

"I Am A Follower"
Leonard Sweet

I have long loved Len Sweet's work. On the cover of "I Am A Follower" Shane Claiborne calls Sweet "a theological poet," and I totally agree. "I Am A Follower" (I'll just refer to it as "Follower" from here on out) is a great read for our current Christian climate, given our focus on leadership. As I pulled out the book to write this review, I noticed (maybe for the first time) this quote at the bottom of the cover:

(It's never been about leading)

And Sweet makes that point very well. The Christian life is not about heroic leadership, but about servant-followership. "We don't take Jesus into the world. We discern where he's dancing and join in the dance." (p. 9) Jesus is THE leader. He is our leader. We don't lead, we follow.

First Sweet looks at the Way of a follower. Life isn't a set of rules to follow, it's a walk, a journey. "Parking-lot churches are drive-to places where people get their needs met in a minimum amount of time with a maximum of return in religious exaltation. Pedestrian churches consist of people who walk with Jesus in his journeys on earth." (p. 82) We walk along, following Jesus, casting the fruit of the Spirit into a world that is broken and thirsty.

Then there is the Truth: following Jesus does not happen at a distance. We're not some secret spy tailing someone, trying to blend into the crowd when he turns around. We're not trying to find his tracks in the dirt. We're right there with him. We follow close, so close that we smell the things Jesus smells, eat what he eats, hear what he hears. We don't follow a cause, we follow a real person, who is alive and well today. This means that instead of becoming "expert-witnesses for Christ" we are "actual-event witnesses to what we have seen and experienced in our own lives." (p. 156)

Finally there is the Life: Christ in us, the hope of glory. We move away from a Learn, Grow, Go model most prevalent in today's USAmerican churches, and instead adopt the Hear and Obey model of discipleship. "There is a vast difference between believing in God and hearing and recognizing God in diverse divine manifestations." (p. 197) Our discipleship of those around us takes on the same kind of incarnational nature that Jesus' discipleship of us did. "The relationship between leader and follower is this: leaders are over people, followers are among." (p. 209) We must leave behind the folk-heroism of today's leadership focus and turn away from those things that distract us from following.

One last quote: "There are some Christians who think that they are following Christ, when really they have simply been imprinted by a culture that calls itself Christian." (p. 240) More than anything else, this is the power of Sweet's book (and most of his writing); Jesus is not just a concept or a set of cultural values, he is our leader, and he's calling us to follow. Today. Now. No matter where we currently find ourselves--we might be accused of adultery, fishing, collecting taxes, or on our way to arrest those on the margins. His words to us are still the same.

"Follow me."