

EQUIPPING SERIES 2023
Followers of Jesus

PART 1: Friday, January 13, 2020

I am so thankful you are here tonight. This is a benchmark night for us here at Encounter 319. Three years ago the Lord spoke to me about E319 and He declared we would be a catalyst. He said we would not be the only one, but we would definitely be one.

So I looked up the word 'catalyst' in the dictionary, and it is defined as: *a person who by his actions selflessly helps, mentors, influences, guides and inspires other people in the journey and the fulfillment of their lives, making them fulfilling and better.*

We have tried many pivots as E319 as we 'heard and obeyed' attempting to fulfill that Word, and I feel as though now I have some revelation on what He is calling us to be a catalyst of, and that's what I want to talk about tonight.

Encounter 319 is a catalyst, in the body of Christ, to become 'champions' and then to *selflessly help, mentor, influence guide and inspire* other in our spheres of influence to become, 'champions' for Jesus.

A number of years ago, probably 20 years ago now, I was at a very small 'revival' event, and a friend of ours, Graham Cooke was standing next to me. There was about 12 people face-down before the Lord, and Graham said something I have never forgotten.

He said, *You give me 12 people, like this, and we can transform the world.*

What IF, it only takes one, two, or 12, to transform history?

What IF it is not about the masses, the buildings, the money, the influence, the status?

What IF, it is actually about following Jesus:
hanging out with Him,
learning to be with Him, learning to hear Him, learning to listen to Him, learning to be obedient, learning to walk with Him, and learning how to become—exactly like Jesus?

What IF, it was simply all about being a Christ-follower?

What IF, we followed Jesus instead of demanding that He follow us?

WHEN YOU READ THROUGH THE GOSPELS IT DID NOT SEEM THAT JESUS WAS ALL THAT INTERESTED IN NUMBERS:

Jesus was looking for Christ-followers then, He is looking for Christ followers now.

Every place Jesus went He released the Kingdom with incredible signs and wonders, and people were so attracted to those ACTS of Jesus. So impressed were the people with what God was doing, they followed Him in masses, to the point, He often was trapped and could not get away from them.

And I find it so interesting that often in those moments He would throw down the gauntlet in a way that revealed the true followers, from those simply captured by the ACTS.

Like in **John chapter 6**, when Jesus was probably at the highest point of his popularity, and massive amounts of people were following Him, and He chose in that moment to roll out the lines about *eating my flesh and drinking my blood*. He is basically saying: *If you want to be a Christ-follower, if you want to live in life-union with Me, you have to eat my flesh and drink my Blood.*

And people were like WHAT!?! Are you out of your mind? And they left in droves. Jesus watched the masses departing in **John 6**, no longer interested in Jesus. *The notes in the Passion Translation of John 6:66 says-Jesus went from FEEDING 5000 to OFFENDING 5000.*

Peter is like, *what the heck Jesus, why did you say that now? Our numbers have never been higher, you have like an 85% approval rate, and now you say this?*

Jesus chose those types of moments to separate out His followers from everyone else.

As I read through the Gospels it becomes really evident to me that Jesus was looking for followers, and it did not seem to me as though numbers were that important to Him. It was **QUALITY OVER QUANTITY**.

I am intentionally using the terminology of *Christ-follower* because it is important for me to make a clear distinction between a 'Christian' and a 'Christ-follower, because there definitely is a distinct difference.

The word Christian is used three times in the New Testament. It is actually never used by Jesus or by followers of Jesus. It was used by outsiders, and it was used almost like a slang.

The word disciple or apprentice is used 268 times in the New Testament.

That definition of being a Christian is not defined by following Jesus. It is more defined by Jesus following us. I don't know how totally accurate the numbers are, because they

are all over the place when you study it out, somewhere between 65 to 75% of Americans claim to be Christians.

Christians in this definition say they follow a 'moral' conduct and they attend church on occasion and Jesus is really important to them, when they need Him.

Using the 'Western' definition of 'Christian', then I can see where we get that total. But if the definition is follower, or apprentice of Jesus, I got some questions.

In the Gospels we see a number of times where Jesus would call certain ones to '*Come and follow Me*'. Jesus never said, *Come, and believe in Me*. His call was always, *Come and follow Me*.

One day on the shore of Lake Galilee Jesus noticed two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting their nets into the sea. Jesus approached them and said, *Come and follow Me*. Scripture records that they *immediately dropped their nets, left everything behind, and began to follow Jesus*.

