

ABSOLUTE
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SERIES



Following Jesus

SIX BIBLE STUDY LESSONS
FOR GROUP DISCIPLESHIP

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FOR GROUP DISCIPLESHIP



EVERY NATION
P R O D U C T I O N S

FOLLOWING JESUS

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How to Use this Material

In Victory, the primary venue for discipleship happens in a small group. It is called a Victory group. We strongly encourage everyone to be involved since these groups are specifically designed to help disciples grow spiritually.

A Victory group meeting has three sections: **Connect**, **Word**, and **Prayer**, and ideally lasts from forty to sixty minutes.

CONNECT (5-10 minutes)

Victory group meetings begin with a time to relate with one another. Depending on the people who comprise the group, this can be done through a variety of ways:

- Fun—such as an icebreaker activity
- Answered prayers—sharing of testimonies and updates
- Questions—such as those provided in the material, learning each other’s personal stories, and sharing feedback from the weekly message

Effective Questions During the Connect Portion:

- Are deliberately friendly to first-timers
- Ask for opinion or experiences
- Require no Bible knowledge
- Have no right or wrong answer
- Are not controversial
- Are preferably connected to the meeting’s topic

WORD (20-30 minutes)

Teach the truth and relevance of God's Word for life application. The Victory group meeting is not primarily a Bible study. Although teaching and explanation of Scripture is involved, the goal is to minister, not finish a material.

There is no need teach all the points in a material.

Within this section, we look at what the Bible says, its relevance to us today, and its application in our lives.

What: *What does the Bible say?*

Communicate and impart biblical truth clearly and concisely

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16,17

Tips for Sharing the Word Effectively

- Let the Bible speak for itself.
- Use illustrations and tell stories to explain Bible verses.
- When entertaining clarifications, be watchful not to allow the discussion to go off-tangent.
- The primary goal is to minister to the needs of the people, not to finish a Bible lesson.
- Be led by the Spirit when using the material.

So What: *What is the relevance of the Word to my life?*

Give participants the opportunity to discuss how the Word impacts the way they live.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

ROMANS 12:2

Now What: *How do I apply the Word to my life?*

Our primary reason for sharing the Bible is so that people will know who God is and what He has done. In doing so, the participants will begin to discover who they are and what they should do.

If it is a promise, teach them to claim it. If it is a command or a principle, encourage them to put it to action by God's grace. If it is a truth, let them embrace it willingly and not under compulsion. Allow God's grace and love to win them by the way you teach God's Word.

Encourage specific, measurable action steps that are consistent with the life change that the Scripture is bringing about. We do not command people, but we spur them on toward love and good deeds.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. JAMES 1:22

Tips for Life-Changing Application

- You may choose one of the "So What" and "Now What" questions or you may add your own.
- An effective standby application question is: "What one action step are you going to take as a result of what you heard today?"
- Designate who will be the first to answer the question asked.
- Do not allow someone to argue or be critical of others.
- Remind everyone to apply the lesson to their own lives, not to someone else's.
- Ask God for wisdom to know when to balance or correct strange or unbiblical applications. Insensitive correction or criticism can kill the group, as can unchecked heresy.
- Remind everyone that transformation is God's work, not ours, and our obedience is a response to who He is and His love for us. It is God's grace that enables us to apply and obey His Word.

PRAY (15-20 minutes)

Prayer is the most important part of the Victory group meeting. Make sure you have plenty of time left so your prayer time is not rushed. This is not a “closing prayer,” but a time for everyone in the group to take specific requests to God. This is where the action is. The goal is to create a venue where people will see God move on their behalf.

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” MATTHEW 18:19

Tips for Powerful Prayer

- Listen to the Holy Spirit carefully during the Connect and Word sections for things that may need prayer.
- Spend your time praying for one another, not sharing and discussing prayer requests.
- Keep your prayers simple, sincere, and short. Most non-believers have never heard an ordinary Christian just talk to God and will be touched by the sincerity and simplicity of the prayer.
- Pray, don’t preach. Pray in simple and short sentences, not long “sermon prayers.”
- Use conversational prayer, not complicated or profound, intercessory prayer.
- Expect God to answer your prayers.

