

Week 31

7/23/12

James: Thank all of you. And welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm James Robison. I feel like I'm half here because Betty is not here. She had an eye that had a blood vessel break in it a couple of days ago and it looks like it is going to take about a week for that to get better. It's nearly swollen shut. She wasn't comfortable being with us. I hope you'll understand.

I have a wonderful guest, Kyle Idleman who is one of the teaching pastors at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville. Dave Stone is pastor. And Dave, I'm sure you're watching because I know you watch me and you watch Betty because you told us you have an appreciation for what we do. And I have so much admiration and appreciation for you and for your church and for your leadership, and also for your friendship. But I know you're watching because I know you really like my guest today. I know that Kyle -- and you even sent me an e-mail saying, "He's some kind of preacher, James. I'm looking forward to the two of you being together."

So, Dave, highest regards and appreciation for you, for the leadership there in one of the great churches in our nation; I just thank God for you. Thank God for the ministry there at Southeast, and thank you for sharing one of your staff. I want you to welcome Kyle Idleman to *LIFE Today*. Kyle, good to have you here.

Kyle: Thank you! I appreciate it.

James: I want to talk to you -- you know I actually saw clips of you preaching and you're really good. I can tell you're zealous and I'm kind of a zealous guy myself. I can remember when I was young like you, I had a lot of zeal but I've still got it and I'm kind of an old guy.

Kyle: I hope I'm going strong.

James: You'll be going strong -- *Not a Fan*. This is kind of a title that gets your attention. And Max Lucado talks about what an incredible book it is. Your pastor has said this is awesome. What are you talking about, *Not a Fan*? Tell me about your journey and tell me about what led to this book.

Kyle: Well, a fan is simply defined as an enthusiastic admirer. It really began -- the book

really began as a personal conviction in my own life that I had a relationship with Jesus that was too much on my terms. In other words, I defined it, I identified it more about what I wanted it to be and how I wanted it to look than necessarily what the gospels taught. As a result, oftentimes my sermons would reflect that. And so God broke me, convicted me on a Thursday.

I was getting ready to go preach for Easter weekend. At our church we'll have 30,000 or 40,000 people come in for Easter weekend. So I was feeling this pressure. Right? I wanted it to be a good sermon. We have a lot of what we call "Chreasters" on that weekend. And Chreasters are the people that only come on Christmas and Easter. I think every church has them, the Chreasters. And the Chreasters are --.

James: Are they anything like creatures?

Kyle: A little bit. They're a hard group to get. They come a couple times a year -- I even had one time, I finished preaching an Easter sermon and a person caught me afterwards and said, "It's a great message. I'll see you next year." That's kind of the mentality of a Chreaster.

So I was sitting trying to think, what's a message that would get their attention? What's a way to creatively present this in such a way that they would want to come back? It just wasn't coming. So I went into our empty sanctuary, and it's a big sanctuary; it seats around 9,000 people. I sat there and just began to pray. Said, "God, what is it that you would want me to say?"

I pulled out a Bible out of the chair in front of me and I just asked a very simple question that would end up really changing me as a person and as a preacher. Here's the question I asked. I said, "What did Jesus preach whenever he had his large crowds?"

I just began to do a survey of the gospels making notes of the different messages that Jesus preached whenever he had the biggest audiences. What I discovered was that when he had the big crowds he would often preach a message that wasn't necessarily comfortable; it wasn't necessarily what they wanted to hear. Sometimes the people would go home. And so I sat there and I cried and I told God, "I'm sorry" because too oftentimes I had preached a message that I knew people would want to hear, that I thought would make me a little more popular, that I felt would be more comfortable for all the Chreasters. And I made the decision that the apology had to go further.

So I stood up on that Easter weekend and I said to all the people there, "Listen, I owe you an apology because too oftentimes I have preached a gospel that has left out some certain

areas. I've allowed there to be small print and there is no small print in the truth of Christ. I have tried to make it more pleasing and more presentable but in doing so I've cheapened it." And so I began just really with a very heartfelt tearful confession, hoping it would go no further than that.

What I discovered was that this is a message that God needed to convict me of. He needed to change a lot of hearts in our church but it needed to go further because too oftentimes our churches have become stadiums full of fans. People want to follow Jesus close enough to get the benefits but not so close that it requires anything from them and they want the relationship on their terms. So really, it's just a call back to the gospels to objectively say, "All right, what's it really mean to follow Christ? How does he define that?"

