

Responses to Jesus:

Fool,

Fan, or

Follower?

Responses to Jesus GIG

Fool, Fan or Follower?

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Introduction

Responses to Jesus: Fool, Fan or Follower?

Probably the most important question in all of life is: “What is our response to Jesus?” The Bible tells us that the people in Jesus’ day were “divided” because of Jesus (John 7:43). In other words, they had differing responses to Him, His miracles and His teachings. Some people responded to Jesus as “fools”; i.e. they made poor/wrong judgments about Him out of unbelief, unwillingness, etc. Other people responded to Jesus as “fans”; i.e. they admired Jesus and liked to be associated with Him and/or to be around Him, but they didn’t make personal commitments to Him as Lord. And others responded to Him as “followers”, i.e. people who loved Jesus and pursued Him, His teachings, and His will; people who sought to live out His ways in a loving response to Him for what He has done and for who He is; and people who were committed to Him as Lord of their lives.

In this Bible study series, we’ll look at a few people who had some of these different responses to Jesus. In so doing, we will be challenged to think about “What is our response to Jesus?” — a fool, a fan or a follower?

Responses to Jesus

Some Unbelieving Fools

John 10:22-39

Introduction: The first people that we are going to look at are the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day. These men were generally hostile toward Jesus and they actually wanted to kill Him. In this study, we'll be taking a closer look at these men, with hopes of understanding more about why they responded to Jesus the way that they did.

Warm up question:

- Think about something that you recently heard or read about that you found/find hard to believe, and tell why.

Read John 10:22-39

Discussion questions:

[Note: This incident took place only a few months before Jesus' death. Jesus is at a large Jewish gathering and "The Jews" (Jewish leaders) are gathered around Him.]

1. The Jewish leaders asked Jesus to tell them if He really is the Christ. Was their inquiry sincere?

Their inquiry seems insincere. They had already been looking for a way to kill Jesus (John 5:18; 7:1) and had even attempted to do so before this (John 8:59). And here, once again, they are ready to kill Him (v.33).

2. Why did the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus?

Because of His blasphemy. He was claiming to be God.

3. Did Jesus deny or affirm their accusation?

Jesus doesn't deny their accusation, but rather He affirms that He had said that He was God's Son (v.36)

4. What does Jesus make clear is the real reason why they do not listen to Him and accept His claim to be God's Son?

It is because of their unbelief (vv.25, 37, 38)

5. Why didn't the Jewish leaders believe Jesus to be God's Son, and therefore follow Him?

Three main reasons:

- 1) Read John 6:41-42

What is the reason for unbelief found in this passage?

Reason #1: They thought that Jesus was only a man (and therefore, could not be God)

Note: This is the one reason mentioned in our passage (see 10:33). But there are more...

2) Read John 7:41-42, 52

What is the reason for unbelief found in this passage?

Reason #2: They thought that Jesus didn't have the right credentials

[Note: In their hostility toward Jesus, the Jewish leaders were wrong here. Jonah (an OT prophet) came from Galilee, and others might have as well. However, they did know that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem in Judea (where Jesus was actually born—though they didn't know this), not Nazareth in Galilee (where Jesus grew up—which they did know)]

3) Read John 5:16-18

What is the reason for unbelief found in this passage?

Reason #3: They thought that Jesus kept breaking the Sabbath (c.f. Mark 2:23-3:6)

[Note: Other passages would reveal how Jesus—in the minds of the Jewish leaders—broke other “laws” as well (e.g. He ate with tax collectors and “sinners”)]

Summary:

The Jewish leaders were “fools”. They not only didn't believe Jesus (and therefore wouldn't listen to Him or follow Him), but they also wanted to kill Him. And eventually they did!

Not all “fools”, however, are hostile to Jesus. But many do not follow Him because of unbelief—which can exist for many different reasons.

6. What are some of the reasons that keep people today from believing and fully following Jesus?
 - *Some of the reasons are the same as those of the Jewish leaders (e.g. How can Jesus be both a man and God at the same time?)*
 - *However, some of the reasons may be different (e.g. How can Jesus be the only way to God? How could Jesus rise from the dead? etc.)*

Application questions:

- Are you a “fool” as well because of your unbelief in what Jesus said or did—even if you aren't hostile toward Him?
- What issues of unbelief keep you from believing and fully following Jesus?
- What might help you to believe?

Responses to Jesus

The Sad Fool

Mark 10:17-27

Introduction: In this study we meet someone whose view of Jesus seems positive, and who sincerely wants to do what was right. This is why, as we will see, his response to Jesus is so surprising—and sad.

