



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Follow Me

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Part Six – Our Commission

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If you are new or newer, let me bring you up to speed. Today, we're concluding a six-part series of messages we've called *Follow Me*. Now, the purpose for these messages was for us to address the growing confusion and dangerous consequences of what I've been referring to as the deconstruction of biblical Christianity.

It's happening right before our eyes in real time, all around us in churches in this part of the world. Sadly, we're seeing a growing number of pastors, Christians, entire churches, and denominations abandoning the authority and inerrancy of Scripture as well as abandoning thousands of years of orthodox Christian biblical theology.

We're seeing and hearing churches and pastors teaching and believing whatever it takes to avoid the enemy fire of the culture's rejection and persecution. So, this brand of secular Christianity is really deeply motivated by the desire for the acceptance and approval of the culture. Because that is what motivates too many pastors and churches in our area, the light of Jesus Christ is clearly being hidden under a bushel.

We're also seeing something else. I would say it's just as dangerous and confusing, and I would label it *Christianity lite*. Christianity lite is made up of believers who are minimizing their Christianity to just a few key religious ideas about Jesus and maybe a few key religious activities in their lives, but what's missing, typically, is an enduring passion, a willingness to endure whatever it takes to remain following Jesus.

What's missing are things like moral conviction and courage to engage the culture with the life-transforming power of the gospel. Especially in the Northwest, we're seeing a lot of a kind of spirituality that calls itself Christian but it denies the power of the gospel to have any effect or ability to change our lives or world.

So, it's a very benign, irrelevant, take-it-or-leave-it version of Christianity that we're being surrounded by. The sad result of all that is a lot of people sitting in churches, just like here today, really have no idea what it means to be a follower of Jesus anymore. They really don't know

what God requires of those who make the claim to be followers of Jesus. So, that's what we're doing.

In part one, we talked about *Our Conversion*. Becoming a follower of Jesus requires a supernatural change of heart toward God and toward my sin. See, conversion happens when we dare to believe God loves us too much to ignore or downplay our natural bent toward self-destruction. Our conversion happens when we put our trust in God to rescue us from the judgment and wrath that's coming with undeserving peace, forgiveness, and grace. There has to be a conversion in the soul of a person who claims to be a follower of Jesus.

Then, in part two, we talked about *Our Cost* of our discipleship, the cost of following Jesus. The cost is nothing less than surrendering our total sovereignty. If we're following Jesus, we live for him now. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said something like, "The call to follow Jesus is the call to come and die." To die to a life independent from the rule and reign of Jesus. Again, in one word, I would say the cost of following Jesus is complete *surrender*.

Then, in part three, we talked about *Our Commitment*. Followers of Jesus are servants of Jesus. The title deed to everything we have belongs to him and for him now. That's our commitment.

In part four, we talked about *Our Consecration*. The true follower of Jesus is on a constant, ongoing, continuous journey of becoming less controlled by sin and more defined by grace. There is a change that is continually taking place in the believer's life.

Now, that change happens at different rates and in different ways for all of us. God does not have a time clock on that. He's not up in heaven, tapping his watch, saying, "Now, let's move it along! Let's move it along!" That's not how God treats us, but indeed, because his very Spirit resides in us, there is to be an ongoing transformation into the likeness of Jesus happening in our lives.

Last week, in part five we talked about *Our Community*. Christianity was never meant to work in isolation. Following Jesus is a relational project where we can openly talk about what isn't working in our lives. We can confess those sins vulnerably and transparently to each other and pray for one another. That's where community works. It's in community and fellowship that the cleansing blood of Jesus starts feeling real.

Today, we come to part six. We're calling it *Our Commission*: followers of Jesus, talking to other people about becoming followers of Jesus. Here's what the stats tell us. The statisticians who measure this stuff say eight out of ten people sitting in churches today have never led someone to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. I'm pretty sure I know why that is true.

Today, we want to change that stat. We want to begin seeing that number drop. Before we get into all of that, let's now stand for the reading of God's Word as your Bibles are open to Acts, chapter 6. One verse to set the foundation for what we are to hear today. Acts, chapter 6, verse 7: **"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."**

Father in heaven, we thank you so much today that through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ, you no longer count our sins against us. We praise your holy name that you have removed us from our sin and shame as far as the east is from the west. We thank you, God, that your love will not fail us.

God, when the world fails us, when people betray us, when all of our hopes and dreams let us down, we know your love is unfailing. God, we ask right now that you would surprise us and revive us into believing, dreaming, and expecting that you will actually use us to lead other people to true conversion. Help us understand it, God. In Jesus' name, amen.

