
PROUD TO BE A FOLLOWER

“...if Christianity could be narrowed down to one word, it would be “follow.”

Eighteenth-century American writer Thomas Paine left us with the maxim: “Lead, follow or get out of the way.” No doubt he would be perplexed to see his words emblazoned on bumpers of careening vehicles steered by drivers hopped up on caffeine, rushing to meet hectic schedules.

I believe neither Paine nor those other “pains” had a firm grasp of an oft-overlooked reality of life -- that the highest level of human fulfillment is not experienced in our ability to lead, but in our willingness to follow.

Though it goes contrary to a million graduation speeches, the Bible teaches that we were created to follow -- it's what we do naturally.

I experienced a classic example of this principle a few years ago. After stopping for road construction on a well-travelled highway, I looked ahead to a long line of pylons that marked the middle of the road, both lanes of which were clearly drivable. A few cars were ahead of us, and about a dozen behind. Eventually we received the go-ahead to proceed, and the lead vehicle set out in the left lane. Since danger was non-existent and we were merely inching along, I spied an opportunity to play NASCAR driver (or maybe crash-test dummy) and began to weave around the pylons separating the lanes. The funniest scene unfolded in my rearview mirror as a dozen drivers also began to snake their way through the “course.” I could almost hear their thoughts: “It must be the right thing to do, everyone else is.”

I suspect this desire to follow is actually sparked by God. The Bible resounds with Jesus' repeated instruction, “Follow me.” In fact, if Christianity could be narrowed down to one word, it would be “follow.” Our highest calling in life is to discover the proverbial footprints of Jesus and step only there.

Several things unfold as we choose to excel as followers. It is a place of intimacy. As we strive to walk near to God, He is pleased to walk near to us.

It is also a place of confidence. When convinced that I am walking in the will of God, I am not afraid of forging through even the most difficult times in life.

It is a path of adventure. I have striven to follow Jesus for nearly 40 years and it could be described in many ways: exhilarating, thrilling, dangerous – but never boring.

When we learn to follow Jesus, we participate in a most perplexing oxymoron. Those who pursue leadership, believing the title will bring a higher level of personal satisfaction and perhaps prestige, rarely enjoy what they are looking for. However, those who excel in following the Leader experience soul-satisfaction second to none. Perhaps that's what Jesus meant in stating, “If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.”

I'm considering the development of a new bumper sticker: “I'm a follower and proud of it.”