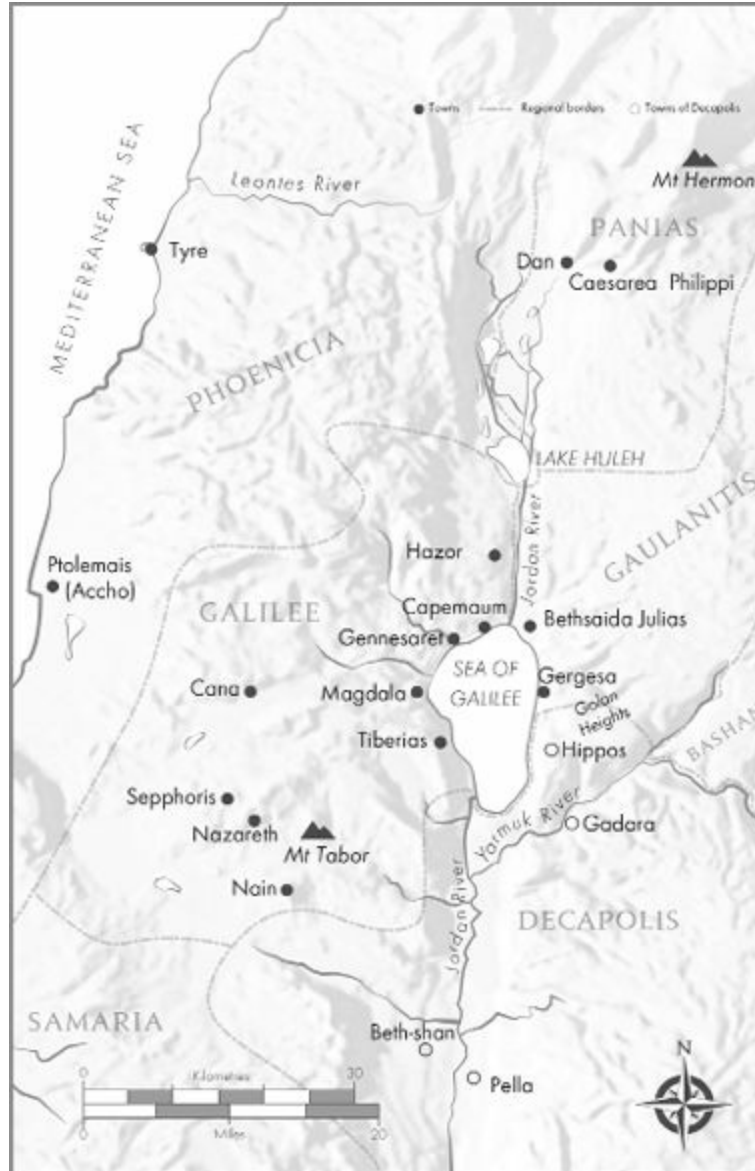
For the past 10 years, I have been part of a small group of men who meet for a café breakfast each Thursday at 6.45 to share God's Word, encourage each other and pray together. Some of us travel a lot, but the weekly group continues. The guides in this book could provide a frame for such a group—individual reading, reflection, comments shared on social media, with regular opportunities to discuss key discoveries. Who could you invite on this journey? And who among your friends or in your community would you like to see grow as followers of Jesus? Plan to share this journey with them. Be part of Jesus' movement of disciples making disciples!

The Holy Land

in the Time of Jesus



Jesus' Ministry in Galilee



PHASE 1

Preparation

For a life of multiplication

The first 30 years of Jesus' life were spent in preparation. Then, John the Baptist introduced Him and His short public ministry of disciple-making. By the end of His ministry, He commissioned His disciples to do the same: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Using the word *ethne*, Jesus indicated He was not speaking of nation states, but of making disciples in all people groups or relational streams.

The primary witnesses to Jesus' disciple-making and movement-building are the four gospel writers:

- Matthew, a first-century tax collector who became a disciple, focuses on Jesus' radical, countercultural kingship and kingdom, and is the only one who mentions Jesus using the word church. Church formation is a byproduct of disciple-making.
- John Mark, perhaps the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10),¹ recounts his story as perhaps heard from Peter the fisherman.²
- Luke, a Gentile doctor (Colossians 4:14) whose two contributions make up nearly 40 per cent of the New Testament, wrote his "orderly account" after careful research (Luke 1:3) as he had not personally observed Jesus' life.
- Without John's gospel, we would have little insight into Jesus' first 18 months of ministry. Writing more than 60 years after Jesus' resurrection, John is the only gospel writer who experienced the whole of Jesus' ministry. His gospel is mostly chronological, highlighting crises and turning points, but his account does not begin with Bethlehem—or Jordan.

Rather, Jesus is introduced as Creator and Saviour, the Word of God and the Lamb of God “slain from the creation of the world” (John 1:1–3; Revelation 13:8). He then moves to John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus and Jesus inviting people to be disciples.

