

How Do We Follow Jesus in 2026

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FIRST THEY CAME PASTOR MARTIN NIEMOLLER

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.

Rev. Martin Niemoller was a Lutheran Pastor in Germany during the 1920's and 1930's. During the 1920's, Germany was in great economic strain because of the sanctions the Allies put on Germany because of WWI. When Hitler was trying to get into power, he promised wealth and greatness for Germany. He told the German Church that he would keep his hands off the Church. Of course this was a lie, but many German Pastors and Christians believed him including Martin Niemoller. He had visited with Hitler and thought he was the answer to Germany's problems. Even when he started to see some troubling signs from Hitler, he didn't want to believe them. He remained silent to the evil that was going on around him. During His last meeting with Hitler, after Hitler had been in power for awhile, he finally realized the deep evil of Hitler. Niemoller then

preached against the the evil of the Nazi Regime, but it was too late. The Church had allowed the Nazi Regime too much control within the Church. Pastor Niemoller would be arrested and put into concentration camps from 1937 until 1945. After 1945, when Germany was defeated, he wrote this writing at the beginning as a warning to future generations including ours. He repented of the sin of silence to evil, but also for the sin of allowing false teaching to take root within the Church. Pastor Niemoller was known as a good Pastor. He wanted future generations to know how easy it is to be misled and to know how easy it is to remain silent when evil is spreading around the Church. Last week, we talked about following Jesus from His statement to Peter in John 21: 22, "You follow Me". This will be our mission statement for 2026. We talked about how Peter was focusing on other things, that he had lost focus on who he was to follow in all things of life. Peter had a different view of Jesus before Pentecost. His focus was on the wrong things and it almost destroyed his life before Pentecost. Pastor Niemoller started to look upon Hitler as the answer to Germany's problem and he believed all the lies that Hitler told him at the beginning. Niemoller started to focus on Hitler which cuts down one's focus on Jesus. He was mislead and when he finally discovered the sin, he didn't know how to handle it, so he remained silent for awhile. This is what most people do when they encounter bad life events that are new to them, they remain in the background and hope for the best. The American Church today is following in some ways the same set of footprints as the German Church did during the 1920's and 1930's. How are we to follow Jesus and still deal with the culture around us? This is an important question we must ask ourselves. We can't just sit in a chair and hope for Jesus to come back. He is coming back, but we must be faithful to the calling that has been put upon the Church by Jesus Himself who died for His Church. I would hate to have to write a poem or article that contained the words that Pastor Niemoller had written many years ago.

To learn how to follow Jesus during the time we are living in, we are going to start a sermon series from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The city of Colosse stood on the most important trade route from Ephesus to the Euphrates and was an important city. The city was known for the wool it produced. The church was

formed during Paul's third missionary journey, but not by Paul. It was formed by another Christian follower. The city would later be destroyed by the Turks many years later. However, Paul kept this city in his prayers and he learned the church in the city was having some issues. Paul was held as prisoner in Rome during this time, so he wrote a letter to them with the help of the Holy Spirit since he couldn't go there himself. So, let's look at the beginning of this letter. Turn to Colossians 1: 1-8 where we read this from Apostle Paul, "1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²To the saints and faithful brothers^[a] in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. ³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^[b] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^[c] behalf ⁸and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. (ESV – www.biblegateway.com)"

As of most of Paul's letters, he starts off by giving thanks to the Lord for their trust in Jesus and the Gospel Message. Plus, Paul gives thanks for the love the Colossians have through the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul was hearing that love fruit and faith fruit was being produced by the church in Colossians. It sounds like they are doing a good job as a church. Paul reminds them of the power of the Gospel Message and that it was still working around them. This is a nice beginning to the letter.

