

The Encouragement Newsletter

Follow Me...

There has been one word that has been resounding within me for quite some time. That word is "FOLLOW ME". Well, that is two words and one phrase. The words "FOLLOW ME" were key words Jesus spoke when choosing His disciples. Jesus said "FOLLOW ME" to Peter and His brother Andrew in Matthew 4:18-20; Matthew in Matthew 9:9; Philip in John 1:43; and again to Peter before the ascension of Jesus in John 21:19-22.

In the accounts found in Matthew, Jesus said "FOLLOW ME" before any miracle was performed. Rather, it was after the temptation. After he had passed the test. There were more tests to come, but He had to go through this major temptation before He could legitimately and unequivocally say to anyone, "Follow Me".

What was the meaning of this simple, yet powerful phrase? What was Jesus saying to these gentlemen and what is He saying to us today? He was saying come after me; pursue me; imitate me; follow my example; do like me; emulate me, heed what I say; be in keeping with me; and obey me. He was saying take action and do something. He is saying make a conscience decisive decision to Follow Me.

I am convinced that even in the 21st century, these are key words for every disciple of Christ. It will be spoken time and time again to those that will hear. I want to have a strong resolve to follow

Christ in 2013 and beyond. How about you? I want a strong pursuit because he is calling me everyday and always saying, "Come here after Me". With his voice there is and will always be other voices speaking to pull me into another pursuit. I am aware that there is nothing wrong with engaging in good activities, but if I go after that more than I pursue Christ, what will the end really look like. I will be just like the one that built their spiritual house on sand and when the storms of life come, my house will not stand. The heart of the true worshipping disciple will keep this pursuit ever before their eyes and fight the very notion to pursue anything else more than Jesus Christ.

Matthew 4:20 indicates the disciples (later called apostles) had no hesitation in following Jesus. Peter and Andrew immediately left their jobs to Follow Jesus. How many times do I have to "think about it"? I will confess, I am ashamed of my hesitance and need to think things through before I follow. Sometimes I doubt and I do not immediately drop what I am doing. Nor do I immediately change my way of thinking about a matter. If you are like me, there is a measure of independence and "I" have to "get it done". Because, of course, I know what I am doing. Yes, it is a trust issue and pride issue as well, when I think I know what is best for my life, but in reality I do not have a clue.

When Jesus called the disciples, he knew it



would challenge and change them. He knew they would make mistakes in their imitation and emulation of Him. Just imagine with me the incident in the Garden of Gethsemane as the soldiers and priests came to get Jesus. Peter, the disciple with the great revelation that caused Jesus to declare, "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you..." and the one invited to witness the transfiguration, grabbed his sword and cut off the servant's ear in the heat of emotion. (John 18:10) Talk about violent gangsta behavior. I am not condoning making these types of mistakes, but what I am saying is that Jesus knows the challenges you and I will have as we follow. In His love he looks past our hesitance, fears, doubts and other deficiencies to peer deeply into the heart. Then, He graciously draws us back to square one—Follow Me.

*And He said to them,
Come after Me [as
disciples—letting Me be
your Guide], follow Me,
and I will Make You
fishers of men!
Matthew 4:19
(Amplified Version)*

FOLLOW ME Excuses & Jesus' Response

Matthew 8:22 reveals that after Jesus said "Follow Me" to a man, the response was, "let me go bury my father". To me, that was a legitimate and noteworthy thing to do. It sure would place high on my priority list. How about yours? Strangely, Jesus says, "let the dead bury the dead". That seems like a cold answer, but I can understand the point. There are things man may prioritize as important, but this invitation is greater and most important.

Jesus just had a strange way of responding to situations. At first glance, the response appears unrelated to the question or statement. Look at Matthew 8:19. The scribe says, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go". Jesus' odd response was, "Foxes have holes, birds have nest, but I have no place to lay my head." Uh...a really bizarre exchange. The scribes were considered the lawyers. They were well respected as knowledgeable men and esteemed highly. Following Jesus would mean the scribes' status among his peers and other men would change drastically. Therefore, what I believe Jesus was saying is, "I do not have all of life's conveniences and to follow me is great". He was also saying, "You may not have all of the opulence you are used to having as a scribe and life with me will not be a life of ease or prestige".

FOLLOW ME The Cost

Following Jesus will upset many things we consider important. There is loss, but so much is gained. It is important to always remember, Mark 8:34—"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and FOLLOW ME." This verse provides three requirements - 1) Deny self; 2) Take up the cross; and 3) Follow. If you have seen the movie "Passion of the Christ", it is evident that the cross is not easy to carry. The movie perfectly depicts the emotion, struggle and pain involved in carrying the cross. It is toil and labor. You want to rest sometimes and take a break, but carrying the cross is a daily habit of denying ourselves the luxury of thinking, behaving and speaking our own



way. We cannot live like we want, even though we would love to do so, because we have born into another Kingdom. This Kingdom does not operate like Burger King, "Have it Your Way". He is the King and we are His followers. This is really a great delight. This is a great delight.

Following Jesus is the unpopular narrow way of life. It is not for the cowards or men pleasers. One day as I settled down for my train ride to work, I proceeded with my regular routine of reading the Bible. The passenger sitting next to me suddenly said, "Do you believe what you are reading?" Taken by surprise, I said "Yes" and explained my belief in the scriptures and how I apply them to my life. She explain how women at work claimed to be Christians, but did not live like it. From the conversation I gathered the individuals were hypocritical and gave no reason for her to change her life and become a believer. In the end, I did not pray with her to receive Jesus; however, I was able to give an answer for the hope that resides within me. I Peter 3:15 gives us the way to address the inquisitive and critic alike. It says, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,".

