

Why I'm Not a Jesus 'Fan'

Jesus doesn't want a fanbase. He's looking for surrendered  *followers.*

A few years ago I was working on a sermon for Easter weekend, but it just wasn't coming together. Hoping for some inspiration, I went into our sanctuary where 30,000 people would soon gather; but I still had no idea what I was going to say.

"This sermon needs to be good," I told myself. A number of people who would be coming attend church only on Christmas and Easter (we call them "Creasters"). I wanted to make sure they'd come back. *What can I say to get their attention?* I thought. *How can I make my message more appealing?*

Finally, I asked myself this one question: "What did Jesus talk about when He talked to the large crowds?"

I grabbed the Bible out of the chair in front of me and quickly began to flip through the Gospels. What I discovered broke me as a preacher and changed me forever.

I found that when Jesus had large crowds, He would often preach a message that would cause many of them to leave. Ultimately it wasn't the size of the crowd that Jesus paid attention to, it was their level of commitment.

That Easter weekend I stood up on the stage, and with tears in my eyes, I apologized: "I'm sorry for sometimes selling Jesus cheap and watering down the gospel."

I explained that although my intentions were good, I had too often left out the passages of Scripture that made it clear the invitation to follow Jesus was a call to serve, sacrifice and even suffer. The passage I preached on that day was from Luke 9:23, when Jesus said, "If anyone would come after Me, he

must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (NIV). That sermon set a new course for the message series that would follow.

One key phrase resulting from that series has become the very lens through which I now review all my messages. It is, "Not a Fan." The word *fan* is defined as an "enthusiastic admirer." By that definition, many of our churches today could easily become stadiums full of fans. Fans may be fine with repeating a prayer, attending church once a weekend and slapping a Jesus fish on the back of their bumpers—but Jesus wants a deeper relationship than that.

Fans don't mind Jesus making some minor change in their lives, but Jesus wants to turn our lives upside down. Fans don't mind Him doing a little touch-up work, but Jesus wants complete renovation. Fans come to Jesus thinking tune-up, but Jesus is thinking overhaul. Fans think a little decorating is required, but Jesus wants a complete remodel.

I've continued to preach the Not a Fan message at churches all over the country, challenging Christians with this question: "Are you a fan or a follower?"

Ultimately my prayer is that the Not a Fan message will become a movement of God's people taking seriously what the Bible teaches about following Jesus.

Kyle Idleman is a teaching pastor at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Ky. His sermon series Not a Fan is now available as a DVD small group study. Visit www.notafan.org for more information and to join the thousands of people worldwide who have declared: "I am not a fan." Pastor Idleman believes we can challenge one another to passionately pursue our relationship with Jesus and radically live out what we say we believe.