

Following Jesus

Jesus Is the Messiah — The Savior of the World Sent by God

Matthew 16:13–26 Devotional for Students

Understanding the Context of Matthew 16

Matthew 16 is a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Up until this moment, Jesus has been teaching, healing, performing miracles, and revealing the kingdom of God. Crowds are following Him, religious leaders are questioning Him, and people are trying to figure out who He really is.

Some think He is a prophet. Some think He is just a good teacher. Some think He is another religious leader. But Jesus now asks His disciples the most important question they will ever be asked: ***“Who do you say that I am?”***

This question matters because everything in Christianity hinges on the identity of Jesus. If Jesus is just a teacher, we can take or leave His advice. If Jesus is just a prophet, we can admire Him. But if Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, then He deserves our full surrender and our lives.

Matthew 16 shows three powerful truths about following Jesus:

- You must personally recognize who Jesus really is.
- Following Jesus means trusting His authority.

- Following Jesus requires surrender, not control.

Jesus is not looking for fans. Jesus is calling followers.

Exploring the Text

Understanding key words in this passage helps us understand what Jesus is teaching.

Messiah (Christ)

The word “Christ” means “Anointed One” or “Messiah.”

The Messiah was the promised Savior that God said would come to rescue His people.

Old Testament prophecies pointed to the Messiah as:

A King (2 Samuel 7:12–13)

A suffering Savior (Isaiah 53)

The one who would defeat sin and death.

Peter recognizes that Jesus is not just a teacher, He is the promised Savior.

Son of the Living God

This phrase declares that Jesus is divine.

Peter is saying: Jesus is not just sent from God, He is God’s Son.

John 1:14 says: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”*

Jesus is God in human form.

Church

When Jesus says He will build His church, the word church means “called-out people.” It doesn’t mean a building. It means a group of people who belong to Jesus and live for His mission. This "called-out people" isn't just an idea; it's a real community, your local church, where you can grow, serve, and live out His mission together.

Deny Yourself

This phrase means to surrender control of your life. Following Jesus means: Letting go of your way Letting go of your pride Letting go of your plans Letting go of the pressure to curate a perfect online image Letting go of always needing to be in control of your friendships or future
It means trusting Jesus more than yourself.

5-Day Devotional Plan

Day 1 — Who Do People Say Jesus Is? - Matthew 16:13–14

Devotional

When Jesus asked this question, He wasn’t asking because He didn’t know the answer. He was asking because people had many opinions about Him. Some believed Jesus was: A prophet, a messenger, religious teacher, but they still missed who He really was. The same thing happens today. Some people say Jesus was: A good moral teacher, a wise philosopher a historical figure, But the Bible makes it clear: Jesus is the Savior of the world.

John 14:6 says:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The world has many opinions about Jesus. But the truth about Jesus comes from God’s Word.

Application

Many voices in the world try to define who Jesus is. Social media. Friends. Culture. Even popular influencers or songs. But the most important question isn’t what people say about Jesus. It’s what you believe about Jesus.

Challenge

Ask yourself honestly today: Where have my ideas about Jesus come from... The Bible or culture?

Spend time reading Scripture this week to learn who Jesus truly is. As an actionable step, open your Bible right now and read John 1:1-18.

Day 2 — Who Do You Say Jesus Is? - Matthew 16:15–18

Devotional

Jesus shifts the question from the crowd to the individual. “Who do *you* say that I am?” Peter responds with a powerful declaration: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter realizes something huge: Jesus is the promised Messiah. This wasn’t just intellectual knowledge, it was spiritual revelation. Jesus even says Peter didn’t figure this out on his own.

God revealed it to him. Knowing Jesus is not just about information. It's about God opening your heart to believe.

Application

Following Jesus starts with a personal decision. You cannot follow Jesus because your parents believe. You cannot follow Jesus because your church believes. You must answer the question yourself: Who do I believe Jesus is?