Jesus walked a bit further and found two other brothers, Jacob and John sitting in a boat along with their father mending their nets. Jesus invited the two brothers to become His followers. Jacob and John responded by *dropping their nets, and following Jesus*.

It is really important that we do not miss the end of both of those verses: *they immediately dropped what they were doing, left everything behind, to follow Jesus*.

I find it interesting when God called Moses at the burning bush, He had Moses remove his shoes. Moses is before the presence of the Lord and God says to Moses, take your shoes off, you are standing on holy ground.

Moses had to remove something; he had to leave something behind; it does not mean shoes are evil. It does not mean he didn't pick them up after the encounter.

It just means there was something he needed to remove that would be a possible distraction or separation. **There is a cost to saying YES, to following Jesus.**

Jesus talked about this cost in Luke 14:25 As massive crowds followed Jesus, He turned to them and said, *When you follow me as my disciple, you must put aside your father, your mother, your wife, your sisters, your brothers, it will even seem as though you hate your own life.*

This is the price you will pay to be considered one of my followers. Anyone who comes to Me must be willing to share my cross and experience it as his own. Or he cannot be considered to be my disciple.

Dang Jesus. That sounds rough. Count the cost. Do not follow me without considering what it will cost you.

Are you willing to leave things behind? Are you willing to surrender your life?

Now let me talk about this 'leaving everything behind': To be a follower means you are entering into a process as an apprentice. When I talk about leaving things behind, this is a process. A process is a series of steps that takes you from point A to point B.

In this process for me, there have been things that the Holy Spirit has touched in my life, and He wants to make an exchange with Me. And the Spirit does it so wonderfully.

He draws up in such a wave of love and He points something out in me. And He never points out anything in me to make me feel guilty. He is touching something in my life, because I am ready to make an exchange with Him, and He is ready.

So He says, *this will not travel well where I am taking you, but this, will, so why don't you give me that, and I will give you this?*

And then He floods my heart with that, that He wants to give me, and I am so overwhelmed with His love and with what He is giving me, that the exchange is so easy.

The farther you go with Him, the more you have to leave behind.

My process story: Greatest directional word—ALWAYS etc. pick myself up, forgive myself and move forward.

Now I also feel I need to explain what was happening here in this offer from Jesus to come and follow Him.

In Jesus day, to be invited by a Rabbi to come and follow him, was huge.

It was a great honor to be asked to follow a Rabbi. It was the apex for that culture.

When a Rabbi would invite someone to 'come and follow me', that person immediately knew what the cost was. They knew they were saying yes to becoming a follower, an apprentice, and eventually a disciple of that rabbi.

They knew they would be leaving behind a number of things and people, for a long period of time, as they would follow this rabbi, live with this rabbi, learn from this rabbi until they became exactly like this rabbi.

Jesus was considered a 'Rabbi'. We read in **Matthew 26:49**-when Judas betrayed Jesus, he approached him and said, *Shalom, Rabbi, and he kissed Him on both cheeks*. In **Mark 9**, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter blurts out: *Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah*.

Again we read in **John 1:38**, directly after John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to two of his disciples, they approached Jesus, Jesus sensed them, turned towards them and asked them, *What do you want?* They responded, *Rabbi, where are you staying?*

And then there was the time Nicodemus met secretly with Jesus and in **John 3:2**, he said to Jesus, *Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*.

Each one whom Rabbi Jesus called to come follow Him, knew exactly what they were saying yes to. They knew the cost, they knew what they were committing to.

A follower was not one who simply came to where Jesus was, sat and listened, and then walked away.

By saying yes to Jesus, they dropped everything, left everything being and **fully integrated their life, with Jesus**, until they became exactly like Jesus.

In **Mark chapter 8**, Jesus came upon a crowd and in that moment, He gave a description of a Christ-follower. He said, *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Me*.

The invitation of Jesus was come and follow Me, and let me teach you a new way to live.

In our Western culture, we have created a belief that we can be a Christian without being a follower, a learner, an apprentice, or a disciple. We can call ourselves Christians without actually living the Jesus way.

The mandate given to Encounter 319, by the Lord, is to equip followers of Jesus, to become apprentices, who then become disciples who become like Jesus, and then, from that place they impact their spheres and train up champions.

Those whom Jesus called to follow Him, became His disciples. He spent 3.5 years with Him, as apprentices. It was a process.

For those of us saying YES to being a follower of Jesus, we are also in a process, and probably the best illustration of this process is the life of the Shulamite maiden in the Song of Songs.