Warm up question:

- What is something that you have that you find very difficult (maybe even impossible) to lend or give to someone else? Why?

Read Mark 10:17-27

[Note: This incident happens right after Jesus had spent time with some little children who were brought to Him (vv13-16).]

Discussion questions:

1. In this encounter with Jesus, a man (Matt 19:22 tells us that he was a young man) comes running up to Jesus, falls on his knees and asks Him a question: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? (v.17). Why do you think he asks this question?

He may have asked the question having just heard Jesus say to His disciples that anyone who does not receive the Kingdom of God (therefore, inherit eternal life) like a little child, will never enter it (v.16) —which may have left him wondering, “What must I (a young man) do?

Why do you think it was so important to him?

As we will see, the man had worked hard and done a lot in hopes of earning his way into God’s Kingdom (i.e. earning eternal life). However, with what he had just heard Jesus say, he may have become unsure that he had done all of the “right” things.

2. Jesus first answers the man’s question with a question: “Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.” (v.18)

Any idea why Jesus might have said this and what He was trying to communicate?

Jesus was essentially asking, ‘Do you realize the true meaning of calling me what belongs to God alone?’ In essence, Jesus was encouraging the man to consider His true identity; i.e. that He Himself was God]

3. Jesus goes on to say: “You know the commandments” and goes on to list five of the Ten Commandments. (Read v.19) What do you think of the man’s response (v.20)?

The man may have responded sincerely because, as a Jew, at age 13, he would have assumed personal responsibility for obeying the commandments—and he may very well have worked hard and done a good job of keeping them.

4. Look at what Jesus says in response to this. (Read v.21)

Do you think that there really was only “one thing” that the man lacked?

No; Jesus knew that the man wasn't perfect except for one thing. However, He did know that there was something that the man needed to recognize and "do" that was standing in the way of him inheriting eternal life.

Why does Jesus tell the man to "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me."?

Jesus loved the man. However, despite all of the good things that the man had done, Jesus knew of the man's great love for his wealth—and that this was an area of His life that he hadn't given up complete control of to God. Therefore, he put the man to the test to determine what he would choose—would he (the man) or He (Jesus) be in control of his life.

Why did Jesus have the right/the authority to ask these things of the man?

Jesus was God. Therefore, the man needed to trust and obey Him.

5. What was the man's response? Why wasn't he able to do what Jesus told him to do, and what does this say about what was most important to him?

(v.22) "he went away sad, because he had great wealth" The man loved his wealth more than he wanted to do what it took to have eternal life.

[Note: It wasn't that the man didn't love God or that he wasn't willing to give some (and maybe even most) of his life to God. However, he wasn't willing to give God (and in this situation, Jesus) control of all his life. And this is what Jesus was asking him to do.]

6. What is vv.23-27 all about? What does Jesus say about the 'pull' that wealth has in peoples' lives? What does He say about the power and ability of God?

Wealth is one of many things that people desire so strongly that they are unwilling to give up to allow Jesus to have complete control of their lives. God, however, can help people do this if they are willing.

7. What do you think are some other things that people or athletes desire so strongly that they are unwilling to give up to allow Jesus to have complete control of their lives?

- sports, relationships, lifestyle issues, areas of interest and investment (job, sport, sex, parties, career path, etc.)

Summary:

This man was a "fool". He had worked hard to be "righteous" and truly wanted to have eternal life, but he wanted even more to be in control of his life. He was unable to fully trust (and obey) Jesus and follow Him because there was something more important to him that he needed to give up control over—but couldn't.

Application questions:

- Are there things in your life that are so important that they keep you from giving Jesus complete control over your life? (e.g. athletics, money, career, relationships, etc.)
- Are these things more important to you than knowing that you will receive eternal life when you die? [Consider Jesus' words: "What good is it for you to gain the whole world (i.e. have whatever you want), and yet lose or forfeit your very self?" (Luke 9:25); and the words of Jim Elliot (a missionary killed by the people he tried to share Jesus with) "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."]

Responses to Jesus

Fans and “Fringe” Followers

John 6:1-35; 60-69

Introduction: Throughout Jesus’ public ministry, crowds of people regularly gathered around Him to see Him, listen to His teachings and to witness and experience His miracles. Most in the “crowd” remained mere spectators and/or recipients of what He had to offer them. However, some who met Jesus actually followed Him from place to place and identified themselves as His “disciples”. And out of this broader group of disciples, Jesus chose “the Twelve”. In this study, we will see all three of these groups of people responding to Jesus in different ways.

