

A WOBBLE FACTOR POCKET BOOK

YOU CANNOT NAVIGATE ALONE

Am I a solo disciple?



by Ron Robison

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*Am I a solo disciple? — one man's reckoning with the lie that faith is a
private project*

Ron Robison

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1. THE TABLE

There is a table in my house that my wife has wanted to replace since the day we got married. It's heavy, awkward, and it has followed us through twelve houses, and every time we move it someone says out loud what we're both thinking, that we should have left it behind three houses ago. It is not beautiful and it certainly is not the table you'd photograph. But it has been the centerpiece of almost every conversation that ever mattered in our family, and I would move it twelve more times before I'd give it up.

Somewhere along the way we made it a place where the performing stopped. No phones, television, or other distractions, just conversation, presence, and honest talk about the actual activities of life. That table is where we made school decisions and sat through the sports ones. Where we celebrated and where we grieved. Where doubts got said out loud and faith questions got asked without anyone flinching. Where we worked through the disagreements and made the decisions that reshaped our whole family.

I can't tell you the exact moment I understood why that mattered. I would often stand in a circle of believers, nodding along while someone shared their testimony of steady, upward, uninterrupted spiritual growth, and when it came to me, I would give the edited version. The highlights, victories, or forward progress. But what I did not mention was the argument I'd had that morning. The prayer life that had felt like dry sand for months. The pattern I thought I'd buried years ago, quietly back at the door.

I wasn't lying on purpose, but I was lying. I was performing discipleship instead of practicing it, and I had gotten so good at it that I could do it without noticing. For years I had treated my faith the way I'd treat a home improvement project. Personal, private, and mine to fix, alone, with maybe the occasional input from a book or a sermon. I believed that mature Christians had it together, so admitting I was struggling felt like admitting I had failed. I kept the Sunday morning face on in public and wobbled wildly in private, convinced I was the only one in the room who couldn't get this right.

I was wrong about all of it.

Here is the realization that changed everything, and it is so simple it embarrasses me to say it at times, **you cannot navigate alone**. Not because you're weak, rather because you

can't see your own blind spots. You can't recognize your own patterns while you're standing inside them. You cannot tell when you've moved from a healthy wobble into a genuine drift, because the only person watching you is you. Your own inner voice will always be self-protective, self-justifying, and quietly committed to keeping you exactly where you are.

You need outside reference points. On the water, a harbor pilot who trusts only his own sense of the current runs aground. He needs a fixed light on the shore, a channel marker, another set of eyes. So do you, and so do I. That's what the table finally taught me. Not a program. Not a system. A place where the performing had to be stopped.

2. THE LIE OF THE SOLO DISCIPLE

We absorb things from the world around us that quietly keep us from admitting we need help. We've made faith personal and private like a self-help program. We've reduced the whole of following Christ down to "me and Jesus," a closed loop with room for exactly one human being in it. We've turned spiritual growth into a self-improvement plan we run in isolation, and then we wonder why we're so tired. This is not how it worked in Scripture. It is not how it can work for you now.

The wobble, the ordinary back-and-forth of a real person trying to follow Christ through a real week, is hard enough to navigate with other people helping you see clearly. Trying to navigate it alone isn't just harder. It's very nearly impossible, since you cannot see your own blind spots. That's what makes them blind spots. Your patterns are invisible to you precisely because you're the one living inside them. And when you drift, your mind is a genius at explaining the drift back to you as reasonable navigation. *This compromise is necessary given my circumstances. Everyone struggles with this. I'll deal with it later, when things calm down.* Given enough time alone, you can justify almost anything to yourself.

You need external reference points. You need other people. But, and this is the part I got wrong for years, not just any people. Not casual acquaintances from the church lobby. Not surface-level friendships. Not a small group where everyone keeps their Sunday face bolted on for the full ninety minutes and goes home unseen.

You need the real thing. Fellow disciples who are wobbling too, who are willing to see you and be seen, who can help you navigate for the simple reason that they're navigating the same waters. Before I can describe what that is, let's clear away what it isn't, because most of what we call "community" is a decent imitation that will never do the job.

3. WHAT IT IS NOT

It is not accountability in the usual sense. When most of us hear “accountability,” we picture someone checking up on us. Did you do your quiet time? Did you avoid the thing you promised to avoid? That’s external monitoring, someone making sure you did your homework. It’s performance management with a spiritual coat of paint, and it produces better performances, not better disciples. Real community doesn’t ask *are you doing what you’re supposed to?* It asks *where are you actually struggling, and how do we help each other move?*

It is not consuming together. A great deal of what churches organize under the word “community” is really group consumption. We watch the same sermon, work through the same study, attend the same event. We’re in proximity, pointed at the same content, but we’re not in relationship. You can sit in the same small group for years, discuss every theological concept under the sun, and never once say where you’re actually wobbling in your own life. That’s a book club with a prayer at the end. It is not what I’m talking about.

It is not sameness. We drift toward people just like us, same life stage, same politics, same struggles, and the same view of everything. We call that finding “our people.” But an echo chamber where no one ever challenges you isn’t community that helps you navigate. It’s community that helps you drift, faster, with company. The body of Christ is diverse on purpose. We need each other *because* we’re different, not in spite of it.