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1

Lost and Found

CONNECT

- Tell us about the most surprising part of your week.
- Recall an instance when you or someone you know got lost. What happened?
- In school, what were you known for? Why?

“. . .The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” ¹ SAMUEL 16:7

WHAT

We live in a culture where people are often judged by their looks or social status, but God sees people differently. The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 is a testament to the reality that though man looks at the outward appearance, Jesus looks at the heart. In this lesson, we will look at the progression of the life of Zacchaeus and how his encounter with Jesus changed him.

1 A Rich Tax Collector

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. LUKE 19:2

People saw Zacchaeus based on his profession and economic status. Because he was a rich tax collector, he was considered corrupt, religiously unclean, and a political traitor.

Who would Zacchaeus probably be like in our culture today?

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2 A Man with Physical Limitations

He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. LUKE 19:3

Zacchaeus's physical characteristics was a source of limitation, and most probably of ridicule. But his desire to see God did not hinder him (Luke 19:4).

How did
Zacchaeus
overcome
his physical
limitations?

2 A Sinner

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." . . . ⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

LUKE 19:5,7

Zacchaeus was labeled a sinner, but by inviting Himself to Zacchaeus's house, Jesus was making a public declaration of friendship and acceptance.

Why would Jesus
associate with
known sinners? (See
Mark 2:15-17.)

3 A Child of God

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." LUKE 19:9,10

Though people judged Zacchaeus for many different reasons, Jesus saw the condition of his heart—he was lost and needed to be found. When Zacchaeus encountered Jesus, he made a decision to do what is right before God (Luke 19:8).

How has your
life changed
since you
encountered God?

SO WHAT

- Have there been times when you've related to people differently because of their economic status or profession? Why does the condition of being spiritually lost equalize everyone in God's eyes (Romans 3:23)?
- How can our physical attributes or ethnicity become a source of limitation or ridicule? How should we view people according to God's Word?
- How does an encounter with Jesus change us?

NOW WHAT

- What do you feel is Jesus' invitation to you? How can you respond to Him today?
- Where do you base your identity? Are there things in your past that make you base your identity on them? How can you base your identity on God and His Word?
- Think of people around you who you would normally not associate with. How can you help them know God better and show God's love to them this week?

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- Thank God for seeking us out and for making a way for us to know Him and walk with Him.
 - Pray that you would not let any of your weaknesses, limitations, or background hinder you from being who God has called you to be. Ask God to make you secure and confident in your identity in Christ.
 - Pray that your life would be an example to many. Ask God that the people you meet would come to know Christ through your testimony and life.

“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” ISAIAH 29:13

WHAT

Christianity is more than just following a bunch of external rules and religious rituals. Jesus is concerned with the condition of our hearts. Following Jesus means having our hearts right with God.

The story of two disciples encountering the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-45) shows us that it is possible for people who follow Jesus to become slow of heart (Luke 24:25), not recognize God, and forget how to walk with Him. In this lesson, we will look at how these disciples went from being slow of heart to having hearts burning for God.

1 Open Eyes

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. LUKE 24:31

(SEE ALSO PSALM 119:18.)

Many times, God is walking with us, but because we have our eyes on our problems, our past, or ourselves, we don't recognize He's there. When we open our eyes to see all the good and wonderful things that God is doing in our lives, our hearts will burn with a renewed passion for Him.

What are some of the wonderful things that God has done for you? (See Ephesians 1:18,19.)

2

Open Scriptures and Open Hearts

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" LUKE 24:32 (SEE ALSO JOHN 5:39,40.)

