



Faith-Ann A.
McGarrell

“Come, Follow Me”

I remember playing games such as “Follow the Leader!” and “Simon Says!” and “In the River! On the Bank!” as a child in school. In these playground games, my friends and I learned to listen and follow instructions. These skills acquired during childhood play proved beneficial in adulthood when life’s path seemed uncertain, or situations seemed unfamiliar. Yet, I also remember hearing warnings such as “Just because your friends are doing it doesn’t mean you have to do so!” In other words, be careful who you follow. And this is true in all areas of life.

These thoughts come to mind every time I read the story of Jesus’ call in the Gospels. In Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, and Luke 5:1-11, we have a record of Jesus’ interaction with those who would become His first disciples: Andrew, Simon Peter, James, and John. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matthew 4:19, NIV).¹ On first reading, it seems straightforward: Jesus called. They followed. Yet, I believe there was more to it than that. Several points resonate upon reflection on this story, and as I consider the articles included in this issue. In this passage of Scripture and the context surrounding it, Jesus invites the disciples to follow Him; in this invitation, they find their purpose, and in doing so, they gain confidence in the One they choose to follow. And we can find the same.

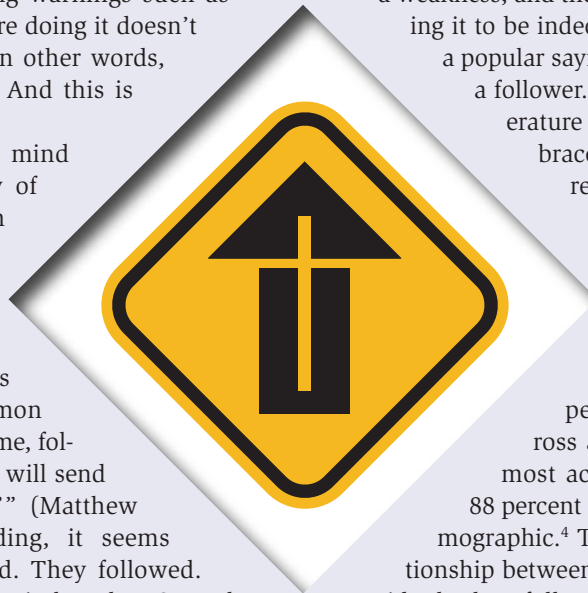
In Jesus’ invitation, there is certainty. The word

follow, as used in this passage, is defined as the call to “come away” or “to know, recognize, or perceive.” In essence, to put aside all else and to know with certainty.² Most people have a response to the word *follow*, a word, which, like many words in the English language, has both positive and negative connotations.

When called a “follower,” some perceive the trait as a weakness, and they consider anyone demonstrating it to be indecisive or passive. There is even a popular saying in English, “Be a leader, not a follower.” Thankfully, in the current literature on leadership, researchers embrace the term “followership”³ and recognize that to move forward in any situation, followers and leaders must work together.

Each month, TikTok records one billion users. Of this number, the largest percentage is aged 10 to 19. Across all social media platforms, the most active users, which account for 88 percent of all users, are the 18-to-29 demographic.⁴ There may be no personal relationship between the users and any of the individuals they follow, and the connection may be superficial. Yet, the pull is there. Why?

One reason is that humans have an innate desire to be known and seen. In this issue of JAE, the authors of the article, “**Discipling the Whole Student**” (Scott R. Ward et al.), refer to research conducted by The Springtide Research Institute. A 2022 report from this longitudinal study on “Belonging” indicates that one in three young people experience persistent loneliness; 40 per-



Continued on page 48

cent feel isolated and unnoticed; and 45 percent feel misunderstood.⁵ Those involved in the study are within the 13-to-25 demographic, the same population that comprises the followers of many social media gurus and influencers.

The study found if young persons have at least one trusted individual in their lives, they experience reduced feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress. This benefit increases the more connections a young person experiences. Springtide calls this the “Belongingness Process,” which refers to three specific types of experiences found in the stories of those who felt they belonged⁶

When Andrew and Peter, and later James, John, and the others, heard Jesus’ call, I believe there was more to their response than following a personality or a brand. I believe that when Jesus said, “Follow me,” there was in His voice the promise of certainty, of realized potential. It was the voice of the GREAT I AM—the voice of the One who knew them, who saw them, who understood their deepest, unspoken desires. The one who said: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5).

Adventist education is where we introduce students to the One who created them, died for them, and who knows them intimately—their joys, sorrows, hopes, and aspirations. But Adventist education is not just for children of Adventists, it is for ALL God’s children. A place where ALL children, regardless of circumstance or experience, can know and cry out like Hagar—and all those like her—such as Abraham, Isaac, and Hannah—that “You are the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). In Jesus’ call is the certainty that we are noticed, named, and known by the One in whom our full potential can be realized.