Warm up discussion topic:

- Think about a time when you started something, but—because it demanded more than what you were able or willing to give—you stopped or gave up on it.

Read John 6:1-35

[Note: As background information to this text, Mark 6:30-33 tells us that “the Twelve” had just returned to Jesus from being sent out on a mission by Him. In an attempt to get away to with them to debrief and rest, a great crowd gathers around Jesus. And as we see in vv1-13 of this passage, Jesus performs a great miracle by feeding 5000 men and their families]

Discussion questions:

1. In vv.13-26, Jesus leaves the crowd and eventually crosses over to the other side of the lake (Sea of Galilee)—but not without another miracle!—and the crowd followed Him. Why?

- *Jesus says that they were looking for Him “not because they saw miraculous signs (and therefore believed), but because they ate the loaves and had their fill”. (v.26)*
- *They were looking for more bread! [Note: When they ask Jesus for another miraculous sign, they ask him to continually feed them, as God fed their forefathers in the desert.]*

How is this like some people today who want to be around Jesus only for what they might get from Him (and/or being associated with those who follow Him)?

- *a “feel good” feeling, a group to be a part of, “health and wealth”, etc.*

2. What does Jesus tell them that they should work for/seek after (vv.27-33)?

“food that endures to eternal life” (v.27) and “bread” that “gives life” (v.33)

3. When the people ask for this “bread” (v.34), where does Jesus say that it can be found?

Jesus tells them that it is found in Him; He is “the bread of life” (v.35; see also vv.48, 51)

What did Jesus mean when He said that He is “the bread of life”?

When Jesus claims that He is “the bread of life”, he is claiming to be the only true source and giver of spiritual life and sustenance. Like physical food provides what our physical bodies need, Jesus says that He alone can provide what our spiritual lives need.

What did Jesus say was needed in order for them (and us) to get this “bread”?

They/we need to come to Him (vv.35; see also vv.37, 44, 45)

They/we need to believe in Him (vv.29, 35; see also vv.40, 47)

4. Read John 6:60-69

Why did many of His “disciples” (and probably many in the crowd as well) find Jesus’ claim that He was “the bread of life” a “hard teaching” and difficult to accept (v.60)?

- *Some might have been confused (What did it mean that He came down from heaven? That we need to eat His flesh? That we will never go hungry?)*
- *Some, because of their unbelief, might have been unwilling to accept His exclusive claim that He was the only true source of spiritual truth and substance.*
- *Some might have been too proud or self-reliant, not willing to accept Jesus was enough*

What did they end up doing (v.66)?

“turned back and no longer followed Him”

Given their response, why do you think they had been following Jesus up to this point?

As we have seen already, many were with Him because He gave them something to eat! Others, who maybe had been following Him for some time, may have done so because of political reasons (See vv. 14-15; “they intended to come and make Him king”)

Why did they stop following Him now?

He wasn’t who they wanted Him to be (free bread provider, political leader, etc.) and He now was asking things of them that they were unable to believe and/or do.

5. What did “the Twelve” do? Why? What was the main difference between them and the other disciples who stopped following Jesus?

They continued to follow Him because they believed that “He had the words of eternal life” and that “He was the Holy One of God”.

Summary:

Both the “fans” and the “fringe followers” in this account became “fools” by distancing themselves from Jesus when following Him was no longer self-gratifying and/or easy. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He calls us to follow Him for who He is—not for what we think He is or want Him to be. He also calls us to believe what He says and to do it—even if we don’t always understand and/or find it hard to do. And if we are to follow Him, He calls us to find in Him (“the bread of life”) all we need for spiritual life and sustenance.

Application questions:

- Do you pursue Jesus as the only true source and giver of spiritual life and nutrition?
- If not, who is Jesus to you? Why do you associate with or stay connected to Him?
- What happens in your life when Jesus asks something of you that isn’t enjoyable or easy for you to do?

Responses to Jesus

Three Wannabe Followers

Luke 9:57-62

Introduction: As we saw in our last study, it was common for Jesus to have lots of people who moved around with Him in His travels and ministry. However, not all did so just because of the benefits they received from Him (like getting free bread to eat!). In this study we will look at 3 men who seemingly wanted to follow Jesus, but who were tested by Him as to their readiness to do so. Through these tests, we will see more clearly what it means and takes to truly follow Him.