In this one verse, I see what I'm calling a law of spiritual multiplication. When the Word of God spreads, when we sow the seeds of the gospel, the harvest of souls will increase. As the Word of God continues to go out, as the gospel continues to be proclaimed, the number of the disciples multiplies greatly. That's what we're talking about here.

The question begins, on some of your hearts... If you're honest, you would say, "Does that apply to all of us? Doesn't that just apply to you pastor types or religious fanatics? You know, the outgoing Christians? Is that what we're talking about here?" The answer is no, that's not what we're talking about here. It actually does relate and apply to every one of us.

Do you remember Matthew, chapter 28? Jesus tells us that true disciples of his make disciples. In Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, Jesus said, "You're going to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes into you so you can be my witnesses." Part of the purpose and ministry of the Holy Spirit of God residing in us is empowering us to be able to talk to people about Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, the greatest evangelist who has ever walked the face of the earth, I believe, the apostle Paul, said we are the ambassadors of Jesus. We are the aroma or the fragrance of Christ, as though he were making his appeal through us. We're to spread everywhere like a good perfume or cologne, and it's to carry with it the aroma of the glory, goodness, and love of Jesus. Ultimately, Jesus said, "Follow me and I'm going to make you fishers of men."

We're all on the hook, really, to be God's messengers of reconciliation. So, where does that begin? Should we just pick up right now and start walking outside, looking for people, tackling them, and telling them about Jesus? How does that look and feel on an everyday basis? Well, let me start with the most important thing.

1. *Prayer is the most important part of our witnessing and evangelism.* I submit to you that our inspiration and our desire to share our faith is directly proportional to our time praying about these things. I was so convicted about this heading into this new year that I dedicated a whole morning of my devotion time just to pray about opportunities, openness, and courage to talk to people who are in my life who don't know Jesus.

I know I have really neglected that part of my discipleship, and so every Thursday morning, I'm praying only that God would begin to use me to tell people about Jesus. Why is that so

detrimental? I want to give you five obvious reasons why, if we don't start with prayer, this is never going to be a part of our discipleship.

A. *Salvation is of the Lord.* Jesus said, in John 6, "**...no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...**" So we can't allow ourselves to think it's up to us to save people. Never! Salvation is a supernatural act of God's love and grace upon the heart of an unbelieving person. We lift up the cross of Jesus and God draws them to himself. So we pray, "God, help me to do my part so I get to see you do your part.

B. *Salvation is a spiritual battle.* Paul wrote, "**...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**" Last week, we talked a lot about what this means and looks like in real time, but the bottom line is that Satan is for real.

God has an Enemy. He's the Enemy of our souls, and we heard last week that he is a deceiver and the father of all lies. His greatest lies that he propagates are blinding unbelievers to the fact that the cross of Jesus Christ is our only hope for the grace and forgiveness of God and the cross of Jesus is our only hope for a new heart and a new life. So our prayers are that God would open their eyes and ears to the gospel and reveal the truth of who Jesus really is to them.

C. *Prayer is needed for everything we do.* In John 15, Jesus said, "**I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**" This applies to all of the Christian life. Prayer is needed for everything we do. It applies to all of Christian life. Much prayer equals much results. Little prayer equals little results. No prayer equals no results, especially when it comes to our personal evangelism.

So the question is...*How do we pray? Where does that begin?* I want to try to take the randomness out of this point for us so we don't just sit down tomorrow morning and start praying, starting with countries all over the globe, and we just don't even know where to begin or to stop. It can feel a little bit overwhelming, so let's put a little practicality to this importance of praying.

I think I would say, first of all, we need to *be selective* in our prayers. Narrow down your witnessing prospect. Jesus said, "When you've been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things." I would say to you that I wouldn't start by praying for the dictator of North Korea or the president of the company you work for.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying their souls are unimportant to God. I'm absolutely not saying that. I'm saying I think a better place for us to start is with people with whom we actually have contact or to whom we have access. Start with the low fruit, the ripe fruit God has put right around you. Don't start by praying for the universe to come to Jesus. Be selective.

Secondly, *be structured.* Keep a prayer journal if you need to. I do this. Keep a little journal that keeps track of what you're learning about the people for whom you're praying: their needs, desires, and beliefs. Be strategic. Jesus said to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. It's

okay. As we're praying for people, we start to notice, hear, or see certain things, and those are things that can start guiding us in our prayer time for them.

