

THE WAY OF THE ÉCLAIREUR

Following Jesus Into the Unknown, Unexplored, and Unexpected

I have spent years sitting around dinner tables with hundreds and hundreds of young Disney Cast Members from all over the world. I have listened to their stories, their fears and frustrations, their hopes and heartaches. I've heard stories that would break your heart, curl your toes, and make you hold your breath. Stories about families, relationships, dreams, disappointments, loneliness, identity, love, loss, and the complicated business of trying to figure out who you are and what your life might become.



Almost none of them came looking for a pastor. In fact, 99 percent of these conversations were with people who had no expression of faith, no experience with the Bible, and had never entered a church building. And I quickly discovered something uncomfortable. Almost all of my church planting training was pointless.

It had prepared me to think about programs, gatherings, strategies, systems, leadership, communication, growth, and how to get people from somewhere out there to something we were creating in here. But the people sitting across the table from me weren't asking any of those questions. They weren't looking for a church or a ministry. None were looking for Jesus. They were simply living their lives.

And if I wanted to understand their world, I couldn't begin with what I wanted to tell them. I had to begin with what I didn't know.

I had to become a student of the world.

I had to learn to listen longer than I spoke, to ask questions without already knowing where I wanted the conversation to go, to notice what made someone come alive, and to recognize pain without trying to fix it. I had to learn to enter someone's story without secretly looking for the moment when I could turn it into my story.

Perhaps most difficult of all, I had to learn how to connect with people without an agenda, a strategy, or even a vision for their lives. That shook the foundations of my training..

Over time, I began to realize that entering the plentiful harvest Jesus described requires a very different kind of follower. Not someone carrying a predetermined blueprint for what should happen next, but someone willing to enter unfamiliar territory attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and open to what might emerge.

There is an old French word for someone like that: **éclaireur**. (ay-kleh-RUHR)

An éclaireur is a scout, a spy, a pathfinder. Someone who moves ahead into unknown or unexplored territory to see what others cannot yet see, discover what is already there, and find a way forward. An éclaireur does not enter the unknown carrying the answers. An éclaireur enters looking for clues.

This is the way of the éclairneur.

It is not a program to implement, a process to complete, or a pathway with a predetermined destination. It is a way of moving through the world with Jesus. It is curious, relational, and adventurous.

The éclairneur does not need to know where the path leads. The éclairneur learns how to move when there is no path.

Leave the Map Behind

Most ministry training begins with a map. Someone has gone somewhere, built something, experienced success, and then documented what happened. Eventually the story becomes a strategy. The strategy becomes a model. The model becomes a conference, a book, a curriculum, or a consulting practice. Someone else sees what happened and asks the obvious question: *How can we reproduce that here?*

There is nothing inherently wrong with learning from what others have discovered. The problem begins when someone else's map becomes our substitute for exploring our own territory.

The harvest is not standardized. People are different. Neighborhoods are different. Cities are different. Generations and cultures are different. A dinner table in Orlando is different from a café in Paris, a flat in London, an apartment in Tokyo, or a university dormitory in Mexico City. The moment we assume we already know what should happen among a group of people, we stop exploring.

That is why an éclairneur must be willing to leave the map behind. A map tells you where someone else has been. A compass helps you navigate where you are.

For the Kingdom éclairneur, that compass is Jesus.

This is what makes the invitation of Jesus so radically different from the way we often approach ministry. Jesus did not hand His disciples a strategic plan and tell them to execute it. He said, *"Follow me."* Following requires attentiveness. It requires movement. It requires enough trust to take the next step without demanding to see the entire route.

The system needs a map. The éclairneur needs a compass.

Learn the Territory

An éclairneur entering unfamiliar territory does not begin by announcing what should happen there. The first responsibility is to pay attention. What is happening here? Who are these people? What do they love and fear? What makes them laugh or angry? Where do they gather? What do

they celebrate? What are they grieving? What questions are they asking, and what questions have they stopped asking? Where might Jesus already be at work?