Warm up discussion topic:

- Talk about a time when you really wanted to do something but didn't because of what you discovered it would cost/require of you.

Read Luke 9:57-62

Discussion questions:

[Context: These verses tell us that Jesus interacts with three men while “walking along the road” (v.57). He was actually headed to Jerusalem (v.51), where He knew He would die (v.22)]

1. [Overview observation question] What are some of the similarities in these three situations?

- all three men seemingly wanted to follow Jesus (two initiate their willingness and desire; one responds with his willingness and desire when Jesus calls him)
- none of them, however (so it seems), end up following Him
- in fact, in every situation, Jesus seems to be making it really hard to follow Him!

2. The first wannabe follower (vv.57-58)

This man initiates his willingness to follow Jesus with a sweeping promise to follow Him “wherever” He goes. How does Jesus test this man’s readiness, and what does He imply about what it truly means to follow Him?

- Jesus says He doesn't have a home (i.e. He is without comforts and security)
- Jesus was headed to Jerusalem (and this meant He would experience betrayal, rejection, abandonment, humiliation and much suffering—as well as a gruesome death.)

Jesus was basically asking the man if he was willing to give up comforts and security—and even his own life—to follow Him.

Following Jesus means following Him wherever He goes and/or wants to lead us.

Where are some of the places that people find most difficult to follow Jesus? Why?

3. The second wannabe follower (vv.59-60)

This man is called by Jesus to follow Him. What do we see in the man’s response?

- he calls Jesus “Lord” (indicating at least a certain level of respect toward Jesus)

- he asks to do something “first” before following Jesus (possibly indicating that though he was willing to follow Jesus, he wasn’t willing to do so at that time)

What seems strange—even uncaring—about Jesus’ response to the man’s request?

The man’s request was a reasonable one—one that was in accord with religious, social and family norms of the time. [Note: It may have been that his father had recently died and that because of this, he needed to take care of the burial arrangements. Most likely, however, the man’s father was still alive and thus he wanted to take care of his father in his old age and wait until after his father’s death and burial to follow Jesus.]

What was Jesus really implying/requiring in His call to the man to “Follow me”?

Following Jesus means a radical transfer of loyalty and priorities. As Jesus says elsewhere, those who follow after Him must “Seek first His Kingdom...” (Matt 6:33). So important to Jesus was the business of following Him and promoting God’s Kingdom that it took precedence even over the burial of family members.

[Note: v.60 probably means, “Let the (spiritually) dead bury the (physically) dead”, implying that there are people who aren’t in the Kingdom of God who can deal with earthly matters but that Kingdom people (i.e. true followers of Jesus) must give themselves—as a priority—to Kingdom matters.]

Following Jesus means following Him whenever He calls us to follow.

What are some of the things that hinder/keep people from completely following Jesus now?

4. The third wannabe follower (vv.61-62)

Like the first man, this man initiates and expresses to Jesus his willingness to follow Him. However, like the second man, there is a “but first” request—a reason for why he can’t or doesn’t want to follow Jesus at that time.

What is this reason, and why does it seem to be a reasonable request?

Family relationships are very important to God. Plus there was a biblical precedent to the man’s request (see 1 Kings 19:19-21)

What do you think Jesus is implying and requiring of the man in what He says to him?

There is always a cost to following Jesus. Even very important things like our relationships with family members must take second place to following Jesus and doing the work of the God’s Kingdom (see Luke 14:26)

[Note: Jesus’ reference to the plowman who looks back most likely refers to the would-be follower of Jesus whose affections and attentions are still on what was left behind.] Following Jesus means following Him whatever it may cost us.

What are some things that Jesus may ask people to give up/leave behind in order to follow Him?

Summary: In these three situations, Jesus is testing the readiness of those who say that they want to follow Him. His desire—and the need of any wannabe follower of Him—is not that they give Him part of their lives or that they live part of their lives for Him, but rather that they count the cost and give all of their lives to Him. He deserves—and demands—no less.

Application questions:

- What would your life be like if you followed Jesus completely—no excuses, no restrictions, no “but firsts”—wherever, whenever, and whatever?
- What is keeping you from giving your life completely to Jesus and to following Him?

