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Not A Fan: Are You A Fan or a Follower? by Kyle Idleman

Luke 9:23-9:23

D -T -R. Some of you will recognize what these letters stand for. How many of you know what the letters DTR stand for? For a young man in a relationship, these letters strike fear in their hearts. They dread the DTR talk. It makes single men so uncomfortable they will only use the initials DTR. The objective is to postpone, run away, and put off DTR for as long as possible. In fact many men are so afraid of the DTR, they will terminate the relationship when they sense the DTR talk is imminent. Now do you want to guess what DTR stands for? D.T.R. stands for Define the Relationship. This is an official talk that takes place at some point in a romantic relationship to determine the level of commitment. You define the relationship and decide where things stand – is it casual, or is it committed? I remember one time going on a date in high school and on the first date – she tried to have the DTR – and that relationship ended PDQ. I just ran away. But there comes a point when it's important to Define the Relationship and you see if things have moved passed infatuation or admiration and moving towards deeper devotion and commitment. And how you feel about the DTR talk is determined by how committed you are to the relationship. If the relationship is one of convenience that you want to be just a casual weekend thing – then you will feel uncomfortable. You will feel anxious. Your mind will be flying with excuses...you may even have a fight or flight response.

Some of you may have those same feelings in the next few weeks, because we're going to have a little DTR talk. I want you to Define the relationship between you and Jesus. What exactly is the commitment level? Now I'm going to warn you that some of you are going to get a little uncomfortable, a little anxious...you may even have a fight or flight response because you kind of like the current arrangement you have with Jesus. He seems like a good guy – and you like having something to do on the weekends – what it comes down to is this - you want to have a relationship with Jesus with all the benefits but none of the commitment. A No Strings Attached arrangement – where you can connect with him from time to time – but it doesn't really mess with your life. You want to be a fan of Jesus – but not a follower. In Luke 9:23 Jesus put it this way "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Followers deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him... A fan is simply defined as an enthusiastic admirer. And the DTR question is this:

Are you a fan or a follower?

As you read through the Gospels you will find example after example where Jesus will put people in a position where they must choose... Sometimes there were large crowds following him like in Luke 14 and John 6 – and Jesus would preach a sermon that would determine who in the crowd were fans and who were followers.

Jesus was never impressed by the size of this crowd, it's the commitment level that he cares about. A concern I have with our churches today is that when we gather together - I think there is the possibility that instead of a community of followers we are nothing more than a stadium full of fans. Where we may wear a cross, but we don't bear the cross. You can come to church, know all the songs, open your Bible and take notes, walk out to your car with a Jesus fish on the bumper and say grace before lunch, but that doesn't necessarily make you a follower.

I think for years I was more fan than follower. (Michael Jordan Poster) In large part because I confused knowing about Jesus with knowing Jesus. But there is a difference between knowledge and intimacy. I grew up thinking it was my knowledge and my good behavior that made me a follower. I loved Jesus and I knew a lot about Jesus - but I didn't know Jesus. I wasn't talking to him about my day - I wasn't listening for him to speak into my life. See, a lot of us don't mind Jesus once a week on Sunday. We don't mind making some minor change in our lives but Jesus wants to turn our lives upside down - we want him to do a little touch up work, but Jesus wants complete renovation - we come thinking tune-up but Jesus is thinking overhaul - we think just a little makeup is what we need and Jesus is thinking makeover. We think a little decorating is required, and Jesus wants a complete remodel.

I got an email a number of weeks ago that was sent to me from the person on our staff who takes care of church membership records. The email informed me of a person who wanted to be removed as a member of the church because they didn't like my sermons. That was the reason given. I checked the address and phone number to make sure it wasn't my wife. I quickly decided to pick up the phone and call the person. When he picked up the phone I said, "Hey this is Kyle Idleman, I understand your leaving the church because you don't like my sermons..." I knew this caught him off guard, there was an awkward silence, and then he started talking, rambling really, trying to express what he meant. But somewhere in his lengthy explanation he said something...and I wrote it down...because when he said it I breathed such a sigh of relief that that tears literally came to my eyes. Here what he said - "Well...whenever I listen to one of the messages I feel like you're trying to interfere with my life." Now he didn't mean that as compliment - I understand. But it's a compliment - in fact it's really more of a job description - to teach the Bible in way that interferes with your life.

But the truth is that it is only in letting Jesus interfere with our lives - that we find real life. Jesus didn't come to this earth so that you would be better behaved or to tweak your personality or fine-tune your manners or smooth out your rough spots. He wants total transformation. The objective of the gospel is not to make you a well-behaved person but to turn your life upside down. Jesus didn't come to change me but to kill me. When I quit fighting for the controls of my life and surrender everything to him - when I die to myself and live for him I find life that that is truly life.