Matthew was the sermon reporter, Mark the biographer, Luke the historian, and John the theologian. We are also enriched by reading the letters of Paul, who wrote, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant [the original word is slave], being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5–8). He was made like us (Hebrews 2:5–18).

In this first phase, we reflect on Jesus’ early years: His preparation for movement-building. The guides cover Sections 1–19 in *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels* and Chapters 1–10 in *Messiah*. They begin with the prologues to Luke and John’s gospels, and Jesus’ human ancestry, and end with His cousin John’s ministry.

We explore questions such as: What did God experience and learn in becoming truly human? What can we learn from these preparation years? And what are the implications for us?

PHASE 1
PREPARATION

GUIDE 1

Jesus as a baby

Luke's gospel prologue introduces his research into the life of Jesus, revealing his core convictions about Jesus and His kingdom movement. Luke wrote of "all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven" (Acts 1:1, 2).

Read Luke 1:1–2:38; John 1:1–18; Matthew 1:1–25, compare Luke 3:23–38
Messiah, Chapters 1–5

From where might Luke have gathered his information?³

In becoming a baby, what were some things God experienced for the first time?

Being fully God and fully human, Jesus chose to veil His divinity in humanity, living and ministering as a human. What did He give up to be human?

Why did Jesus do this?

What can we learn from Jesus' two family trees? (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38)

- Who were the women in His ancestry? (Matthew 1:3, 5, 6, 16)
- What kind of people were “His people,” whom He came to save? (Matthew 1:1–21)

As soon as Mary learned she was pregnant, she went to see Elizabeth.

- What do Mary and Zechariah's songs reveal about Jesus' future ministry? (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79)
- How much older was John the Baptist than Jesus?
- How long did Mary stay with Elizabeth? So what would the village people in Nazareth have observed when she returned?
- Learning of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph “considered this” (Matthew 1:20). The Greek word can also be translated that “he became angry.”⁴ But, in the face of a community demanding her death for shaming the honour of her family and village, what strength of character did Joseph show in taking Mary as his wife?

According to Luke's account, who were the first to welcome Jesus? (Luke 2:1–20)

Fully God—fully human!

What important insights concerning Jesus do you find in these additional scriptures? (Philippians 2:1–11; Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:14–16; 5:7–10; and 10:19–25)

God Almighty took on human form and entered our world. He chose to begin as a baby and not as a grown man. The Bible says that He “made himself nothing” (Philippians 2:7). He never ceased to be fully God, but He veiled His deity and intentionally limited Himself and His powers to become fully human. He was made like us in every way (Hebrews 2:17).

Jesus leaves heaven’s glory for earth’s insignificance. What a sacrifice on God’s part to become one of us! The Creator enters creation, so that He might not only be our God, but also our high priest (Hebrews 2:17) and our way to God (John 14:6). What a strange and unusual way to save the world. God’s gift to us was a baby.⁵

What were God’s gifts to Him?⁶

- Obedient parents (Luke 1:38 and Matthew 1:18–25):
- The names Immanuel and Jesus (Matthew 1:18–23):
- Birth announcements (Luke 2:8–40):

Cultural background

Have you noticed there is no reference in the gospels to Jesus’ birth in a stable? Nor does it say Jesus was born the night Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. Rather, Luke records Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register, Mary was expecting, and “while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born” (Luke 2:6).

There is no suggestion of a breathless arrival in the village, with baby Jesus born that night! And it would have been unthinkable for Mary to be left without care, to give birth alone or with a man—Joseph—present. It is true: Bethlehem was crowded, but no Middle Eastern family would neglect a pregnant wife—and there is no suggestion this was the case. Just the opposite! The family guest rooms—called an “inn” but not meaning a commercial inn—were occupied.⁷

So what does the story suggest?

Imagine the excitement: “The time came for the baby to be born” (Luke 2:6). The women cleared the family living area where the cooking and baking was done, where the family slept each night. This space was adjacent to a lower area—maybe even a cave, from which the home extended⁸—where domestic animals stood and rested during the night, with their feeding troughs or “mangers” in the floor of the living space. The presence of the animals provided warmth for the family during the winter months. The men would have been banished, then the baby was born, wrapped and placed in the perfect crib, a “manger” in the heart of the home.

Meanwhile, the shepherds—rough and poor men—received the good news: “Christ the Lord” had been born, “wrapped . . . and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). Their being out in the fields at that time rules out the winter months (December to February) as the season of Jesus’ birth. Although poor, these men understood the value of life—and babies. They went, found the baby as they had been told and “spread the word”—“glorifying and praising God” (Luke 2:20). Jesus was born in poverty and welcomed by the poorest.⁹

Reflection

Why choose to follow God who came into this world like us as a baby?

Sharing

What will you share with friends on this journey with you?

What will you share with friends who don’t follow Jesus?

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