

Message: A Close Relationship

Do you follow Jesus?

I asked you that question last week. It's the most important question we'll ever answer. We can answer the way an admirer, a fan, would. Or we can answer the way a follower would.

Do you follow Jesus?

Most of us say “yes” without hesitation or thought. The problem is we probably don’t understand what the question means, so our answer doesn’t mean anything, either. There’s no real connection or depth to it.

It’s like sound bite or quick fix.

You’ve seen them. They’re on sale at the store or on TV. If you’re like me, you get them in the mail or by email. They have catchy slogans like “7 secrets to a healthier life,” “9 keys to financial freedom,” or “6 signs of healthy churches.” If life was as simple as following the steps of a recipe, we’d have it made. Too bad life doesn’t work that way.

Jesus doesn’t want fans or quick fixes. Jesus wants followers.

A fan is an admirer. Fans want to know all they can about the person or group they admire. They want to know their birthday, favorite color, who they’re dating and when their next public appearance will be. But a fan really focuses on their own desires. From their selfish POV they ask, “How can this person make me more popular and important?”

Jesus has no interest in those who want to use him for their own purposes. If you’ll forgive my paraphrasing, Jesus said, “*Knowing the correct password ... isn’t going to get you anywhere with me. What’s required is ... doing what [God] wills. I can see it now ... thousands strutting up to me and saying, ‘Master, [look at the things we did].’ Do you know what I’m going to say? ‘You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don’t impress me one bit. You’re out of here’*” (Matthew 7:21-23, The Message).

Jesus calls us out. Followers are welcome. Fans ... will hit the road.

I believe the difference between a fan and a follower is relationship.

A fan is self-centered. Their primary concern is #1 – themselves. A follower thinks about someone else. Their #1 concern is caring for

another person. That's what it means to be in a relationship. There's no way to be close to another person without caring about them. If you don't care, the relationship has no substance. The parties have to accept each other. They enjoy themselves. It doesn't matter if our personalities are different. When you like someone, even opposites attract.

Jesus wants to be in a relationship with you. Wow! Think about it. The Son of God, who saved the world, walked on water and rose from the dead, wants to get close to you.

The question is: “are you willing to get close to Jesus?” Before you say “yes,” let’s make sure you understand what you’re signing up for. I think the best way to start is to think about what it takes for couples to be in a relationship. So let’s do an experiment. Let’s go back in time....

Think back to the last, great date you had. If you’re married, think back to the time before you got married. I’ll give you a few seconds as some of us have to go back a few more years than others. Got it? Great. What made it a great date? You had fun. You enjoyed each other’s company. You felt accepted. You were able to talk freely and feel like the other person was interested in you. You even went on another date because you wanted to know more about this person.

Okay, now go forward a little bit in time. Try to remember the date when you heard the infamous words, “let’s talk.” You know, the date when you talked about your relationship.

What did you talk about?

You talked about where your relationship was going. You talked about your intentions. It’s okay to have fun and enjoy each other’s company, but healthy relationships grow. They can’t stay in one place because life doesn’t stay in one place. Careers change. Life happens. There are other suitors for our time, interest and heart.

It’s an important step when we’re having “the talk.” We know it. It’s a sign we’re ready for more. We’re ready for a deeper relationship. We want to find out if this person is “the one.” So we take a chance. We’re willing to accept the risk of a broken heart, hurt feelings and lost opportunities. We say “okay.” Let’s give it a try.

We’re willing to commit ourselves to the next step. We’ll get closer. That means we’ll be more open. Yeah, that means we’ll talk about those scary things called feelings. We’ll talk about our hopes and dreams. We’ll meet the family. We’re vulnerable, but we think the potential rewards make up for it. It’s nice to have someone care about us.

Jesus wants to have “the talk” with you. Jesus wants to know what you intend. After all, Jesus has invited you to be in a close relationship with him. He wants you to meet his family. Jesus wants to hear about your hopes and dreams. He’ll always listen and he cares so much, he’s willing to die for you – in a good way.

The problem is that we aren’t sure what to expect.

What do you expect in a relationship? It’s a good question. It’s also the source of more self-help guides than you can possibly imagine. Try it as a Google search. I did. I got 54,600,000 results!¹ At the risk of falling into the crowd, allow me to suggest two things we all want in a great relationship.

We want someone to accept us, even when we do dumb things. Yeah, in spite of the way we act. Even late at night. We want someone who will validate who we are. We don’t need fixing. We need support. We want to feel like the other person enjoys spending time with us. They truly care *about* us and will care *for* us when we need it. We think about life in a new way when that happens. We feel free, like we can do anything.

We want someone to listen to us. When was the last time you had a great conversation? You know, one where you felt the other person’s attention. They knew our situation, watched our expressions, listened carefully, asked open questions and supported our point of view. We shared what we felt, not just facts and opinions. We remember those conversations, don’t we? They mean a lot.