But it began in a very personal way for me. So I just began to really challenge our church and myself with those questions. Are you sacrificing for Jesus? Is it costing you anything? And began to explore, are we really following Christ by carrying a cross or have we decided that we're more comfortable with a gospel of ease, convenience, and comfort? The image I like to use is that of a Snuggie. Do you know what a Snuggie is?

James: Oh, yeah.

Kyle: Do you have a Snuggie?

James: Somebody gave me one. I have to admit it.

[Laughter]

Kyle: I love the thought of you on a couch wearing a Snuggie watching TV.

James: Well, just dream on. Okay?

[Laughter]

Kyle: That is a product that sold millions and millions of... blankets with sleeves is all they are in our culture and we can be the people of the Snuggie. We like the Lazy Boy, we like the country club, the day spa... we like Snuggies. So I think what has happened, oftentimes is we have adopted this Snuggie theology where we make it as comfortable as possible but Jesus said it's going to mean carrying a cross, it is going to mean sacrificing. And so just asking --

James: What does that look like to carry a cross? To somebody who is saying, "What does

that look like? Am I going around with wood?" Arthur Blessitt carried it around the world; drug it on wheels and he was a tremendous witness. What does it look like to carry the cross? When you said, "I want you to be a fan in which you carry the cross," give me some examples.

Kyle: And that's the journey that I went on is trying to explore that because I don't want it to be something that you crochet on a pillow and you set out on a bed. "Carry a cross and follow me," it sounds very poetic. But what does that mean today? Because if Christians start living like Christians, if we start doing this, that's where revival, that's where awakening takes place. It's when we begin to not just speak our faith but we begin to live it. So I went on this journey of trying to discover, okay, what does that truly look like in our world right now?

What I found was I'm so inspired by people across the country and across the world who are living this out. One of the things I do in the book is I tell about 14 different stories of people who have made the decision: I don't want to be a fan, I want to be a follower. And as you begin to see these practical examples you think, that's it. That's what it is. We started a Facebook page that now has around 33,000 people from 18 different countries and they've said, "I don't want to be a fan, I want to be a follower." And they just began to tell their stories of carrying a cross, denying themselves. Sometimes it is dramatic. For some family it meant saying that they were going to quit their jobs and they were going to move to Haiti, (this is right after the earthquake) that they were going to do clean water projects in Haiti. That's what it meant to follow Jesus.

For another lady, a single mom, for her, it meant being intentional of helping care for her elderly neighbor who couldn't really care for herself. So every day she goes and checks on her and she makes sure she has food and meals and is cleaned up after. So you begin to see these practical examples of people who are following Jesus, and you know it when you see it. So that's someone who is denying themselves and carrying a cross.

James: When I see someone take that which is special and precious to them, which they treasure because where your treasure is that's where your heart is and it means more than money. We treasure our time. When we're willing to give our time to someone else's need or an area of concern, that's what I consider being a follower. When we will take our gifts, whatever we have the ability, whether it is to help people chart a course, help people to deal with their challenges, help people think their way out. We take what we use for our own benefit; nothing wrong with having personal interests, how you're going to love your neighbor as yourself if you don't love yourself properly and have legitimate self interest. But when you'll take your same abilities and focus on helping someone meet their need, I see that as following Christ. Is that what you see?

Kyle: Absolutely. And what I've discovered is that most people respond to that message enthusiastically. They want to -- they want to embrace that. They're looking for something more, something deeper and more significant. It's not always true. We had one gentleman in our church when we started to really be more intentional with this message he sent in an e-mail and he said he didn't want to be a member of the church anymore. He just said on there, "I don't like Kyle's preaching" -- that's all he said. I wanted to know more. So I called this guy. I didn't know him, but I called him and I said, "Hey, I'm Kyle. I see you don't want to be part of the church because you don't like my preaching. Help me understand a little bit more." And I caught him a little off guard.

He began to talk and ramble a little bit. But in the middle of it here's what he said. He said, "When you're preaching now I feel like you're trying to interfere with my life." And as soon as he said it, I thought, that's it! That's it! We are fine as long as we can compartmentalize our faith and say, "When I walk into church on Sunday and I sit down I can cheer in the stands, end of story." But when it begins to interfere with our finances, our treasure, our time, when it begins to interfere with our plans, then it becomes something much different.

