LESSON 1: FAN OR FOLLOW

Opening Prayer:

Introductions:
If this is a new group or an existing group with new member(s) be sure to allow some time for everyone to introduce themselves.

Opening Questions:
What do you hope to get out of this study?
What does the phrase "not a fan" mean to you?

Watch Lesson 1: Fan or Follower http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iSckCWWhU

Story Content:

Just curious, how do you feel after watching this first episode?

This is a pretty tough first lesson in the series. No paddy-caking around. So we won’t go light in our discussion either. Often times in Bible studies we ask theoretical questions, like "what do you think v.3 means?" Or, "what is the most important thing a person should do?" There will be some hypothetical questions like that. But since fans typically like the theoretical questions because they keep the issues (and Jesus) at a comfortable distance, we will also ask questions of the personal, challenging kind. Like, "what is this verse saying about your life?" or "What is the most important thing for you to do next?" These are questions followers love, because answering helps them become better followers, and that is what true followers desire.

But let me add, no one has to answer any question. We don't want to force anything on anyone. Following Jesus is voluntary, so surely responding to the question must be as well.

One other thing, this is a challenging study, but we also don't want this to be a place where we end up judging who is a follower and who is not. The quickest way to shut down the authenticity in this group is for us to start judging each others lives. This study is not about making others to be better followers but about each of us individually challenging ourselves. So let’s avoid any hint of judgment. Agreed? OK, good. Now before we ask some pointed questions, let’s explore the story we've just watched.

Kyle is at a football game having a good time when he receives news of a friend's heart attack. At the hospital, he and the family receive word from the doctor that Eric Nelson has suffered irreversible brain damage. Everyone is shaken. If you have been in a situation like that, what was it like for everything to be normal one moment, then drastically different the next?

Kyle visits the grieving family and friends: Eric's wife Anna; and briefly, Eric's daughter Natalie and son Tony; his father Bill, and couple of Eric's friends, Darren and Gary. How do you see the various characters reacting to death? How are these reactions like or different from what you have observed in similar situations?

Going Deeper:
Let's turn to Luke 9:18-25. (Would someone be willing to read?)

Oftentimes in these studies, the leaders guide asks the questions, but what questions come to your mind about this passage?

What stands out to you from this section of Scripture?
Notice the progression in the passage:
First, in vv. 18-21, Jesus is recognized as the Christ or Messiah of God. In another Gospel, Peter's confession includes the title, "Son of God."

Next, in v.22, Jesus reveals that even though He is the Christ, or actually because He is the Christ, He will suffer, die, and then rise again. If He is the anointed of God, why must He die?

Finally, in vv.23-25, He tells his followers that they must die as well, die to themselves. But if they do, they too will be raised, their lives will be saved. Jesus adds, "If anyone tries to save his life, he will loose it." Why is this so? How does trying to save one's life lead to losing one’s life?

**Personal Challenge:**
When have you been most alive? Can you describe it?
Where you dead to yourself at the time or alive to yourself?
Think of a time when you were alive, and it was all about you- basically satisfying your own desires.
And a time when you were alive and it wasn't about you, but about others.

Compare or contrast the two- how are they alike?
How are they different? Which do you prefer?

Now some tougher questions. So, "Define the relationship."
How would you define what happens between you and Jesus? What terms would you use? Fan, or follower, something else?

How do you feel about your answer?
To define the relationship implies you a have a real relationship with Jesus. How does a person have a relationship with Jesus, someone he can't see or touch? What is that like? How does it work for you?

What has following Jesus cost you?
Do you feel like Jesus has tested your relationship with him? If so, how? In what area (s)?
If he were to test your relationship to Him these days, what might be a likely area?
Something at work, home, in relationships, with money, what?

Are there any areas of your life that are off-limits to Jesus?
If so, why? What is your reason for keeping him out? What has been the effect of keeping him out?

If you suddenly died, and family and friends were asked for one thing about you, what do you believe they would say?
How do you feel about that? When you do actually die (at some, hopefully distant, point) what would you like people to say then?

What kind of life, what kind of changes or decisions, would it take in your life for people to actually make those kinds of comments about you at the time of your death?

That was a heavy lesson and some tough questions. Thanks for hanging in there.

**Prayer Time:**
What do you really hope for this group / study?
LESSON TWO: FOLLOW ME!

Open in prayer:

Opening Questions:
What is the best thing that happened to you this week?
Before we start the DVD, how would you define your relationship with Jesus since we last met?