Let's now start getting into the meat of the letter. Let's continue by reading Colossians 1: 9 – 14 where we read this, "⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹²giving

thanks^[a] to the Father, who has qualified you^[b] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (ESV – www.biblegateway.com)” We see first off that being a follower of Jesus is filled with praying. The early Church prayed for each other. Jesus always was going off during His ministry into the hills to pray. He prayed for His disciples all the time. Praying for each other creates unity, even though we all are a little different. We don’t pray that everyone thinks like we do. Paul tells us to pray that we will be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. In other words, we follow Jesus by relying on the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and understanding to live in our day and age. We don’t rely on human books or professors to tell us how to live in this day and age. We rely on Jesus to show us His will for us on how to live today. When we are in line with His will for our daily living, we will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord in which will please Hime very much. No where here did I read that we are to cuddle up to the culture and try to please it so we don’t hurt someone’s feelings. When you walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, you will upset many who are not true followers of Jesus. We are to pray for each other in this manner so we can handle the possible rejection. When changes in our culture come our way and we don’t know how to handle it, we must go straight to the Lord to know what His will is for that change. How do we handle AI? We should be praying about it. What is God’s will for the church on handling AI? God knows more about AI than the humans who created it. He knows what AI can do to humans – help them or destroy them. Maybe AI will lead more people away from God? We don’t know, but God does. We need to pray for His wisdom and understanding for the time we are living in. I can’t stress this enough. We like to state how great the New Testament Church was, but they were beginning to have a lot of issues with false teachings. Greek philosophy started to mix into Church teaching and was causing confusion among the believers. Paul knew the Church needed to rely on Jesus to continue to follow that narrow path with Jesus. The Colossian Church was struggling with false teaching just like we are today within the Church.

When we walk / follow Jesus, we will start to bear fruit for His Kingdom while at the same time gaining knowledge of God. This doesn't mean we read tons of human Christian books. They didn't have them during Paul's day. They relied on the Holy Spirit to gain knowledge of God. Maybe this means going back to verse 9 in knowing God's will in our daily walk with Him. I believe as we continue with Paul in this sermon series, we'll see what it means to totally surrender to the will of God for your life – no matter the age. To walk in a manner pleasing to Him means to fully please Him. Are we really walking to fully please Him? We're usually trying to please someone else all the time. Following Jesus means wanting to please Him fully – not the culture around us. Wanting to please Him by wanting His will for our life means that He is the main center puzzle piece for our life. I like to work on those 500-to-1000-piece puzzle sets you usually see on tables at nursing homes. I usually start on the outside edge of the puzzle because it's easier to start with pieces that are flat on one side. Then, I work toward the center. Following Jesus is different. Jesus is the center piece in our puzzle of life. When we put Him down first, all the pieces will fit going outward. Ask an old missionary about following Jesus. They'll tell you how depended they were in Jesus for life as a missionary, but they'll also tell you how as they look back on their life, how God fit everything together to work out the best for them. Why, because Jesus was their center puzzle piece. The German Church no longer had Jesus as their center puzzle piece. They tried to please the Nazi government and themselves. They no longer wanted the will of God for their life.

How do we know that we are following Jesus and have Him as our center puzzle piece in life? Those who follow Jesus fully, will be strengthened with Holy Spirit power which will produce endurance, patience, and joy. This is what Paul tells us in verse 11. Rev. Martin Niemoller didn't discover this until he made the decision to follow Jesus instead of Hitler and the Nazi teaching that had seeped into the Church teachings. He learned the hard way of knowing what it means to rely on Jesus for all things in the concentration camps. The only way he was able to survive was through the power of the Spirit that produced for him endurance, patience, and joy. If we go back to Paul, he wanted the Church to go back in depending on the original teachings of Jesus. He didn't want them to embrace

all of the false teaching around them like we do today. Even though AI is not in the Bible, we do have the same powerful Spirit that can give us all wisdom and knowledge needed to handle whatever comes our way. Let's pray that His Spirit will help all of us to follow Jesus during these confusing days that we live in so that we can know His full will for each of our lives.