In Luke chapter 9. Verse 23 Jesus says that if we want to follow him we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily. But at the end of this chapter Jesus gives three examples of people who are potential followers, but are shown to be fans - just enthusiastic admirers. And here's what we find - what keeps them from following - is really what keeps most of us from following.

We read about the first fan in verse 57As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Notice he says I will follow wherever you go. Wherever. He's at least talking a good game- he says to Jesus I will follow you without reservation. But look at verse 58Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus draws attention to the fact that this man loved comfort more than following him. And maybe that's what's keeping you. Because the call of Jesus to take up our cross and follow him - is in direct conflict with our desire to be comfortable. We are by nature comfort seekers. Have you seen the advertisement on TV for what is called a "snuggie." I admit the first time I saw it I thought... I would never pay money for a "snuggie." When I think of "snuggie"...I'm not thinking comfort and relaxation. But the more I saw the snuggie the more I wanted one. My wife asked me what I wanted for Valentines day...and I was surprised by the words that came out of my mouth I said, "I want a snuggie". I would venture to say that before this product came out you could count on one hand the number of men in the world that had said "I want a snuggie". But how can you not get excited about a blanket with sleeves. You can't be taking the blanket off and on every time you reach for the remote...and is there part of you that wants a snuggie? We see these things and think - that's it. But my guess is, if you ordered a snuggie and it arrived to your house, you would put it on and say, "Wait a second I have one of these! Isn't this just a robe you wear

backwards?"

A follower is not asking the question "How can I be comfortable?" Many of us are not following Jesus – we're following comfort. We've made comfort our God – it's what we live for – work for – and sacrifice for. But there's nothing comfortable about the call to follow Jesus.

So as you determine the relationship you have with Jesus let me ask you a question:

1. Is the relationship one of convenience, or is it committed?

This man in verse 57 spoke words of commitment, but when Jesus painted him a picture of what that commitment looked like the man seemed to back off. I think there are a lot of people who have made a decision to believe in Jesus – but never really committed to Jesus.

MSNBC recently did a report on the new Vegetarians. Christy Pug, age 28 captured the report - "I usually eat vegetarian. But I really like Bacon." She represents a growing number of people who refer to themselves as flexetarians. Most of the time they will refuse to eat meat, but once in a while they make an exception. Christy explains it this way, "I really like vegetarian food, but I'm not 100 percent committed." Flexitarian is a good way to describe how many people today view their commitments. Flexitarians are committed until it becomes inconvenient and uncomfortable. So when the special is Filet Mignon then our commitments can be adjusted. And that's the way many Christians approach their commitment to Jesus and Bible. I really like Jesus – but I don't really like serving the poor – I'm not real big into the idea of going to church – but my resources are spoken for. I love Jesus but this area of my life – when I'm with these friends – when I am at this place...I'm not 100 percent committed.

And so they will say, I want to follow Jesus but don't ask me to forgive the person who hurt me. Don't ask me to release that bitterness and resentment I'm not going to let that go. I want to follow Jesus but don't ask me to give a percentage of my money. I worked hard for that. I'll follow Jesus but don't talking to me about my sex life –.I can't help my desires. We wear the name Christian and then we pick and choose - the teachings of Jesus that we're going to follow – as if the teachings of Scripture were a buffet, where you just take what look good to you and don't worry about the rest. It would be like me officiating a wedding and going through the vows....

We would never do that – but that is what fans do. It's not unusual for me to talk to parents who are concerned because their college age kids or their grown children seemed to have walked away from Jesus. Often the parents want to know two things Why did this happen? And What do I do now? Well there are no easy answers - usually I listen to their story and offer a little encouragement and I pray. But a few months I was speaking in Houston Texas and a good sized man – with a good sized belt buckle came up and with tears in his eyes...that doesn't happen too often, but he started tell me the story of his prodigal daughter. But he wasn't asking me why – he wasn't looking for an explanation. In one sentenced he put his finger on what he thought happened in the case of his daughter and here's what he said... "We raised her in Church, but we didn't raise her in Christ." She grew up learning to be fan of Jesus instead of a follower of Jesus. Most parents want their kids to have a little bit of God – they want their kids to have some Biblical morals. But one of the most dangerous ways to be raised is with a little bit of Jesus...it's like an inoculation. A little bit can make you immune to the real thing. Like a marriage – it doesn't work to just if you don't have a whatever it takes – completely committed approach.

In verse 59 we meet fan number 2. He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." One of the first words out the guy's mouth is "First." The first thing he does is put Jesus off. I want to follow, I really do, but not right now. Now isn't a good time. We treat our relationship with Jesus like the diet we keep meaning to start. I'm going to start eating right – as soon as finish off the chicken chimichanga. And we do that to Jesus – first let me do what I want to do. We put Jesus off like we put off going to the gym. And so we say I'll start tomorrow...this is my last time...when I'm out of college...when I get married...when we have kids...when I get a less demanding job. Instead of getting out of bed we just keep hitting the snooze alarm – just 10 more minutes we tell ourselves.