It is not crisis response. Some of us only reach out when the hull is already taking on water. We isolate when things are calm and come looking for people when things fall apart. It’s understandable since crisis creates urgency, but it’s backwards. Community built in a crisis is fragile. Community built over ordinary time, before you need it, is what holds when the crisis finally comes. You want the people who already know you sitting in the boat when the weather turns, not strangers you’re meeting for the first time in the storm.

Clear all of that away, and what’s left is smaller, harder, and worth everything.

4. WHAT IT ACTUALLY REQUIRES

Authenticity over performance. You have to show up as your actual self, not the self you wish you were, not the self you think you should be by now. That means telling the truth out loud: *I'm struggling with doubt and it scares me. My prayer life is nonexistent and I'm not even sure I care right now. I keep falling into the same pattern and I don't know how to break it.* That kind of honesty is terrifying, because we've been trained to believe that admitting a struggle is the same as admitting a failure. Honesty is the front door. If you won't show people your actual reality, they can only ever affirm your performance, and your performance doesn't need help. You do.

Consistency over convenience. Real community doesn't happen by accident. It happens when you build the space, protect it, and keep showing up whether or not you feel like it. For years, no matter what else was on fire in our lives, we protected dinner at that table. That steadiness is what eventually made the hard conversations possible. Connect with people only when it's convenient and you'll spend all your time catching up on logistics and never once reach the thing underneath. Depth is a function of repetition.

Mutuality over hierarchy. This is not one person teaching while everyone else receives. Everyone gives and everyone receives. Everyone speaks and everyone listens. Yes, someone who's walked farther can mentor someone who hasn't, that's good and right. But it happens inside a mutual relationship, not a transaction. When younger couples sit at our table now and ask us questions out of the decades my wife and I have walked, we answer honestly. And then they ask me something I stopped asking myself twenty years ago, and I'm the one being taught. We're all wobbling. We're all navigating. We're helping each other.

Specific over generic. "Pray for me" is generic. "Ask me every week whether I've actually been honest with my wife about our finances" is specific. "Keep me accountable" is generic. "Check in every month about the conversation with my boss I keep avoiding" is specific. If you want people to actually help you navigate, you have to hand them the chart. Tell them where the shoals are. Give them permission to ask the particular, uncomfortable question. That requires knowing yourself well enough to acknowledge what you actually need, which is its own kind of honest work, and worth doing.

None of this is complicated. All of it is costly. That's usually how it goes with the things that matter.

5. WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU

It gives you eyes you don't have. When you're wobbling, you often can't see it, you're in the motion, making calls in real time with a limited view. Other people can see the pattern from the outside. I've had people in my life say things I could not have said to myself: *Every time you get stressed, you isolate and stop talking to anyone. You keep saying you trust God, but everything you're doing says you're trying to control the outcome. You keep making the same choice and expecting a different result.* None of that was an attack. All of it was navigation help. They were showing me hazards I couldn't see.

It challenges the story you're telling yourself. Your inner monologue is a master at rationalizing. Left alone, you'll talk yourself into almost anything and call it wisdom. Community interrupts that. Someone who loves you can say, *I hear what you're saying, but I don't think that's actually true, let's look at it again.* It's not comfortable. Being challenged rarely is. But without it, you will drift and narrate the drift to yourself as careful navigation the entire way down.

It carries you when you want to quit. The journey is long, and there will be stretches where you're exhausted and can't see a single inch of progress. In those seasons you need people who can remind you what's true, point to growth you're too close to notice, and tell you to take the next step when you have nothing left. I've had flat, stale seasons where I was sure nothing was happening, then someone said, *I see it. Let me tell you what I've watched change in you.* That kept me moving when I would have stopped.

It takes the shame out of the wobble. This might be the quietest gift and the biggest. When you wobble alone, all you feel is the motion which can be disorienting, frightening, and shaped by the private certainty that you're the only one. Then you watch other people, the people you respect, people who are further along, wobble too, and something lets go. The shame drains out and you realize this is simply how discipleship works. We are all navigating. We are all course-correcting. Someone can finally say, out loud, *your wobble is getting smaller — I'm watching you grow,* and you can believe it, because they were actually there to see it.

And it doubles the joy you can't hold by yourself. We talk a lot about needing

people in the hard seasons, and we do, but you also need them for the breakthroughs. When you finally break a pattern that had you for years, when you climb out of a hole you dug and swore you'd never leave, a victory celebrated alone evaporates by morning. I know, because I paid off debt I never should have taken on, foolishness I'd carried in silence for a long time, and the people who celebrated that with me made it real in a way my private relief never could. Paul says to rejoice with those who rejoice. That isn't just a nice sentiment to needlepoint on a pillow. It's a function of the boat. Your victories are meant to be shared, and shared, they multiply.