Story Recap from Lesson 1:
Eric Nelson collapses. Family and friends desperately try to revive him. At a football stadium across town, Pastor Kyle Idleman receives news of Eric's heart attack. Kyle rushes to the hospital, arriving as Eric's friends and family are given the devastating news: Eric has lost all brain function. The family makes the painful decision to let Eric go.
The next day, Kyle arrives at the Nelson home to pay his respects and offer pastoral care. As Kyle speaks with friends and family, enigmatic details of Eric's life emerge. Eric had suffered a mild heart attack five years earlier. The near death experience caused him to completely surrender his life to Jesus. He went from fan to follower and it had a profound impact on those around him. Anna, Eric's wife, is forced to evaluate what really matters in life. Darren, Eric's longtime business associate, subtly indicates that their friendship was strained when Eric took a new job. Eric's father, Bill, disliked the new job and the people with whom Eric worked- and claims his objections were based on Christian principle. Gary, Eric's friend since High School, alludes to Eric's dark past and a subsequent transformation.

Watch Lesson 2: Follow Me                                    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3ZqKcTBc1U

Story Content:
So, why did Gary feel disqualified to follow Jesus?
Was it because of his bad choices or was it because of something else?
What turned him off to following Christ?

The episode closes with Gary knocking on Kyle's door- after a life of ridiculing churchy things and people. Is this ending hokey - sort of fairy tale- or does it have the flavor of reality?

What do you think would be Gary's first question to Kyle - and Kyle’s answer?

Going Deeper:
Among the gospels, there are four separate lists of disciples. In the list's found in Mark, Luke, and Acts, we find Matthew descried simply by name - "Matthew." Only in the list in Matthews Gospel (Matthew 10:3), is he described as "Matthew the tax collector." If Matthew wrote the Gospel names for him, why would he designate himself as "the tax collector" when he doesn't note the other disciples' occupations?

Let's read the story of Jesus inviting Matthew to follow him. It is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. So we will have someone read first from Matthew 9, and see what stands out to everyone. Then we will have someone read the story from Mark, and again, see what stands out to everyone. Then lastly, read from Luke, an again see what stands out

Turn to Matthew 9. Would someone read vv.9-12?
What stands out to you?
Now turn to Mark 2:14-17. Would someone read that passage? What stands out?

Last, turn to Luke 5. Who would read vv.27-32? What do you notice here?

**Personal Challenge:**
Many sinners hung around Jesus, which seems contradictory to the way it usually is. The irreligious typically don't like being around the religious. If there was a time when you were irreligious, do you recall a 'religious' person whom you wanted to be around despite their convictions? If so, describe that person. What made him or her attractive?

What did it take to wake you up? For Eric it was a heart attack. For Gary it is the death of a close friend. What was it for you?

When you first came to Christ, did you expect condemnation? What did you receive?

Who shaped your definition of following Jesus? Was that shaping good or bad? "It is not what we offer Jesus, but what he offers us." Is that how you see it- more about what He offers than what you offer?

A person can live in guilt or in grace. What is it like to live in each of these?

Why do people tend to stand in judgment of others when we all fall so short ourselves?

Here is a very personal question. Do you have some stains of your own that make it hard to say "yes" to following Jesus now?

**Prayer Time:**
You might close by asking everyone who is willing to express their thoughts to Jesus in a single sentence prayer.
LESSON THREE: WHAT MUST I DO?

Opening Prayer:

Opening questions:
Tell us about any experiences you had this week as you attempted to follow Jesus.
When do you feel most closely connected to Jesus?

Story recap from lesson Two
As Gary examines his own life in the wake of Eric's death he recalls their days of pleasure seeking, rebellion driven to the brink by a demanding job and imploding marriage, Eric collapses in Gary's apartment from a nonfatal heart attack convinced he's received a divine wake-up call that must be answered. Eric is never the same again. Now devastated by the death of his friend, Gary must decide what path he will take.


Story Content:
Where does Darren get his map? What is his source of direction? Why would he accept a life map from the source? Why would Darren hold onto this map for his life after the one who gave it to him- Eric-basically tears of the map and throws it away as worthless?

What do you make of the symbolism of Darren tossing the heart back in the box and eventually passing it on to Kyle?

Going Deeper:
Have someone read Matthew 19 vv.16-30 out loud but rather than others following along, ask them to close their eyes and listen to the Word. This young man went away sad. Why sad? He still has his money, his status, and all the freedom that comes with those privileges.

Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, and the disciples are surprised by that statement because in that era people consider the reality to be just the opposite. The rich were believed to be rich because they were blessed by God. Plus the rich had time to study the Scriptures so as to better know God's will. The rich also had the resources to give large amounts to the temple treasury and to the poor, and thereby gain greater favor with God. In the case of this Rich man, he knew the commandments and seemingly tried to keep the law meticulously. So why would it be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, considering these advantages?

In verse 29 we find Jesus saying that whatever anyone gives up for Him, they will receive a hundred times as much. What do you think he means by this? Is a literal? Figurative? What does it mean for you?