These are not demographic questions. They are human questions.

There is a profound difference between researching people and knowing them. You can purchase demographic reports, analyze census data, identify generational trends, and study cultural characteristics. All of that may be useful, but none of it replaces sitting across the table from another human being and listening.

That is why curiosity matters so much. Curiosity gives us permission to say, *"I don't know yet."* Those four words may be among the most important words an *éclaireur* can learn to say.

Our need to be the person with the answer can make us terrible listeners. We listen for openings instead of understanding. We hear a problem and begin preparing a solution. We hear pain and search our mental library for a Bible verse. We hear someone's worldview and immediately begin constructing the argument that will correct it.

The *éclaireur* resists that impulse, not because truth does not matter, but because people do. Curiosity keeps us present long enough to discover the person who is actually in front of us.

Travel Light

Exploration becomes difficult when you are carrying too much. The same is true in the harvest.

We often enter relationships carrying enormous amounts of invisible baggage: expectations, theological vocabulary, ministry objectives, assumptions about what people need, ideas about what success should look like, and timelines for when something should happen. Sometimes we even carry a vision for someone's life before we know their story.

Éclaireurs travel light. That does not mean they abandon conviction. It means they release control. There is an important difference.

I can be deeply convinced that Jesus is King without deciding what He must do in another person's life. I can believe the Kingdom has come near without knowing what expression of that Kingdom might emerge among these particular people. I can trust Jesus enough to enter a relationship without needing to engineer its outcome.

That kind of freedom changes the way we encounter people. The person sitting across from me no longer needs to become anything for the relationship to be worthwhile. I can simply love them. I can express value and allow trust to form. And when the opportunity emerges, I can plant Jesus, not because I maneuvered the conversation toward Him, but because the relationship created enough trust for something deeper to be shared.

Move at the Speed of Trust

We have a phrase around our dinner tables: *We move at the speed of trust.*

Trust cannot be manufactured. It cannot be accelerated by a better strategy, and it cannot be demanded simply because our intentions are good. Trust grows through presence.

It grows when people discover that you are still interested in them even when they aren't interested in what you believe. It grows when you remember their story, when you show up, when you celebrate what matters to them, and when you sit with their pain without trying to explain it. It grows when they realize that your friendship is not dependent upon their spiritual progress.

That takes time, and time is uncomfortable for systems built around measurable outcomes. We want movement, decisions, growth, and results.

Jesus seemed remarkably comfortable with seeds.

Seeds are small. Seeds disappear. Seeds spend a considerable amount of time underground where nobody can measure what is happening. Yet Jesus repeatedly used seeds to describe the Kingdom.

The *éclaireur* learns to become comfortable with what cannot yet be seen. Sometimes the most significant Kingdom moment in someone's life may look remarkably insignificant to everyone else. It might be a conversation, a question, a meal, a moment of unexpected kindness, or simply the discovery that a follower of Jesus actually enjoys being around them.

We rarely know which moments will matter most. So we keep showing up.

Follow the Clues

An *éclaireur* is always noticing. This is where the idea of the spy becomes particularly useful.

A good spy pays attention to what others overlook. Small details matter. Changes in behavior matter. Unexpected conversations matter. What is absent may matter as much as what is present.

Kingdom *éclaireurs* develop that same attentiveness. We begin looking for clues of the Kingdom hiding in ordinary life. Someone suddenly asks a spiritual question they have never asked before. A coworker unexpectedly shares something deeply personal. A neighbor begins lingering at the mailbox. A group of friends keeps returning to the same conversation. Someone invites you into a part of their life that had previously been closed. A dinner becomes a weekly rhythm, a friendship becomes a community, or a question becomes a search.

None of these things necessarily arrive with a sign announcing that God is doing something here. We have to notice.

This is why Kingdom reconnaissance begins with curiosity rather than creativity. Before asking what we should create, we ask what is already happening.

Jesus is already ahead of us. Our job is not to bring Him somewhere. Our job is simply to recognize that He got there first.

