

“A Compelling Cause”
Where Will Following Jesus Take Us?

God has called us not to safety, but to service. What a resounding affirmation of the unique difference that Jesus makes in our lives before a watching world! I was reminded how many of God’s finest people throughout history have been willing to serve others for the cause of Christ in the face of great, impending danger. Beyond this, my mind was refreshed with how a compelling cause is always able to marshal a great following.

World War II was launched because of the threat of the tyrant Hitler. The European conflict hardly seemed much of our business until Pearl Harbor erupted in a rain of Japanese bombs. At that point, an entire nation rallied to the moment. Sons and daughters willingly put themselves in harm’s way. Factories across our country retooled in order to accommodate the needs of war. America became preoccupied with the cause.

If Jesus says, “*Follow Me*,” then it is valid to inquire where He will take us. And, the answer is clear: “*I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19).

Jesus was passionately drawn to people; He was consumed with people. So, when it comes to following Jesus as a fully-devoted follower, the only outcome of any value is the enhancement and advancement of others. **The compelling nature of who Jesus is impacts not only our conduct and our character but dramatically imposes a great cause upon us.** Followers who readily embrace His cause quickly come to see everything under their control as an instrument to impact their world.

Parents see their homes as places where love, peace, and nurturing grace are displayed. Parents who are fully-devoted followers see their primary role as communicating the reality of Christ to their children. Children, for these folks, are seen as real persons who can also become followers of Christ and impact their world for Him—whether they become doctors, lawyers, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, pastors, or missionaries.

The liberating reality of all this is that nothing in life is more important than the cause of Christ. All of life’s decisions are formed by this dynamic. Everything of value in our treasure chest—money, career, family, friends, possessions, or property—is all there for the cause. **Everything within our grasp is a means to reflect the compelling Christ to those who need Him in their lives.**

The early disciples not only saw Jesus as a compelling person worthy of their full devotion but also heard Him call them to a compelling cause. What was it going to be; a life consumed with piles of fish or a life that touched people with the transforming, liberating power of Jesus? The cause required them to get beyond the fish—all that is temporal. The cause was about seeing everything in life as a platform from which Jesus could be seen.

Now, the cause is today carried out against a culture’s preoccupation with our own needs. Following, at the very essence of its expression, is an others-directed endeavor. It all begins with a commitment to Jesus that is undisputed and unconditional. Yet, this commitment does not create instant perfection. Moving from the call to the cause takes time. There are some questions we need to ask ourselves.

Is my commitment to the spiritual needs of others closer to the response of Jesus now than it has been in the past? Does my life still revolve around me?

If the truth were known, most of us follow at a distance. Jesus is always seeking to shrink the distance between Himself and His fully-devoted followers.

This is not always an easy process. In fact, I have frequently been fascinated to see how the disciples, who were consummate followers, had such a difficult time getting close to Jesus in regard to their own perceived importance. Time and time again, the disciples were disputing and debating which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. Each, in his own right, was anxiously waiting to see if he would be selected for the most important posts in the kingdom they believed Jesus was going to establish on earth. So pervasive was this impulse that on the night before the Crucifixion they were discussing this very topic, which prompted Jesus to graphically demonstrate the distance by dropping His robe and putting a towel around His waist to wash their feet as a servant.

I don't know why it is, but a great deal of the energy of the cause has been absorbed into our self-centered agendas. Rarely do people come into a church family seeking to serve. More often, people come to church with a consumer mentality: What can you do for me? Will this church meet my needs, hold my interest, solve my problems?

The compelling cause of Jesus is empowered by fully-devoted followers who dare to get close enough to Jesus until they see themselves as servants to others.

The disciples were dreadfully out of step with the cause of Jesus. For example, in John 9:1-7, the disciples pointed out a blind beggar and asked Jesus who had sinned—the man's parents, or he in his mother's womb—that he should be born blind. No doubt, they had seen this beggar many times before. The response of Jesus to this man showed the huge distance between His followers. His response was compassion, not curiosity or judgment.

Isn't it amazing how like these detached disciples we can be? When we hear of trouble in someone's life, we are often far more interested in the details and an analysis of the situation than we are in finding out what we can do to reach out and help. It is amazing what a note, a listening ear, a prayer, or a hug can do to move us beyond curiosity to compassion.

Why is it so many people who call themselves followers are more prone to take discompassionate, judgmental views of others? Why do we tend to shoot our own wounded?

Getting close enough to Jesus results in not only saying we care about the needs of others, but doing something about the needs of others.

In airports, shopping centers, and other public places, I often use my time for engaging in one of my favorite indoor sports: people watching! As I watch people walk by, I find myself wondering things like, where do they come from, where are they going, what do they do for a living, or could they have possibly looked in the mirror this morning?

Jesus repeatedly saw things in people others, including the disciples, failed to see because of their preoccupation with their preferences and prejudices. In a familiar story found in John 4, Jesus sent the disciples into the city to find Him some food. Weary from His journey, He sat down by the well. A woman came to the well and Jesus asked her for a drink. Later, we would learn He had a purpose behind His request.