Personal challenge:
“The problem wasn't that he had money; the problem was money had him.” Has anything ever had you? What was it like? Is there anything that just might have you now? Can a person follow Jesus and yet not give away or sell everything? If you're unsure if you're a fan or follower, then ask yourself this: “When is the last time my relationship with Jesus cost me something?”
Have you found it to be true that when you give up something significant for Jesus, that sometime later you don't regret it or miss it, but rather it feels like an honor? Can you give an example (without feeling like you are bragging)?

What, if anything, do you think Jesus is asking you to give up these days? How do you determine that he is asking this of you? What do you see yourself doing about this sense?

**Prayer time:**
This business of following Jesus is difficult and challenging. So let's support each other in prayer. If you are willing, tell us what you think you need most this week as you try to be a follower.
LESSON 4: BURY THE DEAD

Opening Prayer:

Opening Questions:
Do you or someone you know struggle with living out their faith in the workplace? Are some days harder than others?

Story Recap from Lesson 3:
From his high-rise office, Darren reflects on Eric’s transformation from cutthroat businessman to compassionate Christ-follower. Darren’s Christian convictions are initially rattled by Eric’s business ethic, but, as Eric boldly explains, “This isn’t church. It’s business.” By the time Eric has a change of heart, Darren has learned to compartmentalize his faith and to view conscience as an obstacle to prosperity. When both men are asked to skirt their stated Christian convictions for the sake of keeping their jobs, Eric courageously follows the way of Christ and Darren walks away sad.

Watch Lesson 4: Bury The Dead http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkLslQxNQ8

Group Discussion:
At first Anna seems thrilled that Eric was changing and following Jesus. But over time she grows resentful. What held Anna back from joining her husband in his full blown following of Jesus?

How do you feel about the way Eric tried to lead Anna and his family in being followers of Jesus? Where does Anna seem to be in her heart at the end of the episode?

Going Deeper:
Why does Jesus have to be so demanding?

Unlike what happened in last week’s passage about the rich young ruler, Jesus doesn’t tell any of these three would-be followers to sell everything before following Him. In even greater contrast, we find in Luke 8 a man who wants to follow Jesus after having had a number of evil spirits evicted from his life. But Jesus sends the man back to his family, a scenario quite different from the man who was rebuked for even wanting to say good-bye to his. Why these different responses to different would-be followers?

Kyle points out that the symbol of the cross has been romanticized, and even turned into an attractive logo for Christianity. But that was not the feeling toward the cross in ancient times. Crucifixion was considered the worst form of death. The Romans perfected its use as a deterrent form crime and rebellion. Roman citizens could not be crucified; this punishment was only for the worst crimes committed by the lower classes. People accepted the practice of crucifixion, and even supported it, because it was inflicted upon thieves and runaway slaves. Crucifixion helped keep the peace and curb crime. But crucifixion was still perceived to be disgusting. The cross was described by writers of that time with phrases like:
- that infamous stake
- the criminal wood
- bound in the most ignominious fashion
- executed in a shameful way
- the most wretched of deaths
Even the Old Testament says, “Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deuteronomy 27:26). All these are reasons why, when Paul described Jesus death, he called it “foolishness to the Greeks” and “a scandal to the Jews” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

In Hebrews 12:2 we are told that Jesus went to the cross, “scorning its shame.” This form of death was so shameful that there arose a heretical movement among early Christians who denied God’s Son could ever die on the cross. They taught that the man crucified was not God’s Son but someone else.

Knowing all this, what does the phrase, “Take up your cross and follow me,” now mean to you?

**Personal Challenge:**
How did you come to Jesus? Was it more by way of a sales pitch or deep call to commitment?
What was the effect of coming to Jesus in that way?

Would you say most believers are sold out?
How does the perception affect your own walk with Jesus?

Have you ever been around someone who changed like Eric does in the story? If so, what was it like for you?

What do you think Kyle means by, “Following is not trying every day but dying every day?”
“And yet we learn that following Jesus means dying every day. Every day we take up our cross and die to ourselves.” What’s the most challenging aspect of dying daily for you?

Listen again to the quote by Bruce Thielemann: “Please don’t say anything to me about tomorrow. Tomorrow is the word the Bible does not know. If you can find me any place in the Scriptures where the Holy Spirit of God says ‘tomorrow,’ I will step down from this pulpit and never step into it, or any other pulpit, for as long as I live. The Holy Spirit’s word is the word ‘today.’”

“Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:15). Don’t say tomorrow. Shakespeare said, “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow lights for fools the way to dusty death.” The word is today.

Are you hitting the snooze button on God’s alarm clock? Is there something He’s calling you to do and you are putting it off?

Would you consider writing any take-aways from your time together?
Anyone want to read or share their take-away?