Thirdly, *be supported*. Work together. Get your Life Group and others to pray with you. You may have a unique opportunity with someone you've been praying for coming up this week. You may have a chance to be alone with them or you're going to be ministering to them somehow. Be able to say to the people close to you, "Hey, would you pray for me? I'm praying that God would somehow use me to lead them toward Jesus."

Fourthly, *be scriptural*. There are a lot of verses in the New Testament that can help us pray, scriptures that are very pertinent to us as well as to the people for whom we're praying. A classic one is in 2 Timothy, chapter 2. At the beginning of verse 24, it says, "**The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition...**"

That's our prayer for us. "God, I want to be gentle. I want to be patient. I know they're not going to just automatically receive everything I want to share with them, but help me, Lord, to be kind." Then, the rest of the verse says, "**...if perhaps God may grant them...**" There it is. It's God's work. "**...grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare [blindness, deception] of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.**"

There's our prayer for the person for whom we're praying. Be scriptural. As you're reading your Bible, note those passages of Scripture about which you can say, "God, please. I want that to be true for the person for whom I'm praying."

Fifthly, *be stubborn*. Jesus tells two parables, one in Luke 11 and one in Luke 18, where persistence in prayer is hailed and encouraged. In the autobiography of the great man of old, George Müller, we read that he prayed for five people his whole life. In fact, in his daily journals, they say that for almost 60 straight years, every single day, he lifted up the names of these five unbelievers to the Lord, and the last one came to Christ just months after his death. That's what you call being stubborn. Evangelism is a lifestyle. It's not just this push-button activity.

So, there you have it. It all begins, most importantly, in the prayer closet. That's where our inspiration and our desire to be fishers of men will grow.

2. *We need to be comfortable in our own skin so personal evangelism can be joyful, rewarding, and fulfilling.* The worst thing we can do is to try and imitate someone else's style or borrow someone else's passion or methods. I'm going to give you permission today to stick with who you are. There are at least six known biblical styles for sharing the gospel. As we go through these, I want you to try to see if you could find yourself in the New Testament as we talk about ways to actually become fishers of men, ambassadors for Christ.

A. *Confrontational*. In Acts 2, we read that Peter confronts a crowd who was basically making fun of him and the other disciples who were praying in the upper room. Peter hears them mocking them and making fun of them, so he throws open the window of the upper room, looks down at this massive crowd, and says, "Hey! We're not drinking! We're not drunk! It's only 9:00 in the morning!"

Then, in verse 14, with a loud voice, he starts preaching to them about Jesus. He says, "You know this Jesus you killed just the other day? He's alive! He is risen from the dead, just like God promised and just like he said he would. He's our only hope for God's grace and forgiveness. He's our only hope for escaping the fury, wrath, and judgment of God that's coming upon the sinfulness and wickedness of man."

It says that right in the middle of him just boldly talking about Jesus, they are pierced to the heart. Arrows of conviction are piercing their hearts. They stop him and they say, "Peter, what do we have to do to be saved? He's alive; we're dead. What do we have to do to be saved?" Peter didn't get fluffy. No conversations. He didn't say, "Why don't we meet tomorrow at Starbucks and talk about it?" Four words: "Repent and be baptized. It's your only hope."

Some of you can relate to Peter. You're bent toward boldness. You can't wait to see who God puts next to you on the bus or the airplane. You just can't wait. You're like, "I hope they just glance at me. That's my open door. If they just turn their head one degree, I'm in. That's all I need."

That's you, and I love you! That is so cool! The kingdom of God needs people who are wired like you are. You're not afraid to go toe-to-toe, exchanging spiritual punches with those who are more aggressive in their unbelief. You're not disrespectful. You're not arrogant, but you're like Peter. Boldness and confidence is more natural to you. Now, for the 99.9 percent of us who aren't like Peter, there are some other options.

B. *Intellectual*. You're more like the apostle Paul than you are like Peter. Things like reasoning, logic, and defending the truth come naturally to you. In Acts, chapter 7, we see where every time Paul went into a new city he made a beeline for the synagogues and those places where the intellectuals would hang out, debating about philosophical and spiritual things, flaunting their knowledge and understanding.

That didn't scare Paul. He just walked right up and said, "What are you guys talking about?" He was well-read. Thinking on his feet was easy for him. Not so much with Peter. Peter would pull out his sword, cut off your ear, and then tell you about Jesus. That was Peter. Well, he'd hand your ear back to you, and then he'd tell you about Jesus.

