

First Followers: The Way True Life Changes the World

Summary

First Followers is a year-long practical study of the process of becoming your best for the world. This is what it means to be formed into the likeness of Christ for the sake of others. The journey will take participants through an exploration of their personal God-narratives, the work of the Spirit, spiritual practices, and community. Through the process participants learn how the ancient ways wedded to the Jesus truth yields the abundant life.

Four Phases

While the process of spiritual formation is deeply integrated and cannot rightly be compartmentalized, for the purpose of learning we have divided it into four phases. These are Narrative, Yielding, Practice and Community.

Narrative - We all live out narratives that have been shaped in us over time. Unobserved, these narratives dictate a false way of living. Each narrative is complete with characters including a role for God, and a role ourselves and others in our lives. Conceiving these narratives is simply part of our human experience. In this phase we will explore the false nature of our old narratives and discover ways they can be replaced with new ones that guide us toward living in the Kingdom of God.

Yielding - Everyone's soul is aiming toward a perceived version of the good life. But scarcity, fear, insecurity and jealousy tempt us to covet other lives and project a false life. This can be exhausting and destructive to the soul. By surrendering to the Spirit and the resurrection power Christ, we aim in the direction of his love for our lives.

Practice - Dozens of spiritual practices are available to us helping believers to live like Jesus Christ and develop awareness of the soul's health. God gives these tools at appropriate moment to be used to complete the work begun in us. As with any tool, one must learn when and how to use it for it to be of any benefit. Fortunately, we have many centuries of teaching from faithful guides from which to learn these ancient ways.

Community - The two greatest commandments are really two sides of the same coin. We cannot love God without also loving others. Spiritual formation does not happen apart from community and a commitment to be with and for each other helping one another become our best for the world.

The Format

Reading: We have developed a reading schedule that will provide the basis for conversation for our community. In the beginning of the program you will learn about your personal reading style which will determine how you approach the recommended and suggested texts. Reading assignments are distributed in 12-week portions with both recommended main texts and suggested supportive texts. Each week the group will also receive an email inviting participants to 'post' insights they come across or questions that arise.

Reflection: Each 12-week syllabus will include a set of questions for reflection. For each week there are three types of questions geared for a variety of learning and reading styles. Participants are strongly encouraged to write answers to the questions in a journal as a way to track growth and process clearly. However, these responses are personal and will never be the direct source of group conversation.

Gathering: The community will gather each month. And while we have a template guiding when and where those gatherings will be, since the group is small, it is possible for us to determine our schedule together far in advance. Each gathering will include a meal, worship, supplemental learning from speakers and videos, discussion, personal reflection and supportive accountability.

Retreat: Two or three of our gatherings will be a 24-hour retreat at a nearby destination. These retreats will give us extended time to explore community, personal growth and learning.

Syllabus Summary

Phase One NARRATIVE (12 weeks): Replacing false narratives with true narratives of God

Dates: August 6, 2018 through October 26, 2018

Readings

- *“The Good and Beautiful God”* by James Bryan Smith, selected readings
- ***Invitation to a Journey*** by M. Robert Mulholland
- *“Why We Must Think Rightly about God”* by A. W. Tozer
- ***Healing the Purpose of Your Life*** by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn
- *“What Jesus Knew: Our God-Bathed World” from The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard
- *“The God Who Won’t Let Go”* by Peter van Breeman
- *“Simply Jesus”* by N.T. Wright, selected readings
- ***Devotional Classics*** edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, selected readings

Proposed Gatherings

Wednesday, August 29 (5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Saturday, September 15 - KENT ANNAN CONFERENCE (8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.)

Retreat 1: Saturday October 12-13 (5:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.)

Phase Two YIELDING (12 weeks): Hidden in Christ

Dates: October 29, 2018 through January 21, 2019

Readings

- **Devotional Classics** edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, selected readings (Dallas Willard, Thomas a Kempis, John of the Cross)
- **Abba's Child** by Brennen Manning
- *The Good and Beautiful Life*, ch 5: *Lust*, by James Bryan Smith
- *Invitation to the Jesus Life*, ch 1: *Soul School: Will I ever Change?*; ch 3: *Attentive Listener*, by Jan Johnson
- **Sacred Pathways** by Gary Thomas
- *Feels Like Redemption* by Seth Taylor
- **Sacred Rhythms** by Ruth Haley Barton
- **The Essential Enneagram** by David Daniels and Virginia Price

Proposed Gatherings

Wednesday, November 7 (5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Wednesday, December 5 (5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.) – with Chris Hall

Wednesday, January 9 (5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Phase Three PRACTICE (12 weeks): The Christian Spiritual Disciplines and how they work

Dates: January 28, 2019 through April 19, 2019

Readings

- ***Invitation to a Journey*** by M. Robert Mulholland
- *The Deeper Journey* by M. Robert Mulholland, chapters 6 & 7
- *Spiritual Disciplines Companion* by Jan Johnson, pp 7-11
- ***Sacred Rhythms*** by Ruth Haley Barton
- *Streams of Living Waters* by Richard Foster
- ***Celebrating the Disciplines*** by Richard J. Foster & Kathryn A. Gianni
- ***The Making of an Ordinary Saint*** by Nathan Foster

Proposed Gatherings

Wednesday, February 6 (5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Wednesday, March 13 (5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Wednesday, April 10 (5:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Phase Four COMMUNITY (11 weeks): Welcoming others into my life for mutual encouragement and edification

Dates: April 22, 2019 through July 12, 2019

Readings

- ***Invitation to a Journey* by M. Robert Mulholland**
- *Devotional Classic*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p 271: Excerpts from *Life Together*
- ***Slow Kingdom Coming* by Kent Annan**
- ***The Rule of Life* by Saint Benedict (trans. John Wilson-Hartgrove)**
- ***Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton**

Proposed Gatherings

Wednesday, May 8 (5:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Wednesday, June 12 (5:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.)

Closing Retreat: Sometime in January 2020

Spiritual Direction

During this program, participants will be introduced to the value of spiritual direction. Opportunities for direction will be available at retreats and by appointment on a monthly basis. The cost for personal spiritual direction (\$50 per session) is not included in the cost of the First Followers program. However, payment can be made with payment fees and will be reimbursed to the Director of choice. Note that spiritual direction at retreats is offered at *no additional charge* in order for participant to freely explore its benefit to soul care.

The Cost

First Followers is an intensive course of study designed to fulfill its outcomes rather than to be cost-free. For this reason, we are asking that participants pay \$750 to cover expenses. These expenses include food, books and materials, speaker honoraria, retreat usage and rental fees, and small administrative costs. This may be paid all at once, in two payments, in quarterly payments, or in monthly payments.

The Application

Participants are asked to complete an Application to help program directors learn a little about you and your experience with spiritual formation. It will also serve as a benchmark for your own personal growth as you reflect on what your hopes and anticipated outcomes are for First Followers. The Application also is your way to indicate your commitment to full participation with your colleagues in your First Followers Community.