

You know those people who jump on the bandwagon from the beginning? Early adopters. Like the first investors in Bitcoin, or a few years before that...Microsoft? Or back years more, the early supporters of Martin Luther King Jr, or back even further, Martin Luther? Let's go back 2000 years. I, along with a friend, were early adopters; we were the first two followers of Jesus.

Do you know who we were? Actually, that's a bit of a tricky ask. Nobody knows the name of my friend, but I am Andrew.

According to the Apostle John, the author of the book of *John*, my friend and I were in Bethany, a little town on the east side of the Jordan River. We were followers, or disciples, of John the Baptist. He was baptizing a huge number of people who were turning out to see him. My friend and I helped him in any way we could. One of the people who came to be baptized? Jesus!

In an incredible scene, John baptizes Jesus, and we all watch as the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus. Quite an experience. A day later, John testifies that Jesus is the Chosen One. We assume John means Jesus is the awaited Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

So, my friend and I are with John the Baptist, we're eating breakfast, we're preparing for another grueling day of the hordes of people streaming in from Jerusalem and baptizing each one. John looks up from his locusts and honey, and sees Jesus walking by. "Look," he says, "The Lamb of God."

At those words, John's words, it's as if I'm lifted to my feet. My friend, same. He's right next to me and right there with me. Without a word to John, we begin following Jesus. Just...like that. Haven't seen anyone else follow him, didn't know if he was looking for followers, I don't know, just, that's what happened. We are the first, the absolute first to follow Jesus.

We take maybe twenty steps, Jesus turns around. I think his eyes twinkled when he asks us, "What do you want?"

We don't know what we want. We just know we need to follow him. We ask in unison, "Teacher, where are you staying?" He laughs. He tells us to come and find out. It's funny, I guess, thinking back. "Teacher, where are you staying?" We spend the rest of the day with him.

At the first opportunity, I went to find my brother. I had to tell him about Jesus. I brought Simon to Jesus, who immediately gave him the nickname, Cephas, or Peter, which means "the Rock." Peter began following Jesus.

Over the next days and weeks, I watched as many others came to Jesus, and he typically just simply said, "Follow me." When you think about it, it seems a little odd?

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:19-42

In the modern world, it's much more common for people to be taught all about Jesus in hopes they will come to believe in him. Unfortunately, many new believers are never taught how to follow Jesus. When the days come that they waiver in their belief, they are in a real quandary because they don't have the experiences that are foundational for belief.

We, on the other hand, walked and talked and ate and prayed. Then walked some more, talked some more, ate some more, and absolutely prayed some more. Nothing extraordinary most of the time. "Hanging out," as your term. As he taught us, we came to believe in Jesus and what he said. When he did miracles, it just increased our faith. It was so natural and....simple.

Let me tell you a little secret. While we hung out with Jesus, up to the time of his ascension, we apostles went through times of doubt and unbelief. Rather than having a crisis and walking away, his true followers just kept following until their doubts and unbelief went away.

It would be easy for me to advise you to tell your friends, acquaintances, people you meet, to just follow Jesus and it will all work out well, I followed Jesus, and I mean, really followed Jesus, every day, followed Jesus, for three years, with no one to compare to.

That's the catch for you. When you tell people to follow Jesus, they will look at you, and your life, and perhaps the life of the Christians they know of and say to themselves, "This must be what it means to follow Jesus."

They should be able to say that. We are supposed to be the representatives of Jesus, to live lives that would do credit to his name. To love each other through good times and bad. In fact, Jesus said others will know we are his followers because we love one another.<sup>2</sup> To live lives of giving glory to God in good times and bad, to lead lives obedient to God, to be grateful during the good and bad events.

Jesus used the analogy of a shepherd and sheep. He being the shepherd, and his followers, his sheep. As far as I know, Jesus was not a real shepherd, even for one day. But he was around shepherds and knew plenty about sheep. One thing he knew was this, pretty much the only time the sheep were content and safe was when they followed after their shepherd.

One reason that people don't want to follow Jesus is because they think they will mess up, really badly, and Jesus won't want them following him.

Well, my brother should be able to help with that. My brother was Peter! You know, the Peter that messed up over and over and over. The Peter that let his mouth run out of control. The Peter that denied Jesus three times. And yet, one of the very last stories of the resurrected life of Jesus is when he forgave Peter three times. You know what he told Peter to do?

He didn't tell Peter to preach amazing sermons or believe some complex theological argument. Nope. Three times he told him the same thing. Three times matching the number of times Peter had denied him. Three times, he told Peter to, "Feed my sheep, take care of my sheep."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John 13:35

<sup>3</sup> John 21:15-18

Jesus knows his followers will make mistakes, big mistakes. He tells the story about a shepherd in charge of one hundred sheep.<sup>4</sup> One of the sheep decides to quit following the shepherd and gets horribly lost. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine who are following him, and goes to any expense to find the one lost. He rescues him, he tends to his needs, restores it to the flock, and then celebrates with his friends and neighbors. Can you imagine how closely that one sheep would follow Jesus from then on?

Jesus tells that story to illustrate how much heaven rejoices when one person changes his or her ways, and comes to follow Jesus.

Maybe that is why Jesus made it so simple, not going into complex theological arguments and abstract theories. Follow Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 15:4-7