

Appendix A - Being a Disciple – there's got to be a Simple way to do it!

I was just at the local gas station getting a refill on something I know I shouldn't drink...while I was weighing the depth of my "diet coke depravity" I was reflecting on a truth about being a disciple (trust me, stranger things happen in my life journey). When I was refilling my cup, I didn't spend a moment trying to figure out how the machine worked that caused the syrup, water, carbon dioxide gas as well as other "mysteries" to come together to become the diet coke that I would eventually drink. Fact is, that was the furthest thing from my mind...I was simply filling my cup. Then, I grasped the cup...I didn't think how I was doing it...what muscles and tendons in my hand and arms that enabled me to get a grip on the cup. I simply reached out and grabbed it...not too hard as to potentially cause it to explode out of the cup and not too soft which would have led to my dropping the cup on the floor and making my new friends at Circle K ticked that I made a huge mess. It just happened and my cup was refilled and I made my merry way out of the store.

This is a phenomenon...something happens simply in our lives without complex analysis. Our bodies react and respond according to how we created to be...we have systems within the miraculous nature of our bodies that give us an opportunity to simply respond to various circumstances and challenges – we act based upon who we are without a lot of thought and in the moment according to how we have been created.

That caused me to do a bit of thinking about who we are as disciples of Jesus. Our identity as disciples (followers of Jesus) is based upon who the Spirit of God is creating us to be. As you know, God isn't finished with us yet (Phil. 1:6)...we are LIFE-filled work in progress...a "Spirit-filled, Spirit-enabled, gifted with every spiritual blessing" disciple. The very life of the God of the Universe flows through our veins. Living as a disciple isn't complex. It isn't something that we have to muster up the courage or knowledge or gumption to be. Being a disciple needs to and can flow out of us as naturally and as simply as me picking up and refilling that cup. Over analysis can paralyze our action as we focus our attention NOT on the action of being or living out our identity but rather on the technicalities of who we (or an "other") discern we are. That "paralysis of analysis" can put us on the sideline while we wait for the proper inspiration, in-depth scrutiny or job description that gives us the right information to act on.

You know, I've read the stories of Jesus calling His disciples so many times looking for the seminar that they had to attend to find out the intricacies of their temperament, personality, gifts and talents and the job descriptions that were designed to help them match up with who they were in order for them to be rightly fulfilled in following Jesus as disciples – I couldn't find those stories. The truth is – they weren't loaded down by introspective exercises...they were rather called out by Jesus to be and live out the life that the Spirit of God was going to enable them to live. I don't think any of them had a clue about any of the stuff that we attempt to micromanage in helping people understand the "depth" of themselves...Jesus was rather simply calling out the disciple, the faithful disciple, that He was creating within them. It was more of a Spirit movement than one of measurement or examination.

Challenging people to live out their identity as disciples in being disciple makers shouldn't be burdened with a whole bunch of "to do's". Trust me, I know about that. For years I talked about people's giftedness and helped them through surveys and tests to be clearer about who God has created them to be...each of those exercises has its place. God doesn't want us to be "ignorant" of spiritual giftedness (I Corinthians 12:1). Yet, I remember the handstands we went through in bogging down the process of equipping and releasing people simply by spending more time on managing the process (through endless introspective analysis) versus challenging the disciple to trust and follow (track, if you will) the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't get me wrong...I believe in clarity and self-discovery. Yet and even so, I trust the Spirit of God more! Too much time and effort getting clearer or more focused or delving into the depth of one's personal "wiring pattern" can detract a person from doing what should come naturally as the fruitfulness of one's dependence upon God's life and Spirit within them. In other words, we don't force plants to grow...we can't grab a rose bush and force a rose to bloom. We can't give it a book and a bunch of inventories and tell it that once it learns more about what it means to be a rosebush that it will produce better roses. We do what is necessary to feed it and encourage its growth and then we watch it bloom. I think sometimes we force people to delve so deeply into who they are in Christ that they never live out who they are in Christ. As I said above...we need less analysis and more action.

Years ago, I had the opportunity to watch my little girl (now 30 years old) take her first steps. It was a fascinating and miraculous event...why? Because I never taught her how to do it. I never had her read a

book...watch a DVD series or listen to a speaker on how she could walk....she was created to walk and with a little encouragement and praise (and a few bumps along the road), she learned to take those first steps with a huge smile on her face. We need to encourage people to walk and to step out in faith...what we have to be careful about is burdening people with more and more information, analysis, seminars, or the type of in-depth introspection that leads more to navel gazing than disciple-making. I'm trying to find ways in my life to teach people and model discipleship as a simple process – trust God for who He has created you and empowered you through His Spirit to be and step out in faith. The truth is that people ARE disciples – we need to challenge them to live that reality out trusting the Holy Spirit to do what the Holy Spirit does best in and through people God loves and empowers. Yep, know your gifts...but don't try to figure out too much or sooner or later the diet coke will be on the floor...not in your cup.

