

Are You a Follower of Jesus or Simply a Fan?

Let me be the first to say that this column—as with any Step out of the Boat columns I write—isn't meant to chastise or point fingers. It isn't meant to bring on guilt or condemnation.

Writing this, as I always do, I hope to spur you to bigger and better things with Christ. If you are struggling with anything, I want to encourage you that there is something better out there, and it can be found in Jesus. That is my prayer for you.

That said, I must confess that my job allowed me to come across Kyle Idleman's 2011 book *Not a Fan* about three years ago. For some reason that I now fully understand, the title of the book didn't resonate with me and I simply tossed it aside.

It wasn't until my pastor, Ed Garvin, recommended the book during a recent church service that I committed to read it. Pastor Garvin explained how it is a life-changer, and of course, now, I'm always intrigued by something when it gets that type of endorsement.

So why wouldn't I read it when I first saw it back in 2012? Let's just say my walk with Jesus, as much as I wanted to believe it was stellar, was anything but. You could say that I was a fan of Jesus and not a follower, as Idleman puts it.

Most times the prologue of a book will hook you, and Idleman's prologue to *Not a Fan* isn't any different. But instead of getting a celebrity endorsement for the book, Idleman caught my attention by offering an apology and an interesting take on John 6.

You know the old story about how Jesus fed the 5,000. Yes,

Jesus truly performed a miracle, and it resulted in thousands of people camping overnight to hear Jesus the next day.

But ask yourself, why do you think many of them stayed around? Could it be that they figured Jesus would feed them again? Give anyone free food, and they'll become a fan, especially if you do it repeatedly.

Jesus wasn't about to become their meal ticket. He and His friends got into a boat and traveled to the other side of the sea. In John 6:26, He said, "Truly, truly I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For God the Father has set His seal on Him."

In verse 66, we come to find out that many would abandon Jesus because He neglected to offer them anything else tangible. "From that time, many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him."

And Jesus did not chase after them. Idleman says, "He doesn't soften His message to make it more appealing. ... He seems OK with the fact that His popularity has plummeted."

In other words, when it comes to followers, Jesus isn't searching for big numbers. He's looking for a level of commitment from us.

Remember Nicodemus? As a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus heard Jesus preach and became a fan. But he didn't make a full-time commitment because he was afraid his reputation would be besmirched by admitting he was an admirer of Jesus. He would be forced to choose between religion and his relationship with Jesus—his status as a follower or a fan. Eventually, we read that he chose Jesus.

So are you a follower or a fan? Have you made a decision for

Jesus or have you made a commitment to Him?

Many of us may say we're His followers with our flattering tongues (I know I did for years), but our actions fall way short of what that really means. I was in one of the groups that Idleman calls the "Jesus fish on the back of my car" group. Just because I went to church three times a month, repeated a prayer after a preacher or had a Christian worship song as my ringtone didn't make me a Christian.

Over the past year, it became very clear to me that it was time. It was time to "Define the Relationship," as Idleman says.

You've done that many times in your life, including when you got married. When you define the relationship, you determine your level of commitment.

For me, that meant:

- Trusting God with everything (marriage, children, finances, job)
- Amping up my commitment to prayer
- Immersing myself in God's Word
- Taking on the heart of a servant

Since I have taken on a deeper commitment to Christ, I can honestly tell you that I have seen a change in my level of inner peace. That doesn't mean my life issues have ceased to exist, but I have learned to cast my cares upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7). I decided to stop trying to do it on my own because, frankly, I can't, and it's exhausting to try.

So I ask you, have you determined your level of commitment to Jesus? Is it casual or deeply serious? What can you do now to make a real commitment to your Lord and Savior?

I implore you, please don't be as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:5, "having a form of godliness, but denying its power."

So are you a fan, or are you a follower? And if you're a follower, will you pass this on to someone whom you believe is a fan?

And as I always like to say, "there is that." {eo}