Now I’m not an expert in relationships. Esperanza will confirm that. I’m speaking as a person in a relationship. I’m in a relationship with my

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https://www.google.com/search?q=what+do+we+expect+in+a+relationship&rlz=1C1AOHY_enUS708US708&oq=what+do+we+expect+i&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.6859j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

spouse and I love her family. But Esperanza and I have one thing in common that united us: we share a relationship with Jesus. It makes us better. We learn what closeness really means from Jesus. We learn he expects things from us.

What does Jesus expect from you? Luke paints a visual image for you. Luke researched Jesus' life and found the story of a remarkable dinner party. Matthew, Mark and John record the narrative, though it seems to have changed as it was retold over the years. For our purposes today, let's focus on two people: Simon and the unnamed woman.

Jesus was very popular. He traveled from city to city, preaching, teaching and healing people. Lots of people wanted his time. Jesus made it a practice to go to different people's homes to share his message. One day Simon, a local businessman and leader in the synagogue, invited Jesus to dinner. Jesus accepted.

Jesus came to the house expecting to be welcomed as an honored guest. Instead, he was almost ignored! It was good manners for the host to wash the feet of a guest, sincerely greet them and offer to help them clean up. Simon was rude. He didn't seem to care. He just led Jesus to a couch next to the table where he could recline and eat. That was the usual practice. The only reason Simon invited Jesus over was to look good in front of his friends!

But a surprising thing happened during the dinner party. An uninvited woman came into room while Jesus was eating. She knew Jesus was in town and wanted to come see him. So she did. Most homes had open doors. That way, visitors and guests could come and go as they pleased. This time, the other dinner guests weren't pleased. They knew the woman and didn't like having her there, crashing their party.

But the woman didn't care about them. She only had eyes for Jesus. She was so glad to see him that tears came to her eyes. Coming up to the couch, she noticed Jesus' feet were dirty. So she knelt and “began to wash his feet with her tears” (Luke 7:44). Then she shocked everyone by letting down her hair in public and using it to wipe Jesus' feet. She kissed Jesus' feet again and again with love. Finally, she took a small

jar of perfume that she wore around her neck, broke it and poured it over Jesus’ feet.

I can tell you, tongues were wagging. Jesus knew what Simon and the others were thinking. They were judging the woman because of who she was. They completely missed the meaning of what she did. Serving Jesus, the woman became the greatest among them!

So Jesus posed a question to Simon and his friends, “*Two [people] were in debt to a banker. One owed five hundred silver pieces, the other fifty. Neither of them could pay up, and so the banker canceled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful?*” (Luke 7:41-42).

They’re businessmen. They knew the answer: greater gratitude follows greater forgiveness.

What they missed was their part in the story. Simon and his friends weren’t interested in a relationship with Jesus, yet they needed it. Instead, they were using Jesus to look important in front of their friends. Simon and his friends were selfish. They didn’t care about Jesus’ needs. They didn’t believe Jesus or his followers were worth their time. They were ungrateful and they were unforgiven.

I can’t imagine how hard it was for the woman. We don’t know when she heard Jesus or what he said to touch her heart, but he did. She knew who was at the party. She knew what they thought, how they would humiliate her. She didn’t care. She had to see Jesus! There was nothing anyone could do or say to keep her away.

The woman shows you what Jesus expects from his followers. She was grateful for Jesus. She went to him, regardless of the opinions of others or the humiliation she suffered. She saw a need, cared and acted immediately, without asking or saying a word. She used what she had. She held nothing back, no matter the cost. Her selflessness act of kindness showed the depth of her commitment. Jesus was the one. Her attitude and actions spoke of her desire to be close to Jesus, no matter what. She was a follower.

Where are you in your relationship with Jesus today?

Don’t miss your part in the story. Simon and his friends knew *about* Jesus but they didn’t know *him*. They were trapped in a life with little meaning. The woman knew Jesus and she openly and freely expressed her love. And that love set her free.

Do you follow Jesus?

Let us pray...

Gracious God, we come to you struggling with what it means to be close to you. We want all of the good things that come by your grace and mercy, yet we struggle to get past our own selfish desires. Fill us with your Spirit, the spirit of love and truth. Give us the courage to admit our shortcomings and to accept your loving grace. Show us how to follow Jesus in our heart, mind and spirit, so we may truly follow him in this world and the next. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Luke 7:35-50 (CEB)

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee's home, he took his place at the table. Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that Jesus was dining in the Pharisee's house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of alabaster. Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner.”

Jesus replied, “Simon, I have something to say to you.”

“Teacher, speak,” he said.

“A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day's work. The other owed enough money for fifty. When they couldn't pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?”

Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled.”

Jesus said, “You have judged correctly.”

Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn't give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on my feet. This is why I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven; so she has shown great love. The one who is forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The other table guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this person that even forgives sins?”

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Luke 9:23-24 (CEB)

Jesus said to everyone, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will save them.”