

Following It

This is week four of our Breakthrough Series, where we're outlining different stages of faith in Jesus. We started by talking about those who are Looking for Something. It's common in our society, without the grounding of faith, many wander through life without answers to questions like, "Why am I here? Why is marriage a struggle? How do I raise my kids? No matter the practical issue, they're all expressions of a spiritual search.

Last week, we talked about people who have Found It. There are many people who would say they're Christians—maybe at one point they made a commitment to Jesus, but they didn't go much further. It might be that they don't know much about the Bible or simply that their Christian faith has little to do with their everyday life. It's just kind of a separate thing that makes them feel good in hard times, but it doesn't change them.

I would guess most of you would consider yourself at the stage we're talking about today—Following It. Not only have you made an initial commitment to Jesus, but you increasingly want to become more like Jesus in your knowledge, in your character, and the way you act and react to people in your life. Faith as more than just a one-time commitment, but a way of life. That's why most of you are here.

Now, each week we've talked about barriers and breakdowns. *A barrier is anything that keeps us from moving on to the next stage of faith.* When we hit those barriers, we

either break down or break through to a new season of growth. In our small group last week, a number of people in our group shared about times in their lives when they were following it, but they hit a barrier, broke down and actually went backward.

For one, it was alcohol addiction. Another said it was losing their Christian community and finding a party community, another said it was a desire to fit in. It's possible not only to move forward, but to move backward at any point in life.

Now, you might think that once you get to the point of following it, this is the pinnacle and there are no other stages beyond it, but we believe that's not the case. We believe there is another level—All About It. I believe this was Jesus' goal for his disciples. That's why told parables like the man who found treasure hidden in a field and in his joy went and sold everything he had to buy the field. It's why he taught **“²⁶If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”**

Now, when you getting to this last stage is characterized by three right relationships—your right relationship with God, the Church, and the world. [Up In Out pic] Mike Breen describes it as Up with God, In with your brothers and sisters in the church, and Out with the world. Here we articulate the same thing as Find Life in Christ, Share Life with the Church, Give Life to the World. [Find Share Give pic] When we get to

the point where we would say we're following it but can't seem to move beyond, the reason is usually because we neglect one of the relationships. We're out of balance.

In fact, what I've seen over my 20-some years of ministry is that most Christians fail to move beyond this stage because of the same barrier—*Consumerism*. Some of you are thinking, "This is going to be so boring!" But I promise it won't be!

When I talk about consumerism, I'm not talking about the worship music industry or saying that Christians are buying too much Christian music or books or listening to podcasts of celebrity pastors. What I'm talking about is *the mindset that my faith is all about my own happiness or spiritual growth*. Certainly, those are fine things, but believe it or not, that isn't the picture of follow Jesus in the Scriptures.

So, where did this idea come from? Let me tell you a story. Edward Bernays [Edward-bernays pic] was the nephew of Sigmund Freud. Freud was the first to articulate the idea that what people say they want and what they really want are often two different things. We all have hidden desires that drive us that are dangerous and must be controlled. Bernays, who was born in Austria, but raised in the U.S. was familiar with his uncle's ideas.

He started as a journalist and then became a press agent, promoting stage plays, ballets and other forms of entertainment using many of his uncle's ideas about the human psyche. He was so successful that during World War I the U.S. Government took

notice and hired him to build support for the war among the people. He called what he was doing, "psychological warfare." After his success during wartime, Bernays realized he could apply his uncle's ideas to peacetime as well and he became the pioneer of public relations and modern marketing.

Up to that point, advertisers would always try to paint a product in the best light. It would talk about the features of the product and why this is the most rational choice. It appealed to people's rational side. But Bernays, knowing that what people want isn't always what they say they want worked to get into the head of the people who would be purchasing the product and sell to their desires rather than their practical side. He began to sell products by associating them with a desirable lifestyle or image.

This new way of advertising was so lucrative that corporations and banks took notice. Paul Mazur of Lehman Brothers wrote, *"We must shift America from a needs, to a desires culture. People must be trained to desire, to want new things even before the old had been entirely consumed. We must shape a new mentality in America. Man's desires must overshadow his needs."* They believed they were doing the country a favor by creating demand, jobs, and a booming economy.

But they weren't just changing the economy, they were changing the character of the entire culture. This quote from one journalist in 1927 captures it perfectly. *"The*

American citizen's first importance to his country is no longer that of citizen, but that of consumer."

Citizen vs. Consumer. What's the difference? Well, the difference is that a citizen sees herself as an active participant. Not only does she receive the benefits of citizenship, but also accepts the responsibility. She votes according to what's good for the country, not just what will get her the most benefits. She considers the next generation.