Responses to Jesus

A Committed (but not perfect) Follower (Luke 5:1-11)

Introduction: Throughout this Bible study series, we've been considering what is probably the most important question in life: "What is our response to Jesus?" We have seen that some people respond to Jesus as "fools"; i.e. they make poor/wrong judgments about Him out of unbelief, un-willingness, etc. We also have seen that some people respond to Jesus as "fans"; i.e. they admire Jesus and like (or at least are willing) to be associated with Him and/or to be around Him, but haven't made a personal commitment to Him as Lord. In this study, we will look at a person who was a true "follower" of Jesus; i.e. someone who loved Jesus and pursued Him, who sought to live out his life in a loving response to Jesus for what He has done and for who He is, and who had given his life to Jesus and was committed to Him as the Lord of His life. This committed (but not perfect) follower of Jesus was Peter.

Warm up discussion topic:

- Think about a time that you let down someone/a group of people (like a teammate or your team). How did you feel? What kept you going and moving past your failure?

Read Luke 5:1-11 [Note: Simon = Peter (see John 1:42)]

Discussion questions:

1. Before this account, Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39), which probably caused Peter to appreciate and respect Jesus. This may have been why he was willing to stop cleaning his nets and let Jesus get into his boat to teach the crowds (even though he was tired from fishing all night and just wanted to finish his work and go home). It also may have been why he was willing to put out into deep water in the middle of the day and get his nets dirty again (even though as a skilled fisherman he knew that fishing was done at night in the shallow water, and therefore believed that they weren't going to catch anything!) At the end of this account, however, Peter's response to Jesus was to leave everything and follow Him (v.11)

What caused this change of response in Peter toward Jesus?

- *Jesus had revealed His authority in an area of Peter's life that he felt confident in, thus proving that He was capable (and worthy) to lead Peter's life.*

What might it mean for him to leave everything to follow Jesus for the next 3+ years?

- *His vocation, business and source of income, his family, his home, etc.*

[Note: This same response of "leaving everything" is seen in the lives of others who responded with a YES to Jesus' call to follow Him (e.g. Levi in Luke 5:27-28) and is what Jesus taught and commanded as being the needed response to following Him (Luke 14:33).]

Read Mark 10:28-30

2. Jesus acknowledged and commended Peter's response of "leaving everything" to follow Him. What does Jesus say will be the reward for all those who respond to Him in the same way?

They will receive back "one hundred times" as much as they gave up—both in this life and in the life to come.

Why do you think Jesus includes the phrase ""and with them, persecutions"?

*Following Jesus is not always easy, and often times results in being “persecuted” for Him.
[II Tim 3:12 “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”]*

Read Mark 14:27-31, 66-72

3. What do we see happening in this passage in the life of this committed follower of Jesus? What was his heart’s desire? What did he end up doing instead? What does his response to his failure show?

Even though Peter had a strong love for Jesus and a deep commitment to Him, he failed. His response to his failure showed that he had understood what he had done and had felt great remorse as a result. [Note: Luke 22:62 tells us that he “wept bitterly”]

Read John 21:1-19

4. What hope does this passage give to all who love Jesus and want to follow Him faithfully, but who know that they, too, will experience (or have experienced) failure at times in doing so?

Jesus’ love and commitment to His followers never ends or wavers when we fail. Rather, if we love Him, He helps us to get back up and to continue to follow Him.

[Note: The verb tense of “Follow me” (v.19) gives the meaning “Keep on following me”]

Skim read Acts 2:14-5:42

5. What further hope do these accounts give for those who love Jesus and want to follow Him?

Peter went on to become a bold evangelist for Jesus and a leader in the early church, suffering much for his faith in and commitment to Jesus.

[Note: As the ultimate evidence of his commitment to Jesus, Christian tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome under Emperor Nero for following Him.]

Summary: Peter was a follower of Jesus who gave up everything to follow Him (i.e. he “denied himself”, and said YES to following Jesus). His heart’s desire was to know and to do what Jesus wanted because of who He was and because he loved Him. He wasn’t, however, perfect, and he therefore didn’t follow Jesus perfectly. Despite this, he continued to seek Jesus’ forgiveness and help to live his life for Him (i.e. to “take up his cross” and say Yes “daily” to following Jesus). And as a result, he proved to be a committed (but not perfect) follower of Jesus for the rest of his life.

Application questions:

- As a result of what you’ve learned from the Bible studies in this series, would you say you are a “fool”, a “fan” or a “follower” of Jesus?
- If you’d like to become a follower of Jesus, what would it mean for you to “deny yourself”, “leave everything” and follow Him?
- What hope and encouragement does Peter’s example of being a committed, but not perfect, follower of Jesus give to you in making a decision to follow Jesus?