Maybe you hear this man's excuse for putting Jesus off – he wants to go bury his father – and think Jesus is being a little too hard core. Let the guy go bury his dad. Well, most likely he father wasn't even sick.

This was a way for the man to say – when my parents die...then I will follow you. When I get the inheritance...when I know they won't disapprove – then I will follow you. But his excuse isn't enough for Jesus. I'm not sure what is holding you back. It may be something that seems very legitimate – but Jesus says the time is now. And one thing I can tell you for certain is that longer you put him off the less like you are to ever follow.

And the third fan is in verse 61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Jesus isn't looking for half-hearted followers. Following him part-time isn't an option. He has no interest in Sunday Christians follow him but are always looking over their shoulder wondering if they are missing out and second guessing their decision

Both the second and the third follower are dealing with the issue of priority. So let me ask you one other question to help you define the relationship you have with Jesus:

2. Is Jesus one of many, or is He your one and only? See, fans want to make Jesus one of many. And Jesus is clear that this isn't an option. Jesus says the most important command is to love the lord with ALL your heart, ALL your soul, ALL your mind, and ALL your strength. That's the kind of relationship he wants to have with you.

Let's imagine, and this is strictly pretend, that this week you walk into a restaurant and you see me sitting at a table having a candle lit dinner with a woman who is not my wife. You come up and ask me who the woman is and what I am doing. I say that I am on a date and you say what about your wife. I respond by saying, "Oh, well I still love her too." This isn't our date night, our date night is on Thursday, I can date who I want the rest of the week. You would walk away angry and disgusted. You decide that someone needs to tell my wife and so you call her and tell her. Well imagine that I come home from my date and you have already told my wife and she meets me at the door and says, "Hi honey, did you have a nice time on your date, (Now this story is really getting fictional).

Imagine how absurd that would be. You don't even have to know my wife to know that her reaction would be jealous anger. As soon as I walked in the door from my date I should fear for my life. If she heard about me eating at McDonalds with a man who kind of looked like a woman she would be jealous – and the Bible describes God as jealous God. He doesn't want our one-day a week affection. He wants your whole heart.

Jesus explains that following him is not something you do part-time or half-way. Jesus says, it's all or nothing. There is a young man in our church who dedicated himself to following the upside down way of Jesus a few years ago. Like many of us his before and after story is pretty dramatic. A relationship with Jesus has changed everything for him. Before following Jesus his life consisted in his words of, going out, drinking, smoking pot and chasing girls. He'd show up to work with a hang over more often than not. He was full of anger and didn't know why. He felt like he was running in circles with no purpose. And was just kind of going through life aimlessly. But Jesus has brought a radical change his life. You spend a few minutes with him and it's easy to see the joy that he has found in Christ. He is constantly at church, serving whenever way he can. He's a single dad with plenty of financial struggles – but when he became a Christian he decided that he would no longer work during church times, even though he needed the hours and he would tithe even though things were tight. Not long ago he asked if I could meet his mom...I said sure. The three of us sat down for coffee in café 920. I knew she went to a different church in town and I assumed that she wanted to meet with me at least in part to compliment Southeast for the difference that she had seen her son. But that wasn't the case. She was upset with me and the church, because in her words, "my son has taken all of this too far." She was not pleased with how much time he was spending at the church...and how he always wanted to pray when they had family meals...and how he was always trying to tell them about the sermon...and she was upset that he was giving some of his hard earned money. And here's what she said to me "Can you please tell him that the Bible teaches 'everything in moderation'?" She said "He's taken this too far and he needs to understand that that it doesn't have to be all or nothing."

I tried to keep a pleasant smile – but my teeth were clenched, and my breath was short, I could feel my

eyebrows narrowing and saw my nostrils flair. I was angry and defensive of my friend. I so did what I always do when I get angry...I started quoting scripture from Revelation. In Revelation 3 Jesus says to the church in Laodicia "You are neither hot or cold but because you are lukewarm – I'm about to spit you out of my mouth." Jesus doesn't say, "Everything in moderation" he says you can't be my follower if you don't give up everything.

And so the invitation hasn't changed. Jesus still says, If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. My favorite word in that invitation is ANYONE. No matter what your story – no matter what you've done this is the relationship Jesus wants to have with you. Anyone... Anyone who has ever laid awake in bed and thought I would give anything to undo what I've done. Anyone who has looked at themselves in the mirror and said I can't believe what I have become. Anyone is an all-inclusive term – Anyone means everyone. Anyone means me and anyone means you

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