On the other hand, a consumer first asks, "how will this benefit me?" How will it make me happy? In a country of consumers, politicians stick their finger in the air and try to figure out what will make their ~~citizens~~, the consumers vote for them. *Citizens* grow and mature as they take responsibility for their country. Consumers regress into infancy where they become slaves to their desires, expecting to be spoon-fed and throwing fits when they don't get what they want. There's hardly any aspect of American life consumerism hasn't touched, including the church.

Now, this creates a real dilemma for churches. On the one hand, a basic principle of mission is that to reach a people group, you have to learn to speak the language and communicate using the tools of their culture. But not every aspect of any culture is consistent with the gospel.

So, the dilemma is that while we *need* to meet people in their consumer mindset to reach them, we then have to disciple people away from that mindset to the mind of

Christ who taught us things like, **“The first will be last and the last will be first”** (Mt 20:16), **“whoever wants to be greatest among you must learn to be your servant”** (Mt 20:26), and **“Blessed are you when people persecute you because of me.”** (Mt 5:11)

Now, there isn't a consensus about how we should present the gospel to consumer culture. We always have to be aware of the tension and pitfalls. But the task really isn't different than how the Apostle Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 9, where he says, **“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”** So, from the music we play to the topics we preach on, to the language we use; we want it to communicate to people brought up in this consumer culture.

The danger is that all of us, are immersed in consumer culture, too. And as with any other aspect of culture, it's not always easy to discern what is part of Christianity and what isn't. But it's clear that there are particular aspects of consumer culture that create barriers to spiritual growth for people who are long-time Christians. I believe the biggest barrier is the temptation to be a *spiritual consumer* instead of a *disciple-maker*. It's subtle because it will often mask itself as a desire for spiritual growth.

Now first, let me say that every believer needs to be a personal disciple of Jesus. We need to grow in our knowledge of and love for God. We need to learn to practice our trust in Jesus in the Church community. We need to care for our soul through prayer,

Scripture, and gathering for worship. These are essential for growth, but all of them can be done with a consumer mindset causes a number of breakdowns.

One breakdown is that it can make us inwardly focused. In other words, our only concern becomes our personal spiritual growth. Over my ministry, there's a phrase I've heard countless times from Christians—"I just want to go deeper."

This typically means one of two things. For people who know the Bible and love to study the Bible it means they want more Bible study. People who have a deep, emotional connection to Jesus and a vibrant prayer life typically mean they want a more vibrant, intimate prayer life. In other words, they want more of what they already love. This is the calling card of consumerism. I have last year's iPhone, but I need THIS year's iPhone.

Now, both practices are great. I hope everyone develops a love of Scripture and deep, intimate connection with Jesus. But constant input without exercise makes us fat.

Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus sit down with his disciples and say, *"What I want more than anything in the world is that you have an amazing quiet time. I want you to love to study the Bible so you can quibble about Greek word meanings."* Instead, his message to those who know Scripture the best is not to study *more*, it's to put what they already know into practice. Don't let it turn you inward, but outward.

The second breakdown is that a consumer mindset makes us overly critical. In a consumer society, the customer is always right. Customers don't have a stake in the

company, but the company has to do what the customer wants or he'll take his business elsewhere. So, the consumer feels empowered simply because he has an opinion. It's not the job of the customer to improve the product, only to fill out the survey or take his business elsewhere. Criticism is easy, leadership is hard.

Third, a consumer mindset stunts our growth. Consumerism is based on the goal of making the customer happy. The old Burger King slogan "have it your way" is the mantra of our age. The problem is that sometimes getting what we want is the worst thing that can happen to us. When everything is catered to our wishes we never learn patience and perseverance. Self-discipline and self-sacrifice are key characteristics of the Christian life, but are completely unnecessary in consumerism.

And because of this, consumerism renders us unfruitful. Jesus says in John 15:8, **"⁸This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, proving yourselves to be My disciples."** The only concern of the consumer is himself. It's all about what I want. Even in the church, if everything is always about my growth, then I can pay my tithe I can expect everything to be catered to me.

But imagine if this was everyone's attitude. If everyone just wanted to be led, there would be no leaders. If everyone wanted to be taught, there would be no teachers. Not only would individuals be unfruitful, the whole church would be unfruitful.

I've seen this with countless people in my ministry—people who think the reason their not growing is because they need better preaching, the right Bible study or more precise theology. When someone is new to faith these things are a critical part of growth.

But what I've found more often is that when someone gets to *the following it* stage in their faith, growth is almost always jump-started when they stop focusing on only their own growth and start investing in the growth of others. In other words, they move from a *consumer* mindset to a *disciple-maker* mindset. What we often miss in Scripture is that *this* is ultimately what Jesus calls people to. Let me show you.

