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—Max Lucado

# not a fan.

BECOMING A COMPLETELY COMMITTED  
FOLLOWER OF JESUS

kyle idleman

## **Not a Fan**

*Becoming a completely committed follower of Jesus*

Kyle Idleman

ZONDERVAN

*Not a Fan*

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## **chapter 1**

### **Fan or Follower?**

## D.T.R.

*Are you a follower of Jesus?*

I would say the chances are pretty good that you just skipped over that question. You may have read it, but I doubt it carried much weight or had any real impact. But would you let me ask you this question again? It's the most important question you will ever answer.

*Are you a follower of Jesus?*

I know, I know. You've been asked this question before. Because it's so familiar there is a tendency to dismiss it. Not because it makes you uncomfortable. Not because it's especially convicting. The question is dismissed mostly because it feels redundant and unnecessary.

Chances are that if you are reading this book you fall into one of two groups:

1) **The “Jesus fish on the back of my car” group.** You are serious enough about your faith that you shop in the Christian section of the bookstore. In which case, when I ask you “*Are you a follower of Jesus?*” it seems rhetorical and you're ready to put the book down, or at least go back and look at the table of contents to see if there is a chapter that might be helpful. You recognize that this is an important question for many to consider, but asking you? Well, it's like walking into a Boston pub and asking, “Who cheers for the Red Sox?” It's an important question, but you're so sure of your answer that your mind quickly dismisses it.<sup>3</sup> You've already

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<sup>3</sup> It's possible to be wrong about an obvious question. Example from *Family Feud*:

Question—*Name a fruit or vegetable that is yellow?* Answer of contestant—*Orange.*

dealt with it. Asked and answered. But before you move on too quickly, let me clarify what I am not asking. I am not asking the following:

Do you go to church?

Are your parents or grandparents Christians?

Did you raise your hand at the end of a sermon one time?

Did you repeat a prayer after a preacher?

Did you walk forward during a twelve-minute version of “Just As I Am?”

Do you own three or more Bibles?

Have you ever appeared in a church directory?

Did you grow up going to VBS and/or church camp?

Is your ringtone a worship song?

When you pray are you able to utilize five or more synonyms for God?

I can keep going. Seriously, I can.

Have you ever worn “witness wear”?

Is the KJV the only real version of the Bible?

Have you ever kissed dating good-bye?

Under “religious views” does your Facebook page say “Christ follower”?

Did you dog *Harry Potter* and rave about *Lord of the Rings*?

Did you get a purpose driven life in 40 days or less?

Do you say “Bless their heart” before speaking badly about someone?

Do you understand phrases like “traveling mercies” and “sword-drill”?

Here's my point: many of us are quick to say, "Yes, I'm a follower of Jesus," but I'm not sure we really understand what we are saying. To quote Inigo Montoya, "*I do not think that means what you think it means.*"<sup>4</sup>

One of the most sobering passages of Scripture in the Bible tells of a day when many who consider themselves to be followers of Jesus will be stunned to find out that he doesn't even recognize them. In the gospel of Matthew chapter 7 Jesus tells of a day where everyone who has ever lived will stand before God. On that day many who call themselves Christians and identify themselves as followers will stand confidently in front of Jesus only to hear him say, "*I never knew you. Away from me.*" If you've just assumed you are a follower of Jesus, I pray that this book would either confirm that confidence or it would convict you to reevaluate your relationship with Jesus and reaffirm your commitment to follow him.

2) **The "Why is there a fish on the back of my friend's car?" group.** If you are a part of this group, then you likely didn't buy this book. In fact, you would never spend your own money on it. But somebody who cares about you, and who probably has a fish on their car, gave it to you. Because it was a friend or a relative you figured you would at least read the first chapter to be polite. And maybe you skipped over the question *Are you a follower of Jesus?* It's not that you're against the question or offended by it. It just doesn't seem relevant to you. But it's irrelevant to you in a different way than the people in group number one. It's not that you have already answered the question; it's that the question doesn't seem worth answering. You mean no offense; you're just not into it.

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<sup>4</sup> If you recognized this quote as being from *The Princess Bride* then give yourself an extra point. It's a favorite among Christians (even though Kirk Cameron isn't in it).

It doesn't bother you that some people choose to follow Jesus. That's cool, but it's not your thing. Kind of like your friend who's so into *Star Trek* that he asks you things like "ta' SoH taH HoD?" (That's Klingon for "Do you think Spock should be captain?"<sup>5</sup>) And you don't really care. If that's what he likes, fine. But you don't get the appeal.

But ... what if? Would you pause for a moment and ask yourself, *What if all of life comes down to this one question? What if there really is a heaven and there really is a hell, and where I spend eternity comes down to this one question?* That may seem completely ridiculous, but if there is some part of you that considers this a minute possibility, then isn't it worth thinking through that question? As you read this book my prayer is that you would at least consider that this may be the most important question you ever answer. I believe that the reason we were put on this earth is to answer this one question. And the truth is, whether or not we do so consciously or intentionally, we all answer this question.