The question was never *am I wobbling?* You are. The only question that matters is: *am I wobbling with people who can help me navigate — or am I wobbling alone and calling my drift a straight line?*

6. BUILD YOUR OWN TABLE

Maybe you're reading this and realizing you don't have this, not really. Not the kind where the performing stops. We need to adjust our expectations about size. You hear 'community' and picture a whole congregation. But you'll have community at different depths with different people, and you need all of them.

The wide circle: the congregation you belong to. You worship together, serve together, share the broad life of the church. These relationships may never get deeply personal, and that's fine. They give you belonging, a place to be part of something larger than your own household, exposure to people who aren't like you at all.

The middle circle: a handful of people, maybe six to a dozen, who meet with some regularity and get past logistics into actual life. Here people know more of your story. You share more of your struggle. There's honest conversation, prayer that isn't generic, practical help when the bottom drops out.

The inner circle: two, three, maybe four people who have real access to your life and you to theirs. The ones who can ask you anything. The ones who know your actual reality, not your edited testimony. This is the smallest circle and it is where the real navigating happens, because it's the only place you can be fully honest, fully specific, fully seen. Most of us have the wide circle and the middle circle and choose to skip the inner one since it costs the most and it's the easiest to avoid. It's also the one that changes your life. If you build nothing else, build that. Here's how you start building it.

Be intentional. It will not happen on its own. You reach out. You invite. You initiate. You make the rhythm that makes the relationship possible. Someone has to go first so let it be you.

Start small. Don't try to assemble twenty people. Find one or two who seem to want something deeper than lobby friendship. Be honest about what you're after: *I want to know someone who's willing to be real about their struggles and help me be real about mine.* Start there. Let it grow the way real things grow, which is slowly.

Go first in the honesty. Someone has to be the first one vulnerable, and everyone is waiting for someone else to do it. Don't test the water with something safe to see if it's

allowed. Share something real. When you go first, you hand everyone else permission to stop performing too. That's the whole unlock.

Give specific permission. Don't make people guess what you need. Tell them plainly: *Ask me every week about my marriage. Notice when I'm complaining about my wife and call me on it. Check in every month, not about whether I did my quiet time, but about whether I'm actually talking to God.* Handing someone the specific question is the most generous thing you can do.

Commit to a rhythm. Weekly coffee, monthly dinner, a standing call. Whatever it is, put it on the calendar and protect it like it's load-bearing, because it is. Consistency builds trust. Trust makes depth possible. Depth is where the navigation finally happens.

You need your version of that heavy, awkward table. Not literally, though a real place helps more than you'd think. You need a space in your life where the performance stops and the real conversation starts. Where you can wobble together, be seen together, grow together. It's still doing its work in my house, by the way. The boys are grown and gone, but the table stayed. Recently it has seated young couples who come for dinner and stay for the honest talk. Now it is in my office where I write and ponder, hold meetings with friends and do the work of this stage of my life. It changed its job. It never changed its purpose.

Build it. Protect it. Show up to it.

7. THE INVITATION

I want to be careful here, at the end, about what I'm doing and what I'm not. This is not an invitation to adopt my system. I don't have one. I have some principles I've learned by wobbling for decades, and a heavy table, and a few scars. Your journey is yours. The Holy Spirit is drawing a line for you that no one else has walked, and I'd be a fool to hand you mine and call it a map.

It's also not an invitation to comfortable faith. What I'm describing is harder than doing it alone in the privacy of your own head. It asks for more honesty, more consistency, more of the particular courage it takes to be seen. It's only got one thing going for it: it's actually true, and it actually works.

So here is where you start. Not with ten steps. One. Stop, and tell yourself the truth about where you actually are, not where you think you should be by now. Then take one step from that real position, in the direction of Christ. Maybe it's reaching out to one person for one honest conversation. Maybe it's saying the sentence you've been swallowing in your small group. Maybe it's acknowledging one struggle out loud instead of maintaining the performance one more week.

One step. From your actual position. Then the next. And the next. That's the whole method. That's how navigation works, not a dramatic overhaul that burns out in three weeks, but small, honest, faithful corrections, made over and over, with people who can see you. You'll drift again. So will I. That's not the failure. The failure is drifting alone, in silence, convinced you're the only one. So don't do it alone. Because you cannot navigate alone.

YOUR TABLE CONVERSATION

Before this week ends, who will you invite to your table, and what question will you give them permission to ask you?

A NOTE FROM ME, BEFORE YOU GO

I wrote this from one chair at a heavy, awkward table my wife wanted to replace for thirty plus years. There's another chair. Your local church is needed to truly be fully engaged as a disciple of Christ. Jump in, get involved and see where the Holy Spirit leads. It will be places you can never imagine.

I don't have a system to sell you, and I'm not out ahead of you on this road. I'm just a man trying to follow, one day at a time, who got tired of doing it alone. If something here rang true, I'd genuinely like to know. And if you'd like company for the next stretch, walk with me: put your name down at **wobblefactor.com** and I'll send the next one when it's ready. Not so you'll follow me. I'm following the same One you are. Just so neither of us has to wobble in silence.

P.S. — If this found you wondering about the wobble, the book that explains it in more detail is The Wobble Factor, along with the others that will follow: wobblefactor.com.

Also by Ron Robison