You can trace her journey from the moment she says, yes to following her Beloved Bridegroom Jesus, to the moment she becomes the Bride, until she becomes just exactly like her Beloved Jesus-by the four **statements of progression that she makes throughout her journey.**

The four progressive statements the Shulamite maiden makes are:

- #1-My life with Jesus is all about me. (Song 1:13)
- #2-My life with Jesus is still predominately about me, but Jesus has a big part. (Song 2:16)
- #3-Jesus is first in my life, but I am still a high priority. (Song 6:3)
- #4-My life is Jesus. I am totally surrendered to Him. I belong to Him. (7:10)

In **Ezekiel chapter 47**, Ezekiel shares a vision the Lord gave him, and it ties in so perfectly with the four statements the Shulamite makes. In verse 1 through 3 Ezekiel shares the vision of water flowing out of the Temple, and the Holy Spirit brought him out the gate and brought him through the water.

The Spirit took Ezekiel through four levels of water: Water that came up to his ankles, water that came up to his knees, water that rose to his waist, and water, like a rushing river, that was over his head, deep, and swimmable.

Those four levels are very compatible with the four statements of progression made by the Shulamite maiden.

- #1-My life with Jesus is all about me. This would be ankle-deep in Ezekiel's vision.
- #2-My life with Jesus is still predominately about me, but Jesus has a big part. This would be knee-deep.
- #3-Jesus is first in my life, but I am still a high priority. This would be waist-deep.
- #4-My life IS Jesus. I am totally surrendered to Him. I belong to Him. This would be a rushing river, in-over-my-head deep; swimmable water.

Now there were 'Four Goals of a Christ-follower, a Disciple' in Jesus day, and they are the same for us today:

- **So the first goal of a Christ-follower, a disciple is to be with your rabbi; be with Jesus**

Part of 'being with Jesus' is learning to live with a continuous God-consciousness.

The Holy Spirit loves to bring us to a place of God-consciousness all throughout the day, where we find ourselves simply turning our heart of affection for the Lord and we

just begin to tell Him how much we adore Him, how much we love Him, how important He is to us.

I want to keep my love affair going with Jesus on a high level, and this is not a one-way street. We need to listen because in those moments He will speak to you about how He feels about you.

There is a book I read many years ago called: Practicing the presence of God by Brother Lawrence. In that book one of the things he wrote was how he had a desire to live constantly aware of the Presence of the Lord. He says he never arrived at that, but he practiced being with Jesus and he got better and better at it.

So much so that he said there were his times in the monastery as he was washing pots and pans that the Presence of God was as manifest in those moments as when he was in solitude, praying in the temple.

So., he had cultivated and developed an awareness of the Spirit of God, that was ongoing, and it made every menial task fill up with eternal purpose. It took every menial, boring part of life, and energized it with divine purpose.

And this is my prayer is that we would get good at being with Jesus, whether we're washing dishes, driving through traffic, at work, wherever we are, that we could be with him, that we could live with a God-consciousness.

- **The second goal of a Christ-follower, a disciple is to become like your rabbi; become like Jesus.**

As a 'follower' you were in an intentional training process to become exactly like the one you were following.

In Jesus' day these followers were literally trying to be just like the rabbi's they followed: they were trying to have the same inflection in your voice as their rabbi; they tried to look like them, speak like them, act like them, think like them; I mean they were trying to become the exact replica of whoever it was they were following.

Now, that's not necessarily our goal, but it is our goal to become like Jesus: **He wants us to be transformed so that when people look at us, it's like, wow, I feel like I just had an encounter with Jesus.**

- **The third goal of a Christ-follower, a disciple is to do what your rabbi does.**

You know, if you're an apprentice to an electrician, your goal is to not just learn about electricity. Your goal is to learn how to do the job to be an electrician. When you

apprentice for somebody, you are actually learning the skills, so you can do exactly what the electrician can do.

Well, what did Jesus do?

- He released the Kingdom everywhere He went
- He changed atmospheres, just by showing up
- He loved without limits
- He released compassion
- He released hope
- He healed the sick
- He set oppressed captives free
- He cast out demons.
- He listened
- He raised the dead

- **The Fourth Goal of a Christ-follower, a disciple of Jesus was to become exactly like Your Rabbi**

Become just like Jesus. Think about the betrayal of Jesus. Judas arrives with a detachment of troops with lanterns, torches, and weapons, and Jesus approached them and asked them-Whom are you seeking? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus said to them-I am He. Now when He said to them I am He, they drew back and fell to the ground. Then Jesus asked them again, Whom are you seeking, and they again said-Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered. I have told you, I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these others go their way.