We can read a lot of books and hear many good opinions, but until the Scriptures are opened, our hearts will remain slow, cold, and far away from God. We read the Bible to develop a deeper relationship with God, not to gain more knowledge of Scripture. It's the Word of God that bridges our hearts to God.

What does it mean to have burning hearts?

3

Open Minds

³⁸*He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" . . .* ⁴⁵*Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.* LUKE 24:38,45

When fear and doubt rise in our minds, our view of God gets clouded and our hearts grow cold. We need to open our minds to the things of God in order to see Him clearly and experience Him daily.

What does it mean to have our minds opened?

SO WHAT

- How do you think the two disciples felt as they began their journey to Emmaus? Why do you think Jesus showed up among these two?
- How does reading the Bible bring us into a deeper relationship with God?
- How do you think God opens our minds? What are some things that can close our minds to the things of God?

NOW WHAT

- In what area of your life do you not see God in right now? How can you see what He is doing in your life and how He is working on your behalf?
- How can you spend time with God and in His Word every day? Do you have a time set apart every day for Bible reading and prayer?
- Are there fears or doubts that are currently keeping you from walking with God? How can you choose to live by faith no matter what you are facing?

-
- Dedicate your heart, mind, and life to God. Ask Him to give you new opportunities to encounter Him every day.
 - Pray that you would grow in your relationship with God and in your passion for His Word. Ask God to help you prioritize your time with Him.
 - Pray for those you know who have not encountered Christ yet. Ask God to open their eyes, hearts, and minds to His truth.

3

No Doubt About it

CONNECT

- How do you feel when you miss out on an important event or occasion? Recall a specific instance explaining this.
- When you were a child, what was your favorite story or character from a story? Why did you like it so much?
- Who is one person you look up to? Why?

²⁴Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." JOHN 20:24,25

WHAT

History and tradition have labeled Thomas, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, as "Doubting Thomas" because of the story in John 20:19-31. A "Doubting Thomas" is someone who demands physical evidence in order to be convinced. Though Thomas' request to see Jesus has been misunderstood as habitual lack of faith, in reality, it was a one-time event that occurred simply because he was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them.

As opposed to a skeptic who has made up his mind not to believe the truth, Thomas honestly wanted to see Jesus for himself. When Jesus appeared to Thomas, Jesus did not rebuke him for not believing. Instead, Jesus met him where he was in his faith. In this lesson, we will look at how we can respond in faith when we face skepticism.

1 Faith based on evidence

²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" JOHN 20:26-28

Though many think otherwise, asking hard questions is not wrong. The Christian faith is rational, and going to God with our questions and concerns helps us grow deeper in our relationship with Him.

How did Thomas respond when he finally encountered Jesus?

2 Faith without evidence

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." JOHN 20:29

For Thomas, "to see is to believe." But for us, "to believe is to see." Though we have not seen Jesus, we believe because faith is not dependent on evidence.

What is faith (Hebrews 11:1)?

3 Faith based on God's eternal Word

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. JOHN 20:31

Our faith is based on who God is and what His Word says. Though at one point Thomas doubted God, he did not let that unbelief define him. He dealt with his doubt and moved on. History tells us that he was a missionary to India and was martyred for the gospel. After his encounter with Jesus, he believed Jesus without a doubt and risked all to follow Him.

SO WHAT

- Why do you think some Christians think we should not (or cannot) ask the hard questions? How did Jesus respond when His followers asked Him difficult questions?
- How can you walk and live by faith? Why do you think the Bible says that “the righteous will live by faith?”
- How does the Word of God help our faith grow (Romans 10:17)?

NOW WHAT

- Do you believe that Jesus is who He says He is? Is He your Lord and Savior? Are you, like Thomas, willing to follow Jesus for the rest of your life?
- Are you in a moment of crisis in your faith? Are you willing to move on from this moment and not let it define the rest of your life? How can you walk by faith every day?
- Is the Word of God a constant in your daily life? How can your passion for God’s Word grow starting this week?

