

LET THE SPIRIT BREATHE . . .



GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES . . . TEACHING THEM . . .”

Lord, let me walk closely with you. Help me discern more completely what it means to be your disciple. Let me extend myself to others, enabling, equipping and encouraging them in their own discipleship. Amen

This month . . . Reflections on

✧ *Growing Disciples of Jesus* ✧

“Discipling is the process of equipping, training and encouraging another in his or her apprenticeship to Jesus. It means journeying with and helping another to grow in knowledge as well as in the virtues and character of Christ.” Adele Calhoun

In the Gospel of Matthew, (Chapter 28:16-20) Jesus tells his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Church communities are in the business of growing disciples. ‘Develop Disciples to Serve’, one of the five mission initiatives of Community of Christ, states: We are poised to equip men, women, and children to be true and living expressions of the life, ministry, and continuing presence of Christ in the world.” Discipleship skills are learned in communities that will equip, train, and nurture one another in the ways of Christ. To be an apprentice of Christ it is essential for us to continually learn, model, and teach the virtues and character of Christ. How do we learn these skills? We invest ourselves in each other in ways that will deepen individuals relationship with Christ through intentional pursuits of learning the dynamics of Christ’s teachings: Bible study, prayer, worship, sacraments, spiritual friendships/companions, to name a few. Growing disciples does not happen in isolation. We need each other. God’s richest blessings to us are derived from the diverse gifts and talents inherent in the body of Christ. As we share in community we become for others trainer, equipper and encourager as others become these expressions for us.

Nurturing Discipleship

“The point of our discipleship” says author Jan Johnson, “is to know Christ and the power of the resurrection.”

So what does knowing Christ and the power of the resurrection look like? How do we help make that happen? In community we pray, we engage in God’s word, we practice spiritual disciplines that will help us connect with God thus our souls can be transformed by the Holy Spirit. When our hearts have been transformed our actions of being ‘one with Christ’ become more natural and mission focused for the sake of others. It takes community to grow disciples. “There is no way that an individual can be conformed to the image of Christ for others without the nurture of the body of Christ; and there is no way the community of faith can be the body of Christ if it does not nurture the individual members toward wholeness in Christ”. (Robert Mulholland, Invitation to Journey)

Exercise: Take a moment to recall those who have helped shape your spiritual life. Now, list one or two people you would like to intentionally give yourself to in nurturing and developing their discipleship. In the months to follow journey with these people, spending time with them, listening to them. Where are they spiritually, where would they like to be? What are the challenges? Pray with and for them. Open yourself to experience blessings of God in relationship as both of you grow.

Spiritual Reflections
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IN THE GARDEN . . .

The symbolism associated with the flower 'Dahlia' is commitment and bond that lasts forever.

Expectations

In his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg tells the story of a fellow named Hank, a member of his congregation. When I began to read the story I was amused by some of the humor in his telling only to be caught in a reality of circumstances all too familiar in some church communities.

Hank was an irritable man. He was that way when he was young and grew even more irritable as he aged. His native language was criticism. His latest complaint was the music at church: too loud. After some time the pastorate approached Hank telling him to restrict his complaining to just a few folks and specifically not complain to the guests that attended church. (Notice they didn't encourage Hank to change his behavior, just restrict who he complained to.) Things quieted down for a while until the day when an agent from OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) paid the church administrators a visit to discuss Hank's complaint. Of course Hank's complaint was unfounded and the joylessness of Hank brought a bit of humor on that occasion, but most often it brought sadness. The trouble was that Hank had not changed in all those years of attending church. More troubling, however, was the fact that no one expected him to change. Oh, folks had some expectations of Hank. They expected him to attend church every Sunday, affirm certain religious beliefs, pray, read the bible, give monetary support, but what they didn't expect was that Hank would progressively be transformed in the likeness of Christ.

This story is tragic on two levels. First, Hank lost out when the congregation didn't expect transformation and didn't engage him in that process. Secondly, the congregation lost the latent and potential ministry of Hank had they, as a community, invested in growing him for discipleship.

"Go and make disciples . . . and teach them."

Reflection moment . . .

Who have you intentionally given yourself to for the benefit and welfare of their growth in Christ?



The Real Difference

A man spoke with the Lord about heaven and hell. The Lord said to the man, "Come, I will show you hell."

They entered a room where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. Everyone was famished, desperate and starving. Each held a spoon that reached the pot, but each spoon had a handle so much longer than their own arm that it could not be used to get the stew into their own mouths. The suffering was terrible.

"Come, now I will show you heaven," the Lord said after a while.

They entered another room, identical to the first — the pot of stew, the group of people, the same long-handled spoons. But there everyone was happy and well nourished.

"I don't understand," said the man. "Why are they happy here when they were miserable in the other room and everything was the same?"

The Lord smiled, "Ah, it is simple," he said. "Here they have learned to feed each other."

Scripture focus:

"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter". 2 Thessalonians 2:15

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. John 15:15

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

In perspective . . .

A recent poll stated that eighty four million people in the United States have made a commitment to Christ. (That is over one quarter of the U.S. population.)

"A pound of meat would surely be affected by a quarter pound of salt. If this is real Christianity, the 'salt of the earth', where is the effect of which Jesus spoke?" William Iverson