**Prayer Time:**
Would someone be willing to write down everyone’s prayer requests and lead a closing prayer?
LESSON 5: DEAD MEN’S BONES

Opening Questions:
Anyone tackle something they had been procrastinating? If so, how did it go?

Story Recap from Lesson 4:
Anna remembers life after Eric recommitted to their marriage and began to take his faith seriously. She quickly finds herself disturbed at how seriously- and stubbornly resists his attempts to scale back their extravagant lifestyle for the sake of helping the less fortunate. After Eric’s ethical stand results in his unemployment, luxurious living is no longer an option. As all her worldly comforts are stripped away, Anna experiences first-hand the tremendous cost of following Jesus Christ.


Group Discussion:
How can someone end up like Bill, knowing so much of the Bible yet so little of the grace and love of Jesus?

How can someone like Bill believe they are right to be so hard and judgmental?

What is the best way to reach out to someone like Bill?

Going Deeper:
Bill quotes some verses from the Bible accurately. “If anyone doesn’t provide for his own family he is worse than an unbeliever” comes from 1 Timothy 5:8; “To whom much is given, much is required” – Luke 12:48; “Bad company corrupts good character” – 1 Corinthians 15:33.
Yet something seems wrong about the way he uses these passages. What is it?

Kyle bases much of what he says in this episode on Jesus’ words in Matthew 23. Let’s turn there. Notice that in verses 1-12, Jesus is not talking to the Pharisees, but to his disciples and other listeners. Let’s read that section and consider why Jesus tells his followers these things. (read vv1-12)
What is his purpose?

Let’s read aloud what are traditionally called “the seven woes” in vv.15-32. (read them)
These teachers are doing many things right, so as you look again at what Jesus says, why is He so hacked at them?

Personal Challenge:
Jesus displayed anger towards the Pharisees in the passage we read. Eric blew up at his dad for his dad’s conclusion that is sister Kim’s miscarriage was due to her sin.

Is it ever okay for a follower of Jesus to be mad at self-righteous people? If you were a total follower of Jesus, would you have more anger or less?

Why do people settle for religion? Why is it easier to follow rules rather than follow Jesus?
What would you say is at the core of Christianity? Traditions, rules, a relationship with Jesus or something else? What do you find at the core of your personal faith – traditions, rules, a relationship with Jesus or something else?

What is your most prominent feeling as you follow Jesus? Guilt, joy, fear, love, frustration, excitement? Is that feeling tied more to a relationship with Jesus or to a perception that you must follow certain rules?

For you, is your faith more “no, no, no” or “yes, yes, yes?” do you find yourself pursuing Jesus more than any other relationship? Why or why not?

**Prayer Time:**
If our prayer times was really relationship rather than a rule to follow, how would we pray?
After group members give their opinions, suggest the group try to follow them in this prayer time and see where it leads.
LESSON 6: DECISION TIME

Opening Prayer:

Opening Questions
Share one area of your life where you think God is calling you to follow.

Story recap from lesson five:
Bill disapproves of Eric's new job and his misguided attempts to help those people at the expense of providing for his own family. Bill takes particular issue with Lily, a pregnant teenager who has moved in with the Nelsons. Eric’s sister, Kim, suffers a miscarriage and is further devastated when Bill suggest the tragedy is a result of sin in her life.

Enraged, Eric confronts his father about his merciless self-righteousness. Days later, Eric offers the olive branch and tells Bill he loves him. Bill is silent. Minutes later, Bill and family watch in horror as Eric suffers his fatal heart attack.

Watch lesson 6: Decision Time                  Please contact the church office to request a copy of this lesson, Not currently available online.

Group discussion: Story content
What did you find most striking or moving in this last episode?
What was it about her dad that actually change Natalie? What appears to be Anna’s reaction to the various people sharing about her husband?

Going deeper:
Read Matthew 7: 13-14.

Hold on now! Does this feel like the old switcheroo? Last week, we were told that following Jesus is not about rules and doing the right things but about a relationship with Jesus. This week, we are told, if we aren't doing the right things, then we could be condemned. What's up with that?

In John's Gospel, we hear Jesus say, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Love is what matters, and we show our love with our actions. But how can we love someone who says such hard things as we find in Matthew 17 verses 13 to 14?

Personal challenge:
If you died this week, what do you think people would say at your funeral? How do you feel about your answer? How do you hope it changes over the coming months and years?
How has your relationship with Jesus changed during this series? What has instigated this change?

Of the exercises and activities you have try during this series, which ones seem to have the best impact on your desire and ability to follow Jesus? How could you continue this kind of thing in your life?

Prayer time:
Since this is the last episode in this series, how about we close with an open time of prayer. Pray when and how you like or are led by Jesus