

# I am the way

A person is seen rappelling down a dark cliff face on the right side of the image. The background is a teal-colored collage of industrial structures, including pipes and circular tanks. The overall aesthetic is modern and technical.

I stood, poised at the edge of the precipice, nothing but very thin air between me and the ground 25 metres below. 'Now lean back over the edge,' he told me. 'Go ahead, sit down,' he urged, as I gingerly lowered the sitting portion of my anatomy over the cliff. The third day of my rock-climbing class was dedicated to abseiling, gliding gracefully down the climbing rope. In theory. As I stood there, poised over the abyss, I contemplated that theory in some detail. The friction of the rope as it wound its way around my body and through the sturdy steel links called carabiners would slow my descent. By guiding the rope around more or less of my body, I could increase or decrease the total friction, which would produce a corresponding decrease or increase in the rate of travel. As I peered over the edge, that knowledge did not quiet my increasingly agitated solar plexus. ➔

by Ed Dickerson

Like most people, I learn more easily by *doing* rather than reading or hearing. All the more when what I'm learning involves significant personal risk. My unfortunate encounters with the law of gravity told me that a fall of 25 metres qualifies as significant risk. That another person, no more immune to gravity than myself, undertook to show me how, gave me the courage to try.

The instructor's example and encouragement helped me get over the edge, and down that rope. 'You can do it,' he called. 'Just do what you saw me do.' Each day of the class, our teacher had demonstrated each technique first, then coached us in turn as we did our best to duplicate his actions. Each day our confidence grew as we saw our teacher complete that day's assigned tasks. Although I never became a great mountain climber, that class taught me a lot.

As we live our lives, we repeatedly find ourselves in the



same predicament that I faced on that cliff years ago. We face a future we cannot avoid, uncertain about our fate, yet forced to make choices that will alter our lives permanently. Marriage, career, religion or no, all these and many other choices loom before us, and each one seems like its own precipice, that once we've committed there's no going back. And what if we discover on the way down that our experience doesn't match our expectations? What if we regret a choice after we make it?

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Beatle John Lennon warned us, 'Life is what happens while you're making other plans.' The lives of John Lennon and Princess Diana demonstrate that we can't know how long we will live. Both had fame, money, and seemed in control of their fates until, suddenly, they were gone. Their deaths prove that each day could be our last, our end brought about by forces we cannot predict or even imagine. Whether we want to or not, every day we face choices which will change our lives forever. Since we only get one go around, we desperately want to make the right choices.



Philosopher Henry David Thoreau said he did not want to come to the end of life only to discover that he had not really lived. We need to find the secret to living well each day, so well that, no matter when the end of life comes, no matter the painful experiences along the way, we can know in our inmost being that we have lived, and lived well.

At the same time, most of us are tired of being told what to do and what not to do. Our lives seem filled with rules and not with living. Parents, teachers, friends, various gurus all seem to think they can give us the correct set of procedures to follow to live well. And it has always been so. Whether Confucius, or Socrates, or Buddha, humans have never lacked for good advice about how to live.

I faced another precipice all those years ago, about how to live my life. I was young, had a good job, and a beautiful wife. But I wasn't happy. I realised something had to change. I'd been raised in a religious home, but like many others, I found all the rules tiring and irrelevant to my real life. Not only that, but I didn't much care for the very ones who claimed to live by all the rules.

I found that Confucius, Socrates, and Buddha all offered good advice about how to live. Problem was, like learning to abseil, I needed more than theory, I needed a friend to show me how. That's what made Jesus

different from all the rest. He didn't say, 'Follow the rule book.' No, he said, 'Follow me.' He didn't say 'I know the way,' he said, 'I *am* the way.' What does that mean? Here's the best description I've found.

'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.' (Matthew 11:28-30. *The Message*)

And that has made all the difference. Once I knew to look, I found friends who knew Jesus. We share our lives with each other, as he shares his with us. Every day we learn more of what it means to live 'freely and lightly.' Each of us has trials and sorrows, but we're learning how to live well through difficult times. We support each other when discouraged, and celebrate each other's triumphs. Oh, yes, and we have a great deal of fun.

I did learn to abseil that day, but not from studying the theory. I had to take the plunge. The same is true for following Jesus. You'll never know how to do it by studying religion. Try it. Find someone who knows Jesus. Spend some time with them. Get a taste of the life. You might like it.

