

## **Are You a Fan or Follower of Jesus?**

**By Rev. Daniel W. Randall**

Kyle Idleman wrote a thoughtful essay titled “Why I’m Not a ‘Fan’ of Jesus.”

He begins by noting that, according to a recent survey, the percentage of Americans who claim to be Christian is somewhere north of seventy-five percent. “Really?” he asks, “three out of four people are followers of Christ? “Let’s see, if the population of the United States is about three hundred and eleven million and seventy-five percent are Christians that brings the number of Christians to somewhere in the neighborhood of Two Hundred and thirty-three million. That’s a lot of Christians.” In his estimation, something about that percentage is off. “Because if there really are that many Christians, then why will some Thirty-five million people in America go to bed hungry tonight, including Thirteen million children? If seventy-five percent of Americans are Christians, then why are there more than one hundred and twenty thousand children waiting to be adopted? The numbers don’t add up.

Jesus said the evidence that someone is one of his followers is love. So, Two Hundred and thirty-three million?” says Idleman, “the evidence just isn’t there. “What’s the explanation for such a discrepancy?” he asks. He tells about an article he read a number of years ago about a group the article called, the “new vegetarians. These new vegetarians don’t eat meat--most of the time. One of them explained that she was a vegetarian, but she really liked bacon.” And so, she ate it. “A vegetarian, by definition, is someone who doesn’t eat meat,” says Idleman. “Umm, yeah, but isn’t bacon a meat? Is it really accurate for her to identify herself as a vegetarian? . . .” Then he adds that the discrepancy was solved by coming up with a new term to describe vegetarians who aren’t committed to abstaining from meat. They now identify themselves as “Flexitarians.” They eat vegetables only – when it suits them! “A Christian,” continues Idleman, “by definition, is a follower and imitator of Christ. So, I’m thinking that what might help make sense of the 233 million number is a new word to describe people who identify themselves as Christians but have little interest in truly following the teachings of Jesus. Perhaps instead of ‘Followers,’ it would be more accurate to call them ‘Fans.’ The word fan is most simply defined as, an enthusiastic admirer. And I think Jesus has a lot of fans these days. Some fans may even get dressed up for church on Sunday and make their ringtone a worship song. They like being associated with Jesus. Fans want to be close enough to Jesus to get the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them. They want a no-strings-attached relationship with Jesus. So, a fan says, I like Jesus but don’t ask me to serve the poor. I like Jesus, but I’m not going to give my money to people who are in need. I like Jesus, but don’t ask me to forgive the person who hurt me. I like Jesus, but don’t talk to me about money, morals, holiness, or sexual purity – that off-limits. Fans like Jesus are just fine, but they don’t want to give up the bacon. Maybe we are not seeing a greater impact in the world for Jesus because there are more Fans than Followers.

In Matthew 16:24-26 Jesus makes it clear what it means to be a faithful follower. “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

So, what about you? Are you growing in the knowledge of God’s Word, the Bible? Are you faithfully worshipping God regularly with others? Are you faithfully imitating Jesus in your words and actions? Are you serving the least, the last, and the lost, or your own wants and desires? Are you a fan or a follower of Jesus?