I want you to know up front that I'm not here to "sell" Jesus. I'm not going to try and talk you into following Jesus by presenting the parts that are most appealing. Because here's the thing, and don't tell the people in group #1 I said this, but many of them assume they are followers of Jesus, but the truth is they have never heard the unedited version of what Jesus taught about following him.

My guess is that after reading this book there will be people in group 1 and group 2 that turn down the invitation to follow Jesus. After all, when we read in the Gospels about Jesus inviting people to follow him, some people signed up, but most decided to walk away.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that I did not personally translate this nor do I speak a word of "Klingon." I do have a friend who speaks some Klingon. I ridicule and mock him, and I always do so in an actual language of real people.

## Time for the D.T.R.

So where do you start in determining if you really are a follower of Jesus? How do you decide if this is even something you would want to consider? Let's begin by having a D.T.R. talk with Jesus. Some of you will recognize what the letters D.T.R. stand for. If you're not sure, let me give you a hint. For a young man involved in a romantic relationship, these letters are often enough to strike fear into his heart. He likely dreads the D.T.R. talk. In fact, many young men will postpone, run away from, and put off the D.T.R. for as long as possible. I have even known a few guys who have terminated the relationship when they sensed that the D.T.R. talk was imminent.<sup>6</sup>

Now do you want to guess what DTR stands for?

Define the Relationship.

This is the official talk that takes place at some point in a romantic relationship to determine the level of commitment. You want to see where things stand and find out if what you have is real.

In high school I went out on a first date with a girl that I really didn't know very well. We sat down in a booth at a restaurant and began the awkward first date conversation. During the appetizer I learned a little bit about her family. While we enjoyed the main course she told me about her favorite movie.<sup>7</sup> And then it happened. While we were eating our dessert she asked

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<sup>6</sup> True Story: One friend of mine faked hyperventilating to get out of the DTR talk. By "one of my friends" I mean me.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood* in case you're wondering. I know; it should've been a red flag. I was just relieved it wasn't *Ghost*.

me, and I quote: “*Where do you see this relationship going?*” On the very first date she was trying to have the D.T.R. talk. I got out of there P.D.Q. That was the first and the last date.

I wasn’t ready for that moment, but there comes a time when you need to define the relationship. It can be awkward. It can be uncomfortable. But eventually every healthy relationship reaches a point when the D.T.R. talk is needed. Is it casual or is it committed? Have things moved passed infatuation and admiration and towards deeper devotion and dedication? You need to intentionally evaluate the state of the relationship and your level of commitment to the person.

So here’s what I want to ask you to do. In your mind picture yourself walking into a local coffee shop. You grab a snack and get a drink and then walk towards the back where it isn’t crowded and you find a seat at a small table. You take a sip of your drink and enjoy a few quiet minutes. Now, imagine that Jesus comes in and sits down next to you.<sup>8</sup> You’re unsure what to say. In an awkward moment you try to break the silence by asking him to turn your drink into wine. He gives you the same look he used to give Peter. Before he has a chance to respond, you suddenly realize you haven’t prayed for your food. You decide to say your prayer out loud, hoping that Jesus will be impressed. You start off okay, but understandably you get nervous and pray “Three things we pray: to love thee more dearly, to see thee more clearly, to follow thee more nearly, day, by day, by day.” You quickly say “Amen” when you realize you’re quoting Ben Stiller’s prayer from *Meet the Parents*.

Before you have a chance to make things more awkward, Jesus skips past the small talk and gets right to the point. He looks you in the eye and says, “It’s time we define this relationship.” He wants to know how you feel about him. Is your relationship with Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> How do you know it’s Jesus? He’s wearing a blue sash. Duh.

exclusive? Is it just a casual weekend thing or has it moved past that? How would your relationship with him be defined? What exactly is your level of commitment?

Whether you've called yourself a Christian since childhood, or all of this is new to you, Jesus would clearly define what kind of relationship he wants to have with you. He wouldn't sugarcoat it or dress it up. He would tell you exactly what it means to follow him. As you're sitting in that coffee shop listening to Jesus give you the unedited version of what kind of relationship he wants with you, I can't help but wonder if that question, "Are you a follower of Jesus?" would be a little more challenging to answer.

It may seem that there are many followers of Jesus, but if they were honestly to define the relationship they have with him I am not sure it would be accurate to describe them as followers. It seems to me that there is a more suitable word to describe them. They are not *followers* of Jesus. They are *fans* of Jesus.

Here is the most basic definition of fan in the dictionary:

*"An enthusiastic admirer"*

It's the guy who goes to the football game with no shirt and a painted chest. He sits in the stands and cheers for his team. He's got a signed jersey hanging on his wall at home and multiple bumper stickers on the back of his car. But he's never in the game. He never breaks a sweat or takes a hard hit in the open field. He knows all about the players and can rattle off their latest stats, but he doesn't know the players. He yells and cheers, but nothing is really required of him. There is no sacrifice he has to make. And the truth is, as excited as he seems, if the team he's cheering for starts to let him down and has a few off seasons, his passion will wane pretty quickly. After several losing seasons you can expect him to jump off the fan wagon and begin cheering for some other team. He is an enthusiastic admirer.