-
- Thank God for His Word and for His faithfulness over your life.
 - Pray that you would believe in God even when there is no physical evidence and even when you don’t feel like it. Ask God to help you grow in your relationship with God and to trust Him every day.
 - Pray for those you know who have not yet put their faith in Christ. Believe God for their salvation and for opportunities to share the gospel to them.

⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"
⁷"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."
⁸Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."
⁹At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. . . .

JOHN 5:6-9

WHAT

John 5:1-15 tells the story of how an encounter with Jesus changed a man who was invalid for thirty-eight years. The man lost hope, endured his sickness, and did not believe he could be healed. Also, no one was there to help him in his time of need. But Jesus met him, healed him, and pursued him. There are at least two lessons we can learn from this account.

1

No matter how long you have had your problem, it's too soon to lose your hope.

One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. JOHN 5:5 (SEE ALSO ROMANS 4:18.)

After being invalid for thirty-eight years, the man received his miracle. Abraham did not lose hope even if he had to wait for twenty-five years. In your own life, even if you have been waiting for a long time for your prayers to be answered, it is too soon to conclude that "it will always be this way."

God is a God of hope, and He will fulfill what He has promised. What is hope?

2

No matter if there is no human, medical, or financial help, God can still help.

7“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”⁸Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”⁹At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. . . .

JOHN 5:7-9

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” MATTHEW 19:26

The man admitted to Jesus that no one was there to help him. Even if help is not available for us, we need to understand that God is willing and able to help, and that all things are possible through Him.

Tell of a time when God was the only help you had and how He came through for you.

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SO WHAT

- How do you think the invalid felt when Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well? What do you think did the invalid feel after being in that helpless situation for thirty-eight years?
- In Luke 18:1, why did Jesus encourage His disciples to pray and not give up?
- Do you really believe that all things are possible with God? Why do you think some people have a hard time believing this?

NOW WHAT

- Is your hope in God? How can you grow in your understanding of God as the God of hope this week?
- Are you in a situation where you need help, but no human, medical, or financial help is available? How can you trust God amidst this challenge?
- Think of one prayer you are still waiting for God to answer. How can you grow in faith every day as you wait on God?

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- Thank God for His faithfulness and goodness over your life. Declare your trust and dependence on Him even when you go through situations that test and challenge your faith.
 - Ask God for hope and faith to believe in Him, to grow in Him, and to be used of Him every day.
 - Pray for those you know who have lost hope and need God's supernatural and miraculous touch. Pray that they would have an encounter with Jesus that would change their lives forever.

The Dangers of Wealth

- If you had ten million dollars, what would you do with it? Why?
- Have you ever participated in a dangerous or extreme sport? What was it like? If you haven't, would you like to try it? Why or why not?
- What was the most dangerous situation you have been in? What happened?

²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²²At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. MARK 10:21,22

WHAT

The rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-22 enthusiastically came to Jesus to know the truth, but he did not follow Him. After we encounter Jesus, the goal is that we would follow Him and have a growing relationship with Him. But this man loved his wealth more than he could obey God. In this lesson, we will look at some dangers of wealth.

1 Wealth is deceitful and can choke the Word.

... but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. MARK 4:19

How is wealth deceitful? How does wealth choke the Word?

2 Wealth is a temptation and a trap.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 1 TIMOTHY 6:9

How can even just the desire for wealth cause us to fall into temptation?

3 Wealth brings arrogance and misplaced hope.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is

so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17

God provides for our enjoyment, but the Bible commands us not to be arrogant.

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Why should we not put our hope in wealth?

4 Wealth can make you lukewarm.

¹⁶“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” REVELATION 3:16,17

Wealth has its dangers, but that does not mean we should all give it up and become poor. Jesus asked the rich young man to sell all he had because his heart was wrapped around with his wealth.

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Because wealth can be dangerous, we should live by the laws God has given us. One of His commands is to tithe, which is a reminder of our allegiance to Him, that what we have is a blessing from Him.