In Matthew 4, Jesus calls his first two disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew. Here's how it happened, **“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”** Right up front, Jesus tells them the outcome of being his disciples.

After that, Jesus was going around preaching the good news of the Kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons and such. Then in chapter 9, it says, **“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [Then he said, “I will shepherd them myself!]** No, he didn't. **“Then he**

said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

But not only does he ask them to pray for workers, immediately in chapter 10, he sends them out. What is he sending them out to do? To practice ministry. Then they will come back and report to him and he’ll teach them more. But lest we think Jesus only expected the 12 Apostles to go out in the book of Luke—after he sent out the original 12, he sends out 72 in chapter 10. Clearly this is an expectation Jesus has of his followers.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the bags of gold where the master goes away on a journey and entrusts his resources to his servants. We find that his expectation isn’t just that we keep what we have, but we make more. But what are we supposed to make? Well, the answer is in Matthew 28:16-20.

Jesus is getting ready to leave and gives his followers one last instruction. **“¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

Acts, chapter one is a parallel version of sorts of the Great Commission. It starts with a flash-back to after Jesus’ resurrection, he gave his disciples these instructions, **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard**

me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Right before Jesus ascended, he told them, “**You will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” (Acts 1:8) Then he was taken up before them. Now, you can’t blame the disciples for standing there gawking. But it says two men dressed in white—which everyone assumes were angels—say to them, “*Why you just standing there looking into the sky? He’s coming back, so get to work.*” Get to work doing what? First, waiting for the Holy Spirit, then making disciples.

What I hope you see is that *Jesus expected his followers to disciple others.*

Discipling others completes the process Jesus trained us for. But it’s not an individual thing, it’s a communal thing. That “thing” is called the Church and it wasn’t your idea or my idea. It was Jesus’ idea. But he didn’t create it for your happiness or self-actualization or to give you tips to grow by yourself. The purpose of the Church is to make disciples.

Now, that doesn’t look the same for everyone. Some people are gifted teachers, some are not. Some are gifted counseling with people one on one, some are not. But everyone has the ability and responsibility to invest in the next generation of the Church.

So, the job of leadership in the church isn’t to create spiritual goods and services for you to consume. Here’s what the Apostle Paul says is the role of leaders, “¹¹**So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,** ¹²**to**

equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

The Church has a worship service, but worship service is not the Church. “The Church” has a building, but the building is not the church. The church (necessarily) has a structure, but the structure is not the church. The Church has leaders, but the leaders are not the Church. You (us), we are the body of Christ.

Those of you who are Christians today, why are you a Christian? My guess is that someone in your life modeled and shared with you the difference Jesus makes. And if you’ve made it to the point of Follower, how did you get here? My guess is that you didn’t do it by yourself. There was someone else who invested in your growth.

For me, it was my parents. It was people named Sheila, Mae, Larry and Mary and Adrienne who taught me the basics of the faith by teaching Sunday School and spending time with me. Pastor Darrell Wagner, who modeled a life of integrity. It was Norman, who set aside a couple of hours from his busy life each week to encourage, teach and challenge me through one-on-one mentoring. It was Chad who inspired me as we met together and confessed our sins and prayed for each other. There’s a whole host of

people who helped me get to where I am today. That's what I'm talking about. I would guess that each of you has your own list of people.

A couple of weeks ago, a long-time member, Eileen Montague passed away. It was after her funeral service that it really hit me. I've been here at this church for 8½ years. And I haven't counted, but I would guess that in those 8 ½ years we've lost 15-20 of that generation. It was a generation that gave countless hours of work and prayer and dollars to the ministry of this church and the Kingdom. You've been the foundation of this church for years and years. Of course, many things have changed in the last few years and that's necessary. Change is a part of life.

But I don't think I've taken the time enough to say thank to for the work you've done over the years and continue to do to build this church and the Kingdom of God. I'm so grateful and appreciative.

And that's the way life goes is that there must be a new generation to grab the baton and run with it. Yeah, how we do ministry is different today than how we did it in the past, but the mission is the same—to make disciples. What that will take is the same thing that can move you to the next stage of your faith. It will take a shift in your mind from spiritual consumer to disciple-maker.

As I said, our job as leaders is to equip you to be able to do that. Next week, we're going to be unveiling the big picture of how we are going to do it in the future, so make sure you're here for that next week.

One aspect of making disciples that will continue is small groups. And we're looking to expand our small group ministry, which is why we're going to be holding an informational meeting right after worship—around 11:30 in the office. Maybe that's a way you can get involved. So, please, if your heart is stirred, join us in a few minutes.

But for everyone who would say you're in this stage, this week I want to you to spend a good amount of time in prayer asking God to show you—to call you to be a Disciple-Maker. And next week come with expectation that God will speak and make your role clear.