Follow
Rick Hose, Faculty Commons’ National Director

In October, the fútbol phenom Cristiano Ronaldo surpassed singer and actress Selena Gomez to become Instagram’s most followed person (Forbes, Jan 7, 2019). Today 158 million individuals follow the world’s highest paid athlete. Honestly, I’m not sure I could rise every morning if 150 million people were waiting for my next word, but — truth be told — in the end I want to connect with people who follow me, I could not remember my password.

Acquiring followers feeds both the ego and the wallet. The Oxford University Ph.D. graduate Samira Karan has over 695,000 followers. Her fascination with mathematics keeps her teaching physics and math to university students, but along the way she discovered the crucial reality that “one in one day on Instagram I earn the same amount as I make as a university professor in two months.” Ohch. Going by @AlphaFoodie on Instagram, Samira posts about smoothies, fruit, and like. I suspect our obsession with “like,” “subscribe,” and “follow” shapes our world more than we think. For example: Is it not so much easier to “follow” someone online than it is to follow any (your pick) real person? Sure it is, which is why it is possible to “follow” 100 people online and, in reality, follow no one but yourself.

I propose that if Jesus had an Instagram account, it might be overloaded with heart emojis and “likes,” possibly masking a paucity of true followers.

In Luke’s gospel, one can not miss Jesus’ passionate interest in followers:

• To Levi, the tax collector: “Follow me” (Luke 5:27).
• To the rich ruler: “Sell all that you have and come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).
• To anyone who would desire to follow: “Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

But notice how Jesus defines “follow”: Leave your tax business. Sell all that you have. Deny yourself. The nature of how one follows another is predicated upon the weight, or glory, of the person being followed. One “likes” a pizza place, but if someone is the image of the invisible God, by whom all things were created (in heaven and on earth), who was before all things, and holds all things together (Colossians 1), one does not follow this person with a “thumbs up.” Instead, one follows with one’s whole being.

This is why we encourage professors to think of themselves as Christians who happen to be professors, rather than professors who happen to be Christians. Likewise, we desire to develop a grad student’s core identity as a Christ-follower who happens to be in graduate school.

Faculty Commons exists to encourage each professor and grad student in the world to wholeheartedly follow the One who spoke everything into being, the focal point of human history, the Savior of the world. What a privilege to be a follower of this Person? For those who do not know Him: come, follow. For those who do know Him: come, follow.

Thank you for partnering with us in this great endeavor. Oh, how the world needs professors and grad students who follow Christ.

May God in His mercy help each of us to become wholehearted followers.

National Director of Faculty Commons Rick Hose and his wife, Sonja, live in Durham, NC, and have three adult children.

Surprising Kingdom Connections

Ministry Profile: Debbie Iannetti, Faculty Commons Representative in Central Florida

“I’m reading a book that makes me think of you!” Dr. Marilyn Armstrong’s colleague, Dr. Claudine Renthal told her in February 2019. They are both professors at Valencia College, West Campus in Orlando. On Claudine’s recommendation, Marilyn purchased A Grander Story: An Invitation to Christian Professors and began reading it.

Marilyn explains, “A Grander Story has shown me how to embrace Christ’s calling in the classroom. I am learning how to foster meaningful interaction with students that is leading to real personal and spiritual life change.”

Then, at the end of the summer semester, Marilyn was invited to teach a women’s restroom and spotted A Grander Story on a shelf by the door. She admitted, “My interest was piqued so I spotted on a shelf by the door. She admitted, “My interest was piqued so I spotted it and I knew it was time. In February 2019, I first met Claudine, the colleague who had first shown her the book. Marilyn invited Claudine to join her at the meeting. As they entered the room, Claudine met Debbie for the first time and exclaimed, "You’re the Debbie with the book — it has been so helpful to me!" Amazed, Debbie asked Claudine how she found A Grander Story. Claudine said that the president of Valencia West had given her the book.

Debbie recalled that two years earlier, she met the president of Valencia West at a Christian women’s event in Orlando. As she talked about Faculty Commons, the president said: “This is the perfect day for me to meet Valencia College

Valencia College has been recognized nationally as the best community college in the nation. It is the second largest of Florida’s 28 state colleges, with locations on eight campuses throughout Orange and Osceola counties.

• Enrollment: 62,293
• DirectConnect guarantees Valencia graduates acceptance and streamlined admission to the University of Central Florida and is considered the most productive university-community college partnership in the country.
• Valencia College’s Orange Campus, a shared campus with UCF, is set to open in Orlando in Fall 2019.

The Valencia College faculty and staff members are working hard to make sure that Valencia College Downtown Campus, a shared campus with UCF, is set to open in Orlando in Fall 2019. Valencia College is a community college. Valencia College is dedicated to providing access to quality education and workforce training for all students.

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Meet the Prof

The Faculty Commons website for Christian professors, MeetTheProf.com, hosted the faith stories of hundreds of professors. These Christ-followers in academia post photos and some friendly trivia about themselves, along with their spiritual journeys. A professor at Ole Miss received emails from two students within days of her post letting her know how encouraged they were to know she was a Christian. Professors have even found other believers at their universities that they never knew were there!
**Encountering Jesus in Grad School**

Ashley Holloman, National Director, Cru’s Grad Student Ministry

One of our first initiatives two years ago was when we launched Cru’s national student ministry to produce the investigative Bible study Encountering Jesus: An Explanation of His Life and Works for Grad Students. It is our first Bible-study written specifically to help students discover what God has in store for them in grad school and beyond. It is designed as a group study, encouraging grad students to connect with one another and with professors who are exploring God. The tips and questions included in each lesson make it easy for busy grad students to lead it and launch grad campus ministries centered around the book.

When master’s student Raven Alade contacted us to ask if Cru had a ministry at Vanderbilt, we said, “No, but you can start one—and we can help!” We mailed her a book and encouraged her to start a study by finding one or two other grad students and trusting God for more.

Raven soon gathered students she met in her graduate courses to join her Encountering Jesus group. She emailed, “[simply asked] a person to Bible study and then we started telling more people.” A few days later Raven called and said, “I’m needing ten more books.” Two weeks later she emailed again, “Now I need ten more books! God is really doing something!”

Raven has seen lives changed so far. She writes: “This study is encouraging students through these tough grad programs. I believe this study is a safe space because all of the professors and students are african americans . . . and the racial issues we encounter on campus are tiring and hard. I am trusting God to allow the space to grow in a representation of the diverse body of Christ. I want this study to be a space of truth, love, healing, and for God to be embraced.”

When I asked Raven how God was using Encountering Jesus in her own life, she said, “For me it is a call to leadership. I think this is somewhere for me to speak life into others and grow in community. This study is showing me how to be obedient, trusting, and loving. I also believe it is growing me to be slow to speak and quick to listen as I grow from others.”

So far, Cru has launched ministries on ten new campuses using Encountering Jesus, with at least a dozen more campuses getting ready to start groups next fall. God is indeed doing something!