James: Some other experience you said you wanted before we even came out, you said there's something that happened with somebody that pretty well illustrates what you'd like people to know about not being a fan but being a follower. You have men -- like you said, you tell 14 specific stories.

Kyle: I had no real intention, no plan of ever writing a book on the subject and then I met a young man in our church, late 20s, single father who had a pretty rough life before he came to Christ. And if he were to tell you his story you would just tell you that it consisted of drinking and partying and waking up angry, not knowing why. It was just really without any direction.

But when he became a Christian everything changed for him and he got it and he went all in; really became committed in his faith -- just great example for a lot of us.

One day he said, "Hey, would you meet and have coffee with me and my mom?" It's kind of an unusual request but I agreed and I thought I knew for sure what we were going to talk about. I thought his mom, she just wants to say thank you to the church and thank you to me for the good things God has done in her son's life. That's what this is going to be about. She is just going to drop some encouragement my way. So I was looking forward to the coffee.

We sit down for the coffee. It went a much different direction. She was upset. And here's what she said. She said, "My son has taken all of this too far." She went on to explain how he needed to be working on Sundays, but was not taking the hours so he could go to church. And he shouldn't be giving his hard-earned money to people who were in need because he had his own needs. And he was trying to give away copies of sermons and trying to always have prayer around the dinner table and making the family uncomfortable.

And this is a lady who went to church, went to a different church and considered herself to be quite religious. But here's what she said to me. She said, "Would you please tell my son that the Bible teaches moderation in all things." She said, "Would you please tell him that the Bible teaches it doesn't have to be all or nothing."

I tried to keep my cool; right? But I could see my nostrils flaring. I start quoting Revelation about Jesus says, "You're neither hot nor cold." And the whole call to follow him is an all or nothing call, and that's where life is found and that's where beauty is found. It is only by going all in.

I realized then this is a message that a lot of moms, a lot of children, a lot of churches needed to hear. So God began it in my life. He continues to teach me because there is many days when I'm more fan than follower. But I know that he seeks to have not necessarily churches that are full of fans but he wants completely committed followers.

James: Do you appreciate what Kyle is sharing? Do you appreciate the importance of not being a fan but a follower? It's following Christ. It's in following him and coming to him we find life. It's in following him that we find the way through life. He is the way to life but following him is a way through life and it is the way to point others to the life that can only be found in him.

I really think a lot of people think it is just going down to the church house. But the truth is, when you come to understand Christ, this is his house. We're the temple of God. He wants to live in us. He wants us to become the fruitful field that literally reveals the beauty of his presence and what the father is like. The Bible is clear about it being kingdom life and there is only one king. We are joint heirs but not joint kings. He's king, he's ruler, we follow him, and when we follow him we have life. We can cheer him and praise him, he is worthy of our praise but it is so much more than being a cheering section. It is actually getting in the game.

That's what I'm hearing you say to people. Don't just sit in the pew. Stand up, and go out and pierce the darkness. Thank you.

Would you say thanks to Kyle again? I think he is great. This is in the bookstores. If you want to know, there is a web site to Southeast Christian Church. And if you want to know about, say, "I want to go listen to this guy."

And you're going to listen to Dave, the pastor there, Dave Stone, it is just a wonderful, wonderful church.

You kind of remind me of when I was young, more than 30 years ago. I still have got zeal. I'm still -- I want you to know, I'm a follower and I'm still a serious follower and I have no retirement in me anywhere! Got no quit in me. I'm not sitting down. I'm going to stand up and trying to get everybody else to stand up.

I used to tease Benny Hinn when he was blowing on people and they were falling down, I said, "You knock them down, I'm going to try to get them all to stand up." I've been spending my life trying to get people to stand up for Jesus, to follow him with their whole heart, and to live for him and to love him with everything they are and that's what we challenge you to do. I really thank God that you make it possible for us to have guests that have a testimony and a witness. You make it possible for us to present Beth Moore: "Wednesdays with Beth." What a wonderful inspirational teacher. She is raising up followers.

Let me tell you something that I know. When we follow Jesus we're going to release rivers of living water. Jesus said, "Out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water." That means love and life, the love of God, the life of God is released and there is no greater way to reveal the love of God and the river of God's life than to give people water.