There is ridicule, misunderstandings and frustrations (within and without), but we all have residing within us the ability to conquer and overcome. As the cartoon above illustrates, "Follow Me" could very well mean going into icy cold uncharted territory. Peter, I am certain, had no idea the cost when he made a decision to follow Jesus. Months, perhaps years earlier, he could not have imagined the fear and emotional turmoil he would experience because of his association with Jesus as the fateful moment of the crucifixion was upon him. I do not always understand what is going on as I follow Christ. The uncertainties can be frightening. At times, it is difficult because I feel like an outcast. I cannot always see the

reward or purpose in the immediate present. The present circumstances may even contradict what I know within my heart. Each day I have to trust Him more because this is a faith filled walk, which requires a definitive decision to obey when I hear "FOLLOW ME", even without seeing the miracle first, the plan or know all of the details. Shaking in my boots, I let down my guard and FOLLOW.

FOLLOW ME What Will Happen

Jesus is saying to us everyday, "Come here after Me, Pursue and Obey Me". What will happen? Jesus said, "I will Make You..." Make me and make you into what He intended when He created and ordained us to be in the earth at this moment in time. It does not matter what is going on in the world. Fiscal cliffs, economic crisis, violence and world wide unrest do not deter the promise of "Follow Me and I will Make You".

In this critical time, there are many people saying "Follow me and I will make you". Too many times God's people have been led down destructive paths following people that promise to "make them". Some in the body of Christ are not encouraging, requiring or demanding God's people truly follow Christ because this will translate to them having less followers, less influence, less members, less tithes, less offerings, less volunteers and less control. It will mean that people will become whole, less spiritually disjointed, malnourished and more confident in the One they follow, turning the world upside down while bringing glory to God — not a man, a man's ministry or the traditions of man. Paul admonished in I Corinthians 11:1, "Follow me as I follow Christ", which will mean, "When I stop following Christ, you discontinue following me" - regardless of title or rank in the body of Christ.

Follow Me... An Invitation - Not A Command

I say to all readers, our land is full of deception. We need to have ears to hear and a mind to follow Christ. We do not just follow every impulse because we need counsel and guidance from others. It is the Lord's will for us to seek out teachers that will instruct us, but the deception in the media and many houses of worship is pulling many hearts away from God and toward men and things. It is to the point that men and women have so much influence on people that their ungodly actions are perceived as right; even when there is no scriptural basis, people will continue to follow and defend them.

There is an urgent call for followers of Christ like the Bereans in Acts 17:11. They understood that Paul was an Apostle and "mighty man of God", but the Bereans did not allow Paul's title nor revelatory speech to distract them from searching the scriptures to see if he was speaking the truth. This is what a follower of Christ will do. Search the scriptures. Not "looking" to find error in a man's way, but looking for truth with the desire to be made and molded by the hand of God. Followers of Christ understand that they cannot check their brains at the door when they go to houses of worship, conferences, concerts and the like. Followers are molded in the quiet times with Christ and develop a discerning heart to know if what they are hearing is right or wrong. Many times as a follower of Christ, we do not know exactly what is wrong, but there is a tug, pulling and hesitance that is unexplainable. What is understood, though, is that the words spoken do not line up with the ways of Christ or His word.

I almost feel that I moved from my topic, but I have become so moved to write this because of some things I have seen and heard that is leading young (and old) innocent souls, looking for Christ, on a path that is less vertical and more horizontal, humanistic and materialistic. I want you to know that being made by Christ will mean that you will not follow everything portrayed as "the way". You and I must search things out and cannot feel like we are rebelling because there is sense that something is not right. I am speaking to those with a genuine heart toward following Christ. I am not speaking to the rebellious or those with a carnal mind set on the flesh. When Jesus says "I will make you" this will demand that we know the scripture, have a fervent life of prayer and communion. This will sharpen our discernment as followers of Christ. We will not be shaken or moved by the

newest revelation, fad or cliché'. We may not get it right every time because we are a work in progress. We may not be popular, but we will be bona fide authentic followers of Christ whose house is built on the rock according to Matthew 7:24—27.

Let me end here with the lyrics to a hymn I learned as a young girl growing up in church.

**I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.**

**Though I may wonder, I still will follow;
Though I may wonder, I still will follow;
Though I may wonder, I still will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.**

**The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back.**

**Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.**

**Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
No turning back, no turning back.**

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, scripture tells us in John 16 that the Holy Spirit will lead, guide, teach and comfort. Speak to me, lead me, teach me and comfort me. Most of all help me FOLLOW. When I cannot understand, help me FOLLOW. When I cannot completely see my way, help me FOLLOW. FOLLOW unconditionally, whole heartedly, in confidence, without doubt, without fear, with consistency and singleness of heart.

AMEN

I Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

If this newsletter has been an Encouragement to you, please let me know by e-mailing me at -

The _EPlace@yahoo.com. I would love to hear from you. Also, this newsletter along with other writings and the blog "Bloggin' the Journey at the E-Place" are available at **TheEncouragementPlace.com.**

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