Resist the Urge to Build

This may be one of the hardest disciplines of the *éclaireur*. When something begins happening, we immediately want to build something around it. We name it, brand it, organize it, schedule it, create leadership roles for it, develop a curriculum, find a meeting place, and create a budget. Before long, something that emerged naturally from relationships has become another structure that must be maintained.

But what if the first question isn't, "*What can we build?*" What if the first question is, "*What is Jesus doing?*"

Those questions can lead in very different directions.

We don't enter the harvest knowing what we are going to build. We enter attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and willing to discover what expression of His Kingdom might emerge among them.

It might become a dinner table. It might become a conversation between two coworkers. It might become a group of friends reading the stories of Jesus together. It might become hospitality or service. It might become something none of us has seen before.

That possibility should excite us rather than frighten us, because the goal was never to reproduce our preferred expression of church everywhere we go.

The goal is the Kingdom.

Become Comfortable With the Unknown

Adventure sounds exciting until you realize what adventure requires: *uncertainty*.

If you already know exactly where you are going, exactly what will happen when you arrive, and exactly how everything will turn out, you aren't exploring. You're executing.

The way of the *éclaireur* requires a different relationship with uncertainty. You have to become comfortable saying, "*I don't know what happens next.*"

For leaders trained to create vision, define outcomes, develop strategies, establish metrics, and produce results, that sentence can feel irresponsible. But sometimes "*I don't know*" is not

evidence of poor leadership. Sometimes it is evidence that you have finally entered unexplored territory.

This is where adventure becomes more than personality. It becomes trust.

We assess. We adjust. We advance. We try something small, pay attention to what happens, listen, learn, and change direction when necessary. We follow the wind of the Spirit and remain attentive to the current of the harvest.

The *éclairé* does not confuse faithfulness with predictability. Sometimes following Jesus means taking the next faithful step before knowing where the second one will be.

The Three Postures

Over the years, I have come to recognize three qualities that continually surface in people who seem most alive in this kind of Kingdom adventure. They are **curious**, **relational**, and **adventurous**.

Curiosity moves us toward what we do not understand.

Relationship keeps us close enough to people to discover what cannot be learned from a distance.

Adventure gives us the courage to follow Jesus when we cannot predict what comes next.

These are not three steps. There is no sequence, no certification, and no moment when you graduate from curiosity, complete relationship, and advance to adventure. They are postures.

Curiosity keeps asking.

Relationship keeps connecting.

Adventure keeps moving. And Jesus remains at the center of all three.

Without Jesus, curiosity can become fascination. Relationship can become mere social connection. Adventure can become novelty. But centered on Jesus, something different happens.

Curiosity becomes attentiveness. Relationship becomes love. Adventure becomes faith.

And ordinary life becomes territory worth exploring.

Go Where the Map Ends

For years, I thought ministry meant knowing where I wanted people to go and helping them get there.

The harvest taught me something different.

Sometimes following Jesus means entering another person's world without knowing what He intends to do there. That requires humility, curiosity, patience, and courage. It requires enough confidence in Jesus that we don't have to control the story.

There are people all around us whose lives will never intersect with the ministries we have spent so much time designing. They aren't waiting for our next program. They aren't searching for our pathway. They aren't hoping someone will invite them into our process.

They are living ordinary lives in ordinary places, carrying extraordinary stories.

Jesus sees them.

And when He looked at people like them, He described what He saw as a plentiful harvest. Then He said something remarkable. The problem wasn't the harvest. The problem was that there weren't enough people willing to enter it.

Perhaps that is still the problem.

Jesus is still looking for followers willing to leave familiar territory, travel light, learn the landscape, move at the speed of trust, follow the clues, and venture beyond the edge of the map. Not because they know exactly where they are going, but because they know who they are following.

That is the way of the éclairéur.

A scout.

A spy.

A pathfinder.

Curious enough to explore.

Relational enough to stay.

Adventurous enough to follow. A

nd willing to go wherever Jesus leads, especially when there is no path.