Jesus said, "I'm the water of life." We can't live without him. Did you know that the greatest crisis in the world that is leading to more illness and more death than anything is contaminated water? -- Diseased-ridden water! We don't have to research the cure; all we've got to do is provide clean water. Jesus said, "If you'll give a cup of water in my name, you won't lose your reward." What is that reward? It's doing the will of God, releasing the life of God.

Would you join us saving lives by giving a cup of fresh, clean water? What about a well? Listen to this testimony. Listen to this very real story and you and I have the answer.

James: Dauphine, I wish you could hear me. I know you wouldn't be able to understand me and we had to have a translator so we could understand you and graphically put it on

the screen so our viewers would understand you but let me just tell you something, we care and we can help you.

I didn't just see that little child sitting there on that rock and think, just some little kid. No, all the little children are precious in his sight. He didn't overlook them.

But he's looking for hands and hearts and a mind that cares enough to say I'll help. So I'm asking you to help us drill a water well in that area. We're going to drill more in that country, Madagascar, than probably any small land mass because the need is so desperate. But we'll be drilling water wells in 15-20 countries; you determine how many we can drill but we drill hundreds every year depending on how many of you will help with gifts of \$48. \$48 gives ten people water for the rest of their life; that's what it breaks out to. You take a \$4800 well, that's what they cost: \$4800, give at least a thousand people water, sometimes it's more than that. But that would break out to about \$4.80 for the rest of their life in these incredibly, desperately needy areas.

If you could give a well, \$4800 -- many of you tell us, "James, every year we do it." Betty and I give a well every time we have the project. We started years ago and said, "God, we want to do it." I'm telling you, God says when you are generous and you bless others, you yourself will be blessed and you will be refreshed. God blesses us when we bless others. It's a blessing to bless others. I don't give to get, I give to give. And God blesses those who bless so we can keep blessing.

Could you give a well? \$4800? Could you give \$2400 toward it and say, "I pray someone joins me"? Or \$1200 and pray three will? Whatever you can do, do it. But remember, \$48 or \$144 you've got ten people water the rest of their life or 30 people water the rest of their life.

I don't know what you can do but there is a level at which you can help. So I'm asking you right now, would you do it? Would you be an answer to that mother's concern for her children? She's already lost children, disease and contaminated water. We can correct that. We don't even have to do any research on it, she just needs a water well. We don't have to do a study; we know what she needs.

Please dial the number. Take your bankcard, use it like a check. That's how you should always use them. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE*. Go online, LifeToday.org and make your gift.

Father, I'm praying every person watching will give something. Will you? I really believe you're praying that God will meet the need but can you help meet the need? Would you dial the number, make that gift of a well or toward the well? There is no level too small.

We have some gifts we want to send you.

Thank you for making that call. By the way, if you should ever get a busy, people are either calling to get help or calling to give help. You be persistent and you get through. Thank you for doing it!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Every day millions of children are forced to make a dreadful choice, drink filthy polluted water filled with deadly disease or die from thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision!

The good news is there is a solution! *Mission: Water For Life* is one of the most exciting and viable demonstrations of God's love in the world today. Suffering can end because clean water changes everything! With your gift today, we can establish and drill 350 new water wells for remote villages in 12 different nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people! A gift of \$48 will help provide for 10 people. \$72 will impact 15 people. And \$144 will help provide fresh, clean, disease-free water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift be sure to request *Arise*, a beautiful new daily devotional featuring words of encouragement from inspiring women who have shared their faith on *LIFE Today*. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the *Arise* audio visual devotional featuring 40 days of inspiration from *LIFE Today's* favorite women guests.

Please prayerfully consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And be sure to request the 2012 commemorative bronze sculpture, "The Lion and the Lamb."

Please call, write, or make your secure gift online today!

End of video clip

In the studio:

James: I want to mention again Kyle Idleman's book, *Not a Fan*. I'm telling you, you follow Jesus you're going to be blessed. Kyle, I'm real excited, Betty and I are. You know your pastor notified me how happy -- you're like a son in the ministry. This is our son Randy and he wrote a book, *God Wants You to Be Happy: Discovering Deeper Joy than You*

Ever Imagined. This is our son. I told him many times, I wish I could write like you, Randy, what a blessing!

But would you join me again in saying thanks to Kyle? Thank you, Kyle! Bless you and Southeast Christian Church. Dave Stone, bless you and your family! -- The whole church family! You're a wonderful friend! Thank you so much for watching *LIFE Today* and sharing life every day!