Now, I've tried to put myself in the position of Jesus. A long, busy, complex day comes to an end. The very last thing in the world I want to do is get involved in a deep conversation with a stranger. Yet, Jesus saw something in this woman that took Him beyond His preferences. What was it He saw?

Jesus was a rabbi. Rabbis typically viewed women as less than significant and a source of temptation and contamination. No rabbi worth his Torah would be caught dead talking to a woman.. In fact, rabbinical literature indicates that if a rabbi were walking down a street and saw a woman approaching, he would most probably crossed to the other side of the street. But, Jesus saw something in this woman that took Him beyond the prejudices associated with His perceived position as a religious leader. What was it that He saw?

This woman was from Samaria. The Jews and Samaritans lived in deep racial polarization. This racial divide related to nearly every aspect of their existence. The animosity was long standing. They had invaded each other's territory, ransacked each other's temples, and had a great disdain for one another. Yet, Jesus saw something in this woman that melted the racial-cultural prejudice that usually would have created an inseparable barrier between them. What was it that He saw?

The disciples return from their journey into the city. They stand in sharp contrast to the One they have committed themselves to follow. They are not happily amazed that Jesus has broken the conventional barriers to speak to this woman's need. They respond with more consternation than enthusiasm. Quite obviously, the disciples did not see the woman in the same way Jesus saw her.

I am reminded of the computer-generated art in which, at first glance, all that can be seen is a mass of squiggly lines punctuated periodically with small figures. I am told that if you gaze at the picture long enough, the random lines will pull together in our minds to reveal a three-dimensional work of art. I've been with others who are able to perceive the picture almost instantly. By contrast, I can stand there with a blank stare on my face, looking like an abject fool!

In much the same way many of us fail to see people in ways that take us beyond our preferences and prejudices. Jesus worked tirelessly with the disciples to shrink the distance. He called them to lift up their eyes and gaze at the harvest. What did Jesus see when He saw this woman? He saw the harvest!

What do you see when you see people? Fully-devoted followers train their perspective to see the harvest and then reach out with compassion in intentional and creative ways to see the cause. Mark it down:

When we are committed to following, Jesus will take us places we have never been before to see people as we have never seen them before.

Following is all about seeing our neighbors as the harvest. I'm talking about that neighbor who mows his grass at 7:30 on Saturday morning, or that neighbor who plays heavy rock music in the apartment above us, or that boss- not as a means of advancement, perks, or pay raises but rather as one who might be drawn to Jesus by seeing Him reflected in us, or the masses in the stadium, or the person in the express checkout who has 17 items instead of the mandated 15.

The harvest is composed of people who are not like us- they are not from where we are from and they are not going where we are going.

By the miracle of His mercy and grace we are just beginning to fully understand and appreciate where it is He wants us to be and what it is He wants us to do. Embracing the cause will mean something different for each of us. It could mean a concentrated ministry of prayer, or a testimony of courage and confidence in the midst of pain and sorrow; it could mean offering a widow's mite, or an act of forgiveness; it could mean a bold proclamation or an unashamed commitment to integrity in an environment more prone to expediency.

I've heard this story a hundred times, but every single time I do, it triggers a raw nerve in my heart. For a Sunday School teacher in Boston, embracing the cause meant taking one Saturday do visit each boy in his rather small Sunday School class. One boy worked as a clerk in his uncle's shoe store. So, one Saturday, Edward Kimball entered the shoe store, walked back to the stockroom where Dwight Lyman Moody was stocking the shelves, and confronted him with the importance of knowing Jesus. In that stockroom D.L. Moody accepted Jesus as his Savior. Edward Kimball had no idea his act of faithfulness would reap such a rich harvest. Do you realize it has been estimated that during his lifetime D.L. Moody traveled more than a million miles and spoke to more than 100 million people about Jesus!

Now, stay with me for a few more moments. It was D.L. Moody who led Wilbur Chapman to the Lord. Wilbur Chapman, who is he? Wilbur Chapman became a great evangelist and during one of his crusades in Chicago, a baseball player with the Chicago White Stockings was standing in front of a bar on State Street in Chicago when a gospel wagon came by, playing hymns and inviting people to the afternoon service down the street. He went to the service. That afternoon Billy Sunday met Jesus and would eventually leave baseball to become a great evangelist.

Are you still with me? In one of Billy Sunday's revivals, a young man named Mordecai Hamm met Jesus and would become a great evangelist in the southeastern United States. One night, in one of the large crowds of his crusade, a young man named Billy Graham came forward to meet Jesus.

What a remarkable succession of faithful harvesters for the cause. Now, let's put it into perspective. Just think if Edward Kimball was like so many others who were not willing to give up a Saturday morning for the cause!

Jesus is a compelling Christ with a compelling cause- "*look at the fields, they are ready for harvest*"!