It's the woman who never misses the celebrity news shows. She always picks up the latest *People* magazine. She's a huge fan of some actress who is the latest Hollywood sensation. And this woman not only knows every movie this actress has been in, she knows what high school this actress went to. She knows the birthday of this actress, and she knows the name of her first boyfriend. She even knows what this actress's real hair color is, something the actress herself is no longer certain of. She knows everything there is to know. But she doesn't *know* the actress. She's a huge fan, but she's just a fan. She is an enthusiastic admirer.

And I think Jesus has a lot of fans these days. Fans who cheer for him when things are going well, but who walk away when it's a difficult season. Fans who sit safely in the stands cheering, but they know nothing of the sacrifice and pain of the field. Fans of Jesus who know all about him, but they don't *know* him.

But Jesus was never interested in having fans. When he defines what kind of relationship he wants, "Enthusiastic Admirer" isn't an option. My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following him. **The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them.**

### **An Accurate Measurement**

So Fan or Follower? The problem with asking that question of yourself is this: it's almost impossible to be objective. After all, if you say, "I'm a follower," what makes you so sure? What are the measurements that you use to define your relationship with Christ? Most would determine the answer to this question by using a highly subjective method of measurement.

Many fans mistakenly identify themselves as followers by using **cultural comparisons**. They look at the commitment level of others around them and feel like their relationship with Jesus is solid. Essentially they grade their relationship with Jesus on the curve, and as long as they are more spiritual than then next guy, they figure everything is fine. That's why some fans are almost glad when it's found out that the Christian family everyone admires has a child that rebels or is struggling to stay together because the marriage isn't as perfect as it appeared. The curve just got set a little lower.

Have you noticed that when we compare ourselves to others as a way to measure our relationship with Christ we almost always put ourselves up against those who are spiritually anemic? I have a tendency to take this approach in measuring myself as a husband. I try and convince my wife how good she's got it by pointing to her friend whose husband never takes her on a date, or by telling her about my buddy who forgot his twenty-year anniversary. I've learned that when I start comparing myself to other husbands as a way to measure how I am doing as a husband, I am doing so out of conviction and guilt that I am actually not loving my wife the way I need to. **If you find yourself measuring your relationship with Jesus by comparing yourself to others, that is likely a self-indictment.**

Another measurement fans use is a **religious ruler**. They point to their observance of religious rules and rituals as evidence that they are really followers. After all, they reason, would a fan go to church every weekend, and put money in the offering, and volunteer in the nursery, and listen exclusively to Christian radio, and not see R-rated movies, and only drink a wine cooler at the party? *Hello? Of course I'm a follower. I'm not doing all that for nothing!*

We have other ways to determine if we are followers. Denominational measurements, our family heritage, and biblical knowledge are all ways we try to prove that we really are followers.

But **here's the real question: how does Jesus define what it means to follow him?** Whatever measurement he gives is the one we should use.

## **Diagnosing Fandom**

The Gospels record many examples of people having the D.T.R. talk with Jesus. In each encounter the person finds themselves in a position where the question “Fan or Follower?” has to be answered. Some are shown to be true followers; others are revealed to be nothing more than enthusiastic admirers. As we examine a number of these encounters, think of them as case studies that reveal different “symptoms” of being a fan.

With four kids at home, we are constantly on medical websites trying to diagnose whatever ailment is being passed around. One of my favorite websites has a search function that allows you to enter in whatever symptoms you suffer from and then it gives the most likely diagnosis. For example, if you type in “runny nose” and “nausea” the website informs you that it's likely the flu or a food allergy. If you add lightheadedness then it narrows it down to a food allergy. If you take away lightheadedness and add fever, then the diagnosis is more likely to be the H1N1 flu.<sup>9</sup> The more specific the symptoms, the more likely you are to get an accurate diagnosis.

The biblical accounts of Jesus requiring people to define the relationship and honestly determine if they were true followers gives us some telltale symptoms of being a fan. As we

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<sup>9</sup> I have a difficult neighbor and have wondered if he has some kind of contributing health issue. I entered in “adult acne,” “irritability,” “halitosis,” and “excessive body hair,” but no results could be found. If you're part of the medical community I would appreciate your expertise in this matter.

study these D.T.R. encounters with Jesus they will act as a mirror so we can have a more honest assessment of ourselves. Fans often confuse their admiration for devotion. They mistake their knowledge of Jesus for intimacy with Jesus. Fans assume their good intentions make up for their apathetic faith. One of the core symptoms of “fandom” is that fans almost always consider themselves to be followers.

So find a seat in the back of a coffee shop and read on. Let’s honestly and biblically define the relationship. Are you a follower of Jesus? Or are you really just a fan?



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