It wasn't too long ago that I wrote this:

What (or better yet, WHO) is a Disciple? What is a Disciple in a descriptive perspective? Well, try this one on for size - a Disciple is one who is alive in Jesus Christ. In other words, a Disciple is a person who has the life of Jesus implanted by the Holy Spirit and manifested by the Holy Spirit in their life that they are now alive in Jesus. Again, a Disciple is defined not by what we do but by the life of Jesus in us. Before there is any "doing" as a Disciple, there is an essential "being" that comes from the life of Jesus alive in the heart. What a disciple IS in their identity has been IMPLANTED by the Spirit of God.

A Disciple is alive in Jesus...as a friend of mine recently stated in an email, "A Disciple is one resurrected from death to life in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, and daily lives out that life." In other words, the Holy Spirit is drawing out what is true, right, holy and pure within their heart because that's where Jesus resides. A disciple is always Jesus –shaped and Jesus empowered. A Disciple lives Jesus, knows Jesus, grows in Jesus, and embodies the living Jesus. A disciple is Jesus led, Jesus fed, Jesus centered, and Jesus focused.

You can look from cover to cover in the bible and you won't find a verse that says, "you are alive in Christ if..." The bible doesn't say you have life in Christ if you attend church, read the bible, pray, give money, serve on a committee, or be a member of an institution. What the bible says is YOU ARE ALIVE IN JESUS CHRIST. As Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "for me to LIVE is Christ..." You see, being a disciple isn't about striving to be someone you are not...it is rather becoming more of what you already are! It is an issue of LIVING your IDENTITY.

What about a Disciple and good works? For many followers of Jesus, they think that they have to "work" at good works...they have to force themselves to do good things or do their best to imitate Jesus or some saint. In the end, many Christ-followers feel defeated and inadequate. Well, good works are not things that we are trying to do because we are attempting to be like Jesus...good works are what the Holy Spirit is doing through us. They are happening and will continue to happen because of the life of Jesus in and through us. As you live in Jesus, good works will happen almost effortlessly, quicker than you could have ever imagined because they happen not by sheer will power, guilt, or even training/mentoring but because they are being released through the work of the Holy Spirit. A Disciple, to allude to something I read in a new book by Len Sweet and Frank Viola, *The Jesus Manifesto*, doesn't ask "what would Jesus do" as if they could match up their actions with the actions of the biblical Jesus...but rather a Disciple asks and seeks to know/discern what it is that Jesus is doing and wants to do in and through their life? There is a difference! You see, the Holy Spirit wants to release what is already there in the life of Jesus in the disciple's life...in this manner, a Disciple is more than a noun - it is a verb, implying action and life.

So – what is a Disciple? A person who is ALIVE in JESUS.

Jesus said a disciple "follows Me". Jesus calls them "MY disciples", in other words, there is a relational connectivity, embrace, and affiliation with Jesus when you are His Disciple. Disciples "of the Kingdom" – come to Jesus, deny self, pick up cross, follow Jesus, give up all, are willing to be reviled, are willing to stand out (known for being disciple)...they are workers in Kingdom (harvest plentiful, workers few), and are responsive and obedient to the commands of Jesus (you feed them, you cure them, etc.) A Disciple always comes back to Jesus – understanding what it means to be a disciple without a relationship to Jesus is not only non-biblical but also oxymoronic.

To be “Alive in Jesus” means that a disciple allows the divinity of Jesus to live in and through their lives. Being a disciple is about BEING...it biblically does not mean that we are to be an adherent to a complex doctrinal system, ethical principles, or that we have to plumb or discern any complex self-analysis before we take our first discipleship step – but rather a disciple is about being a passionate person with a love for a way of living in the world that is rooted in living by Jesus – since Jesus is way, truth and life. A Disciple can never be separated from the Kingdom of God – because Jesus can never be separated from the Kingdom. A Disciple Lives Kingdom...a disciple is a living manifestation of God’s rule. The real question is this - How are you and me a living manifestation of Jesus? How is that identity being lived out today?

I think our teaching must be about who we are in Christ and realize the power of the Holy Spirit as He takes over... John 14:26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you...

Living water flowing out of you...