

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: Luke 9:23; 57-62 *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

“How to Be a True Follower, Not Just a Fan”

D -T -R. Some of you will recognize what these letters 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 about twenty years ago, I was single and was a member of a church and there was this girl who was a member of the church too and we became friends and because she didn't have a car I offered to give her a ride every now and then. This went on for several weeks. I didn't mean anything but she thought it meant something. One time after church, she confronted me in the car – she tried to have the DTR – and it was one of the most awkward moments in my life.

Anyway, in any relationship 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? So, we're

starting a new series called “Following Jesus”. We’re going to look at what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Now I’m going to warn you that some of you are going to get a little uncomfortable, a little anxious as we go through this series...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.

This morning that’s what we’re going to deal with. In Luke 9:23 Jesus put it this way *“If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.”* Then, also in the end of this chapter, we read beginning in verse 57, *“As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* 59 *He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”* 60 *Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* 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.”*

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 room full of fans. We may be one of those church that is one mile wide but one inch deep. Where we may wear a cross, but we don't carry the cross. You can come to church, know all the songs, open your Bible and take notes, walk out to your car with a 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 a fan than a follower. 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.

There are three things from these passages of scripture that we read that I would like to notice about a True Follower of Jesus.

Let us examine ourselves as we go through this this morning in the hopes that in the end we can honestly say to Jesus, "Lord, I'm your follower, not just a fan." So, let's take a look at how to be a true follower of Jesus. To Be a Follower of Jesus You Must

I. Count the Cost.

It is not easy to follow Christ. There is a cost or there are costs involved. In fact, sometimes even a sacrifice. It means getting out of your comfort zone and doing things that may seem crazy. That's what Jesus means when he says those who follow him must deny themselves. You will deny yourself of things that will make you feel comfortable. There is a price that you are going to have to pay to follow him. In Luke 1, Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all

that he had and give it to the poor, but the rich young ruler went away sorrowful. It was hard for him to part with his money. The cost was too much to bear.

You see, there is more to being a Christian than just saying you believe in him. Jesus had a lot of people who followed him around, but most of them were not true followers of him. Most of them weren't willing to count the cost and take up their cross and follow him. Many of them were just after what Jesus could give them not who Jesus means in their lives.

So, the cost of following Jesus may mean great discomfort for us. You see, we are by nature comfort seekers. Everything that has been invented was designed to make us feel comfortable and make our life easier. The light bulb, the air con, the heater, the air bed, and a host of others. 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. It looks more like a bathrobe worn backwards. Imagine walking around the house and tripping over it.

But the more I saw the snuggie the more I think, "maybe it's really comfortable." That could be my Christmas wish.

But you see, 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 another DTR question: Is the relationship one of convenience, or is it committed?

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. She says, "I usually eat vegetarian. But I really like bacon." She represents a growing number of people who refer to themselves as flexitarians. 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. They they are committed up to a point. So, when the special is Filet Mignon then their commitments can be adjusted. And that’s the way many Christians approach their commitment to Jesus and the 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. And they say too, 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 relationships –I can do what I please.

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.

Folks, Jesus is looking for commitment. He is looking for people who would count the cost of following him. To Be a Follower of Jesus, you must also

II. Cut the Connections.

In verses 59 through 62, two men came up to Jesus to tell him that they wanted to follow him but they wanted first to go home and bury the dead, or go home and say good bye to their families. But Jesus said, “Let the dead bury their dead, and don’t look back!” Jesus wasn’t teaching that we must neglect our families, he was teaching the principle of cutting our connections if he really is first in our lives. In these two episodes, Jesus was also just being practical because he realized that if the man went back to bury his father or to say good bye to his family, he could be influenced to stay and forget his commitment to Jesus.

Notice in verse 59 when Jesus tells a man, “Follow me”, the man replies “Lord, first let me”. So, the first thing he does is put Jesus off. His first desire

is not Jesus but to do what he desires. 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 I finish off the double cheeseburger. 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. It's like in the morning, instead of getting out of bed we just keep hitting the snooze alarm – just 10 more minutes we tell ourselves.

To follow Jesus means to put aside all those things that hinder our walk with him. Let me remind you of these verses in Hebrews 12,

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

To be a follower of Christ you must Count the Cost, Cut the Connections, and . . .

III. Cleave to Christ.

Jesus wants us to hold on to him. He wants us to follow closely in his footsteps. If you want to be a disciple of Christ, you've got to make sure you follow him alone. So let me ask you one other question to help you define the relationship you have with Jesus: Is Jesus one of many, or is He your one and only?

You 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 candlelight 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 'm 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?”

Imagine how absurd that would be. You don’t even have to know my wife to know that her reaction would be jealous anger -- and the Bible describes God as a 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.

I read the story of this young man who dedicated himself to following the upside-down way of Jesus a few years ago. Like some 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 of going out, drinking, smoking pot and chasing girls. He’d show up to work with a hangover 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 in 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 whatever 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. Then he asked his pastor if he could meet his mom and his pastor agreed. They sat down for coffee in the nearby café.

The pastor knew the mother went to a different church in town and he assumed that she wanted to meet with him at least in part to compliment the church for the difference that she had seen in her son. But that wasn’t the case. She was upset with the pastor 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 the pastor, "Can you please tell him that the Bible teaches 'everything in moderation'?" And she continues, "He's taken this too far and he needs to understand that that it doesn't have to be all or nothing."

This woman, however long she may have been a Christian or going to church for that matter, has got it all wrong. There is no moderation when it comes to Christ, it's all or nothing. We cannot be lukewarm about Christ, we cannot sit on the fence, it's either we're with him or we're not with him. It's Christ or nothing, Amen?

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.

Friends, the Scriptures teach us that there is more to following Christ than giving him lip service. There is more to following Christ than just good intentions. In Jesus' day there was so many who wanted to follow him for the 'loaves and fishes' or for the benefits that there were, but Jesus told them that they were not fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. In order to be a follower of Christ you must Count the Cost, Cut the Connections, and Cleave to Christ.

Are you a follower of Jesus or just a fan? Have you decided to leave all and follow him? Jesus said, "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my word, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." And Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Are you ashamed of Jesus? Or have you at one time or another served him, but then looked back? If you are either one of these, there is hope for you-you can be a follower of Jesus.

Let me end by showing you a video. You know, one of the trends now is to follow someone through twitter. Have you twitted before? I'm not into it. I

don't know about you. But imagine, if there was twitter in the time of Christ, how would it look like? Pls watch.