Ten Things You Can't Do If You Follow Jesus

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Lots of people claim to follow Jesus, and then they do stuff which makes you wonder about the level of their commitment. I understand that we are all fallible human beings; we will all screw up at times. But I'm not writing about making mistakes. My point is that you can't do these things deliberately if you claim to follow Jesus.

This isn't a complete list, but it's not a bad place to start.

10) Exclude people because they practice another religion.

Jesus was constantly including people, and he did it with a radical disregard for their religion. There are several stories about Jesus reaching out to folks of other faiths, such as the woman from Samaria and the Syro–Phoenician woman. Jesus simply reached out to everyone without discriminating, so much so that the religious authorities accused him of breaking bread with the wrong people; they said he was a glutton and that he broke the law.

9) Exclude people for what they look like, how they were born, or things beyond their control.

I may have already mentioned this, but Jesus constantly included people. Jesus seemed to have a rebel streak as he regularly sought out folks who didn't "fit in" and who were excluded by the religious authorities. He welcomed people who were different, people who were marginalized, people whom others excluded, people who were made to feel unwanted in one way or another. They all held a special place in the heart, life, and actions of Jesus. I suspect he did it because he understood they really weren't different at all. They were precious human beings. If he lived today, he would embrace members of the LGBTQ community and Muslims and poor people and drug addicts and the homeless, and so on.

8) Withhold caring from people.

Did you ever play the game "Follow the Leader?" If you don't do what the leader does, you are out. Following means you should imitate as closely as possible. When people were sick or lonely or anxious and needed care, Jesus gave it to them. If we follow Jesus, we will imitate him as closely as possible. We will take care of everyone. Everyone.

7) Exclude people.

Last time. I promise. Jesus was constantly including people. It's a little concept called love. He was pretty big on it. And too many churches and Christians don't seem to get it, so it bears repeating. Often.

6) Let people go hungry.

When Jesus said, "Feed my sheep," he wasn't talking about spiritual feeding alone. Gandhi once said, "There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." In other words, you can't have one without the other. You can't have spiritual feeding without physical feeding. In fact, there is enough food in the world for everyone. There isn't a food shortage in the world. There isn't a problem with a distribution system capable of handling it, although it has been stretched in the last couple of years. Have you ever noticed that we can eat lobster from Nova Scotia while looking at the Rockies? The problem is that we aren't particularly good at sharing.

5) Make money more important than God and God's people.

The love of money really is the root of all sorts of evil. Not money itself, but the love of money. We make choices about what we will do with our money every day. Our choices speak louder than our words. Willingly or not, our choices frequently hurt the least of these and others

rather than help them. Sometimes, we even hurt ourselves. Because money is so important, we will shop at stores when they advertise lower prices even though we know their products come from sweat shops. We buy mass–produced food because it's cheaper than buying from the farmer down the road. We'd rather keep more of our money than pay the taxes it takes to provide for those in need. We have a money problem.

4) Judge others.

"That 'speck of sawdust in your brother's eye while ignoring the two–by–four in your own eye' and 'let the one who is without sin cast the first stone' stuff? I meant it. Signed, Jesus."

3) Be physically aggressive or violent.

Throughout his life, Jesus consistently taught us to avoid violent behavior. Find non–violent ways to seek justice. Be creative in your protests. See how Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi did this, to name just a couple of folks who got the message.

2) Use the church to hurt people.

If there was anything that could tick Jesus off, it was when institutions used their power and practice to hurt or exclude people. Notice, for example, the incident of the money changers in the Temple. It was supposed to be a place of worship. So while it is true that Jesus became physically aggressive there (throwing over the tables and booths), it's important to note that even then, he didn't attack people. He just threw some stuff around.

1) Hate.

This is a hard one for most of us, myself included. One of my mantras is that "I am tolerant of everyone—except those who are intolerant!" In one of his most famous sermons, Martin Luther King Jr reminded us that "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already void of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." The truth is that violence always begets more violence, so it's best to avoid hating altogether.

The gospel always urges us to love, to welcome others, to be as inclusive as we can be. It's a journey. It's a process of growing in love.

Isn't that what it's all about?