Paul wasn't like that, and you're more like Paul. Your strength to share your faith blossoms in the midst of meaningful conversations. Big vocabularies, fancy degrees, and rigorous debates don't intimidate you, and you love that side. There are lost people in your life who need you to reason with them and walk them in this linear line, logically, to their need for Jesus. Yet some of you are neither of those.

C. *Testimonial*. You're more like the blind guy in John 9. Remember? He's blind from birth. Jesus heals him of his blindness. The problem was, word got back to the Pharisees and the religious leaders that Jesus healed this guy on the sabbath day, which they deemed to be illegal because it was a sin to do any work on the sabbath day, even if it meant doing good for your fellow human beings.

They hear about this blind guy who's walking around with his sight and they call him in to their religious chambers and they start interrogating him. They start interrogating about who this Jesus was and why he allowed Jesus to break their religious rules by letting him see again. His response was classic.

In John 9, the blind guy goes, "Look. All I know is I was blind, and now I can see, and the guy who did it, his name was Jesus. That's all I have for you." For some of you, that's you. That's you! You love this guy. You don't give a rip about knowing how to explain the hypostatic union or the eschatological difference between Ezekiel and Daniel.

You don't lose any sleep over whether or not God created the world in six literal days or longer periods of time. You don't care if the dinosaurs were still on the earth after the flood. None of that keeps you awake at night. You might have some opinions about that, but you don't lose any sleep over that.

Your amazing strength in sharing your faith is in your ability and willingness to just tell people, "Once I was lost, and I'm found. There was a time in my life when life wasn't working. There was a time in my life when Jesus was the furthest thing from my mind, and now he's at the center of my heart."

You have this amazing natural ability. It's your sweet spot to testify about how Jesus has affected or is affecting your life. You see those opportunities, those open doors, and you do it naturally, without threat, and without being self-righteous. You just genuinely are able to do that.

D. *Relational*. Jesus sees a man in Mark 5 who's possessed by multiple demons. Jesus casts out all the demons and gives him his life back. He sets him free forever, and the guy's immediate response is just wanting to cling to Jesus. He has been in caves. He has been banned to an island. He has been chained up in caves, living like an animal. He's just disgusting and gross for his whole life.

Jesus sets him free, he comes into his right mind, and all he wants to do is say, "I'm with you, Jesus. I'm never leaving you." Jesus says, "No, I want you to go back home and tell your friends and family what the Lord has done for you."

For some of you, you are a powerful witness in the context of relationships that are personal. For some of you, your greatest mission field is those closest friends and family members who don't know Jesus. You're not nearly as comfortable trying to witness to strangers or people you barely know anything about, and that's okay.

You're able to build trust more quickly and naturally than the rest of us, and this guy gives you permission to make your friends and your family your primary mission field. You don't have to feel guilty that you're not the one to debate that snot-nosed little intellectual who's sitting next to you on the airplane. You're okay.

Some of you aren't any of these styles yet and you're still waiting to see if there's one that's you. Let me give you another one.

E. *Invitational*. I love the Samaritan woman. Her life is a complete mess. She's on her fifth marriage. In John, chapter 4, she goes out to the well to get some water. She meets Jesus there and he tells her all of her sins before she even can tell him. He tells her, "You will never thirst again."

He's looking at her, saying, "You obviously are looking for fulfillment and something in your life. You're hoping all these men will give it to you. That's not working for you, but I'll tell you what. I have living water for you and you will never thirst again." Of course, he's referring to himself.

They talk some more, and John 4 tells us she goes back to town, where no one really respects her because of her lifestyle up to that point, and she starts inviting the whole town to come out and meet Jesus. I don't know how she did it. I don't know if she ran down the street and started yelling. I don't know if she was knocking on doors. I don't know if she sent a group text. I don't know how she got the word out, but she gets literally this whole town to follow her out to the well. Think about that! She was so convincing, they had to trust her and go with her.

Some of you are amazing like her. You have the ability to invite people, to ask people to listen to a sermon that blew you away. You're able to give someone a book to read that opened your eyes. You have the ability to invite people to church and they come with you. I try to invite my non-Christian friend to church and they look at me and say, "I'm not going to church." You invite them to church and they ask, "What time?" and they come with you.

It's amazing how there's something about the way God has wired you that you're able to persuade people to consider Jesus because you're real. There's no pretense about you. You are who you are and you're not afraid to invite people to trust in the Jesus who has changed you. "You just have to read this book. You have to watch this YouTube video I saw yesterday. It blew me away. You have to read this blog." And they do! I don't know how you do it! That's you. You just have this way where people trust you.