In this invitation, the disciples find their purpose. The invitation is not about comfort, but courage to fulfill our purpose. Two additional definitions of *follow* are used—“to accompany” and “to assist.” Jesus called the disciples to accompany Him, to assist Him on His

mission of making disciples for the kingdom: “and I will help you fish for people.”⁷ And He invites us to do the same! Fishermen during the time of Jesus lived difficult lives. The arduous, demanding occupation called for skill, patience, and tenacity. They endured extreme heat and cold; they used nets, baskets, spears, hook and line, and sometimes, even their bare hands to catch fish. They learned early how to sort the various types of fish and determine how each could be used; they learned how to make, mend, and maintain their nets so that they could keep up with the industry.⁸ It took courage to live as a fisherman.

So, what might it have meant for them to hear Jesus say, “I will send you out to fish for people”? People? Like the fish of the sea? All types of people in all types of circumstances? People who would require patience, skill, and care? People who would need more from them than they could give in their own strength?

In Luke 5:1-11, we read the same story from another perspective, and in this version, Jesus works a miracle after a difficult situation. After fishing all night and catching nothing, Simon Peter responds to Jesus’ request to use his boat. In return, Jesus instructs him to cast his net into the deep. Peter is skeptical—they had fished all night with no success. However, when Peter sees the nets bursting with fish, and the boats sinking with the weight of the catch, we’re told: “he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” (Luke 5:8). Like Isaiah, who declared, “Woe is me! I am ruined . . . my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5), and like us, when we feel the weight of what is required of us during this period of time in which we are living—the demands, the crises, and the challenges to longstanding principles of faith—Peter caught a glimpse of his own frail, fallible humanity, and felt in his soul the need for a Savior. I believe, too, that at that moment was born confidence and certainty that in Jesus, ALL things were possible. For us today, it re-

mains the same. Only when we acknowledge our dependence on the divine⁹ can we truly, humbly, respond to the call: “Come, Follow Me.”

Jesus responded to Peter’s cry with words of comfort and a declaration of promise: “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” WILL is affirmative! It shouts, “certainty in the future.” That same I AM that was with Moses (Exodus 3:14) promises to equip us in His mission to be “fishers of people” even in challenging times. As Adventist educators, we encounter all kinds of students and families, and we will need to know how best to reach them, nurture them, and keep them.

From inception, Seventh-day Adventist schools have been “nets”—capturing all, teaching all, nurturing all. And we must continue our commitment to become skilled at doing so against changing social, political, economic, and religious tides. From learning how to use new technology like Generative AI (David P. Harris and Fred Armstrong), to learning how to navigate and maintain impartiality on Adventist school boards (Robert Crux); from stewardship of the environment (Desmond Hartwell Murray), to stewardship of our professional growth in Christ (Carol Linda Kingston), to caring for their prayer lives in college and university (Ramona L. Hyman and Malya Prather). As Adventist educators, educational administrators, and educational personnel and staff on the frontline of mission, we have a mandate: to make our schools places where all who enter will hear the call of Jesus, “Come, follow Me!” Places where all who enter feel the impress of the Savior on their hearts, and “by the cords of His love”¹⁰ are drawn to Him.

The call of Jesus on the Sea of Galilee echoes through time to each one of us today. In a world with so many voices clamoring for our attention, may we hear clearly the One who calls, find confidence in His promise, and be about His mission.

Faith-Ann A. McGarrell, PhD, is the Editor of The Journal of Adventist Education®. She can be reached at mccgarrellf@gc.adventist.org.

Recommended citation:

Faith-Ann A. McGarrell, ““Come, Follow Me,”” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 85:2 (2023): 3, 48-49. <https://doi.org/10.55668/jae0041>.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. All Scripture references in this editorial are quoted from the *New International Version* of the Bible. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

2. *The Blue Letter Bible*, “Lexicon: Strong’s G190” (2023): <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g190/kjv/tr/0-1/>. See also *Knowing Jesus* (2023): <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/strongs/G190> and *Strong’s Concordance With Hebrew and Greek Lexicons*, “Follow” (2023): <https://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html>; *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “Follow” (2023): <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/follow>.

3. John S. McCallum, “Followership: The Other Side of Leadership,” *Ivey Business Journal* (September/October 2013): <https://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/followership-the-other-side-of-leadership/>; Neal Schaffer, “Social Media Demographics in 2023: What Marketers Need to Know in 2023” (2023): <https://nealschaffer.com/social-media-demographics/>.

4. Springtide Institute, *Belonging: Reconnecting America’s Loneliest Generation* (2022): <https://www.springtideresearch.org/research/belonging>.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. This commission is repeated in Matthew 28:19 and 20.

8. Riley Manning, “Fish, Fishermen Hold Prominent Places in Scripture,” *Marketplace* (May 7, 2014): <https://www.gadsden-times.com/story/lifestyle/faith/2014/05/08/fish-fishermen-hold-prominent-places-in-scripture/32103995007/>; Ray Vander Laan, “They Left Their Nets Behind,” *That the World May Know* (2023): <https://www.thattheworldmayknow.com/they-left-their-nets-behind>.

9. Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1955), 128; _____, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), 255, 307.

10. _____, *The Desire of Ages*, 249.