Challenge

Write this question somewhere you will see it today: *Who do I say Jesus is?*
Talk to God honestly about where you stand in your faith. Consider writing down your personal answer to that question in a journal or on your phone, describing *why* you believe what you do about Jesus.

Day 3 — Jesus Has All Authority - Matthew 16:19–20

Devotional

Keys represent authority. Jesus is explaining that His message has the authority to open the door to eternal life. The Gospel, the message of Jesus, is what brings people into God's kingdom.

Acts 4:12 says:

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Only Jesus saves. No good works. No religion. No popularity. No amount of social media likes. Just Jesus.

Application

Many students try to build their lives on: Popularity, sports, grades, approval, but none of those things can save you or give you eternal life. Only Jesus can.

Challenge

Think about this question today: What am I trusting most in my life right now? Ask God to help you trust Jesus above everything else. As a concrete step, consider how you spend your time today. Can you intentionally choose to prioritize something that reflects your trust in Jesus over something that reflects your trust in earthly things?

Day 4 — Following Jesus Means Surrender - Matthew 16:24

Devotional

Jesus makes something very clear: Following Him isn't easy. The cross was a symbol of death and sacrifice. When Jesus says take up your cross, He means: Let go of control, Put God first, Live for something bigger than yourself. Following Jesus means choosing Him even when it costs something. And here's the amazing paradox: giving up control to Jesus actually leads to the most freedom and joy you'll ever experience. True life is found in surrender to Him.

Application

Many students want Jesus to fit into their lives. They want to set the terms, to make Jesus convenient. But Jesus calls us to build our lives around Him.

This means: Choosing obedience Choosing faith Choosing Christ over comfort.

Challenge

Ask yourself today: What is one area of my life I need to surrender to Jesus? (e.g., a specific habit, a difficult relationship, a future plan, your desire for control).

Pray and ask God to help you trust Him with that area. Then, think of one small, specific action you can take today to physically or mentally demonstrate that surrender.

Day 5 — When Our Plans Clash with God’s Plan - Matthew 16:21–23

Devotional

When Jesus tells the disciples He will suffer and die, Peter pushes back.

He says: “This shall never happen to you!” Peter loved Jesus — but he still didn’t understand God’s plan. Sometimes we want Jesus without the suffering. We want victory without sacrifice. We want our plans to always go smoothly. But God’s greatest victory, salvation, came through the cross.

Isaiah 53:5 says: *“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.”* Jesus suffered so we could be saved.

Application

Sometimes God’s plan for our lives doesn’t look like what we expected. It might involve hardship, waiting, or different paths than we imagined for our friendships, sports, or college. But God’s ways are always greater. Trusting Jesus means believing that His plan is better than ours.

Challenge

Think about a situation in your life where things didn't go the way you planned, or where God's path seems harder than your own.

Ask God today: "Help me trust Your plan even when I don't understand it, and show me the good You are doing even in difficult seasons." Take a moment to list 3 things that are going well in your life right now, even amidst challenges, as a way to practice gratitude and acknowledge God's hand.

Final Thought

The question Jesus asked His disciples is still the most important question in the world: "Who do you say that I am?"

Your answer determines:

- Your faith
- Your purpose
- Your eternity

Following Jesus begins when we recognize: He is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. And when we believe that truth, the only response left is this: Follow Him.

Next Steps

You've spent five days diving into what it means to follow Jesus – don't stop now! Here are some ideas for how to keep growing:

- **Keep Reading:** Continue reading the book of Matthew. See how Jesus continues to teach about discipleship.

- Talk About It: Share what you've learned with a trusted adult – a parent, youth pastor, or mentor. Their insights can help you grow even more.
- Find a Friend: Invite a friend to go through this devotional with you. Discussing these truths together can be powerful.
- Serve: Look for opportunities to serve in your local church this week. Living out your faith in practical ways helps solidify what you believe.
- Pray Specifically: Take time each day to pray for guidance in one specific area where you want to follow Jesus more fully.