These guys came with one intention, to grab up Jesus. They came to capture Jesus and arrest Him. Jesus had been visible for quite a while. These guys knew exactly what Jesus looked like. I mean c'mon, Jesus walked around town, everyone He touched got healed. He was raising people from the dead, turning water into wine, you would think that these guys would know who He was.

But Jesus asked them, who are you looking for? Jesus. That's me. Jesus is standing there with Peter, James, John, Luke, all the guys, and they look so much like Jesus, these guards were confused about-which one is Jesus, because all these guys were like Jesus. They saw all these guys performing signs, wonders and miracles, and they could not distinguish who Jesus actually was amongst them.

Christ followers, apprentices, disciples of Jesus become like Jesus.

We will flesh out all that in more detail but **there are also a number of distinguishing characteristics of Christ-followers, which we will also be fleshing out this year. Just a few of them are:**

Distinguishing Characteristics of Christ Followers

- Christ-followers-Live a surrendered life—
- Christ-followers-Live in Life-Union with Jesus -Abiding in Him
- Christ-followers live-Addicted to the Presence
- Christ-followers, live, move, and walk in the Holy Spirit.
- Christ-followers live to serve the Master first
- Christ-followers live a life of praise, adoration and worship
- Christ followers have entered into a process of being transformed

Being a follower of Jesus means you are a student, you are a learner, and you are continually in a process of becoming more and more like Jesus. You are learning His **WAYS**.

The Greek word for 'way, or ways', is the word 'hodo', which literally means, *a road, a pathway, and a journey*'. When Jesus invites us to come 'follow Him', He is inviting us onto a roadway, a pathway a process, a journey of apprenticing under Him, and to learn from Him a different way to live.

Jesus is asking-Will you come and follow Me? This is a wild invitation, and only you can answer that, for you.

Close your eyes for a moment please, quiet all the background noise seeking to distract you, take a moment and abide in your spirit: *Holy Spirit, this truly is a sobering moment.*

In this quiet place the questions you have to settle in your heart, and it does not have to be settled here, right now, but the call from the Lord is: *Come and follow Me. Come and be my disciples.* And the questions are:

- Am I willing to pay the cost required to be a disciple of Jesus?
- Am I willing to put aside anything and everything that is a distraction to intimacy?
- Do I have a greater desire for me, and my goals, or am I willing to lay those things down and put them in their proper order in my life?
- In spirit and in truth, can I say-*Jesus you are so worthy of my life, my surrender. I am not satisfied with just being a fan. I want to be a follower.*

Holy Spirit, come and do all the realigning that needs to take place in my interior world, so my life is surrendered and yielded to You. Holy Spirit, I want to be with Jesus and become like Jesus.

The invitation is for all of us. All of us. No matter our background, no matter how disqualified we may feel. Your invitation into a process of life-transformation. Your invitation is to be with you, to abide in you, to follow you, to become just like You.

Lord Jesus, if you could change the world with eleven, what can you do with this community right here at ENCOUNTER 319?

Father, my prayer is that we would fall more and more in love with You. We want to be found Lord, just hanging out in the Holy Spirit, learning to live with You, learning to hear You, learning to be with You, learning to walk with you, learning to listen and be obedient to you.

Lord, our desire is to be a people who can stand under any pressure; and that no matter what the enemy throws at us, it simply makes us bigger, better, stronger, more fit and ready, because all those things cause me to stand stronger in Your Presence Lord.

WE want to be a people who will always demonstrate Your un-changing nature; we want to be as gracious as you are, as kind as you are, as merciful as you, as long suffering and as generous as you.

Lord will you come and imprint your own heart and character in each one of our lives; would you please come and live in us in a fresh way, so that we could be the very model and example of who you are, so that people in the world looking at us, would know and understand the very Nature of who you are, because of who they see of You, in my life.

Thank you, Lord that you are inviting us to truly be your disciples to truly walk your way that Jesus way. We love you and we thank you and your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

ELEVATOR SPEECH

Jesus' invitation has always been, *Come and follow Me*. What if we followed Jesus instead of demanding that He follow us? The mandate of Encounter 319 is to follow Jesus, and develop champions who train others into becoming champions. Christ followers make a conscious choice to follow Him, and to lay aside anything that would hinder them from surrendering their lives to a process of transformation. Champions have a radical impact upon their world.