F. *Serving*. The open door for you to share the gospel is through serving. The example of this is in Acts, chapter 9. Another woman in the Bible, whose name was Tabitha. In Acts 9, she suddenly dies and we read that many people show up to the funeral, but they don't show up empty-handed.

It says they're all coming with tunics and garments she had made for them, gifts she had given to them. They're all in tears. You get the picture. They're talking about her and reminiscing. They're all comparing the ways she blessed them. They're testifying to her loving, generous servanthood and acts of kindness.

Some of you shine the brightest when you can serve a friend, a coworker, a neighbor. You don't even necessarily have to know them that well. Your antennas are always up. You're always looking for ways to help the hurting and to celebrate with the happy. You have this natural magnetic draw to be able to weep with those who are weeping and rejoice with those who are rejoicing, and that is the key that opens the door for you to enter a life and begin to draw them to Jesus.

It doesn't matter if you know them well or not. You're like the Good Samaritan in the flesh. You see and you hear things we don't hear and you notice things we don't notice. Someone is struggling, hurting, mourning, in sorrow, in shame, or whatever it is, and you have this ability to walk up to that girl friend or guy friend at work and you give them a little gift and you say, "Hey, man. I know it's hard right now. I wish I could take it all away. I just want you to know I love you and I'm praying for you." That's you!

You hear that the neighbor lost their job or their teenager is going off the rails, or whatever you heard, saw, or noticed. You walk over and you have this way of immediately just connecting and saying, "Listen. It's none of my business. I just want you to know there's someone across the street who's praying for you, who cares. Let me know if we can help," or whatever. You're just good at that. The rest of us don't even notice that. That's your door for being fishers of men.

There you have it, six of them: *confrontational*, *intellectual*, *testimonial*, *relational*, *invitational*, and *servant*. Which one is you? There may be a little combination of two. You're an overachiever. You can do more than one way. Some of us right now are struggling to find one of those. Which one is most like you?

Two points of application now. I'm going to ask you if you would you be willing to start praying that God would give you peace about how he made you and begin to grow the desire in you to walk through the doors he opens for you because of how he wired you. Would you just start praying about that, however that praying looks for you?

What I just did is just part one of the sermon. That's all. That's part one. Part two is in your bulletin. I want you to look. There's a little card in your bulletin called "Sharing Jesus Without Fear." Part two is going to take place over the period of four Thursdays in a class. In the class, you're going to learn how to actually present Jesus when the heart of the person is open, when you start to sense they're ready.

Where do you begin? How do you talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus? How do you talk about sin and repentance? What verses do you use? Do you use verses? That's natural. How do we actually lay it out so it makes sense? What part does your testimony play? What part is

your story in your style? Where does that fit in? How does your story relate to the people for whom you're praying?

Then, how do you respond to rejection and objections? Not everybody is just going to fall on their knees and accept Jesus, so how do we respond to that? Do we get all depressed? Do we say, "Forget it. To hell with you"? What do we do? Is there a way to use objections and rejection to open more doors?

That's part two, and I would suspect that hundreds of you sitting in this room right now have been desperately wanting something like that. All you have to do is fill it out and you're signed up. No cost, no charge. Fill it out. Our ushers or our First Impressions Team are going to be at the doors. All you have to do is hand it to them. We'll sign you up and then we'll remind you.

Part two. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Real disciples make disciples. Real followers of Jesus talk to others about becoming followers of Jesus. I hope you'll take that step, and I hope that statistic will come down, at least at Canyon Hills. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I am so thankful that you are so good, so patient, and so gentle with us. Father, we do confess that for most of us in this room we have excused ourselves or run away from this in fear. We have somehow written it off for other people, God.

Whatever the excuse, we confess that as our sin and we ask, God, that you would begin, now, lighting in us a fire, a flame that would shine so bright that we would have no choice but to explain to people what it is. God, we thank you and love you, and we pray that even this week we'd be amazed by the opportunities you've had in front of us all along. In Jesus' name we ask, amen.

Some of you in this room are not following Jesus, and you're sitting here going, "I wish someone would tell me how to follow Jesus." You're here and we're here. If you find that you're in a place right now where you are ready to believe in Jesus, to repent of your sin and trust him for forgiveness and salvation, we want to help you take that next step. They are here to help you do that. I hope you'll come talk to any one of them before you leave.

God bless you. We'll see you next Sunday.