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⁹Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

PROVERBS 3:9,10

SO WHAT

- Why do you think the rich young ruler could not give up his wealth? How do you think he felt?
- Why do some people think that their problems would be solved if they had more money? What does the Bible say about this belief?
- Why does God command us to honor Him with our wealth?

NOW WHAT

- Are you faithfully giving your tithe? Starting this week, how can you handle your wealth in a way that honors God?
- Is wealth a temptation or a trap for you? How can you be free from the dangers of wealth beginning this week?
- How can you grow in your understanding of biblical prosperity and the dangers of wealth? How can you apply what you've learned today?

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- Thank God for His blessings and faithfulness over you and your family.
 - Pray that you would trust God as the source of every blessing. Pray that wealth would not be a temptation or a trap for you, and that it would not lead you away from God.
 - Declare your dependence on God and your desire to follow Him. Pray that you would make Him known wherever you go and that you would be a channel of His blessings.

6

Follow without Fail

CONNECT

- Do you like shopping? Why or why not?
- What's your favorite action movie? Why do you like it?
- Who is the most generous person you know? Recall an instance explaining this.

"Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" MARK 10:17 (READ MARK 10:17-30.)

WHAT

The rich young man in Mark 10:17-22 came to Jesus to ask Him what he needed to do for salvation. He was trying to gain eternal life by his own actions, but the Bible goes on to tell us that he went away sad and did not follow Jesus because the man had great wealth. There are two ways to look at what Jesus was telling this man to do: Was Jesus trying to take something away from the man, or was He trying to give the man something? Our perspective on what God is doing in our lives will greatly affect how we respond to Him.

After the rich young man left, Jesus addressed His disciples. In this lesson, we will look at what He explained to His disciples, and what He wants to give us as we follow Him.

1 Temporal Blessings

²⁸Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" ²⁹"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." MARK 10:28-30

God does not have a problem blessing His people on earth.

How has God provided for you as you have put Him first?

2 Persecution

"... and with them, persecutions..." MARK 10:30

(SEE ALSO 2 TIMOTHY 3:12.)

The Bible promises that if we want to live godly lives, we will be persecuted. How have you been persecuted as you have followed Christ?

Why should we not put our hope in wealth?

3 Eternal Life

²⁴... But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." MARK 10:24-27 (SEE ALSO MARK 10:30.)

The rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to get eternal life, but Jesus told His disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said it is impossible for us to save ourselves, but it's not impossible for God. He promises eternal life for those who follow and surrender their lives to Him.

Salvation is not about what you do for Him—it's what He already did for you. How can we be saved (Romans 10:9)?

SO WHAT

- Why do you think the rich young ruler did not follow Jesus? How do you think Peter and the disciples feel after the rich young ruler turned away from Jesus?
- Why do you think Christians are persecuted? How should we respond to persecution?
- What is eternal life?

NOW WHAT

- Have you received the eternal life that Jesus is offering? Are you assured of your salvation? If not, would you like to surrender your life to Jesus and follow Him starting today?
- Have you, like Peter, left all to follow Jesus? Is there something that's holding you back from following Him completely? How can you follow Him completely starting today?
- How can you know God more and follow Him closely this week?

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- Thank God for the promises He gives us in His Word. Thank God for the gift of eternal life.
 - Ask God to help you follow Him and walk with Him every day. Pray that He will bless you in every way and that He will sustain you in the midst of persecution.
 - Pray for those you know who have not made a decision to follow Jesus yet. Believe God for their salvation and pray for opportunities to share the gospel to them.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

MATTHEW 4:19

Following Jesus is a series of six materials for group discipleship designed to help disciples know and follow Jesus.

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Lost and Found
- Hearts on Fire
- No Doubt about it
- Don't Give up
- The Dangers of Wealth
- Follow without Fail



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P R O D U C T I O N S