

DEEPER

A Return to the Beach

10-10-10

Good morning. For the last 6 weeks Bonita and I have been introducing us all to the stages of Spiritual Development using a picture called the **Ocean Diagram**. This has been a window into the invisible but very real activity that is happening everyday in our lives as we seek to know God more and more. We have been introduced to:

1. Who the **primary people** are at each of these stages
2. What **primary question** they have on their mind concerning God and the church
3. What **primary relationships** they need in their life to move forward spiritually
4. What **primary barrier** they face to forward movement
5. And finally what **primary ministry** needs to be in place somewhere within the life of the church to help them move forward in their spiritual journey

With that basic introduction of the last 6 weeks, it is now time to move **deeper**. In this series, we are going to seek to do 2 things:

1. First, we are going to return to each of these stages and ask and answer a new question. The new question is: *How then must a fully committed Follower of Christ live in order to be an effective witness to people at each of these stages?*

Let me define one word in that question. The word witness = demonstration of the truth

2. The second thing we are going to do is we are going to identify one principle for each stage that a fully committed follower can use as a target on the wall, so to speak, that reminds us of the overall life behavior we need incorporated into our lives in order to be a useful tool in God's hand to people experiencing that particular stage of spiritual development. This principle will appear in your sermon notes each week in the box.

So let me right from the start put the target on the wall for a Fully Committed Follower who wants to be effectively used by God to help others at this first stage A Fully Committed Follower:.

Deflects a cynical world view *with the Word of God*

You see, in your notes the further explanation of that first principle:

A follower of Christ exchanges his/her cultural worldview with its cynical perspective of God and others for a biblical worldview by continually striving to understand the truth as well as the practical application of scripture. As a result, a follower regularly engages in reading and studying the Bible and daily chooses to apply what s/he learns to thought, word and deed.

If Cynicism is the barrier, then a fully committed follower deflects it with the Word of God. Cynicism is defined as: “an attitude of **scornful** or **jaded** negativity, especially a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of others.”

We can see it begin to form in the lives of our children can't we?

- When they are first born they are full of innocence and trust
- Then something happens and they begin to change. Maybe they don't want to share their toys
- Then adolescence hits and the acceleration of distrust continues
- By adulthood through the bombardment of so many experiences the cynicism is so embedded in our lives it can be almost like solid concrete

But for a fully committed follower the Word of God calls us back, away from a life of cynicism-where everyone is suspect, everyone is out for themselves and I have to protect myself from it all.

This first principle will mean that God will have to provide a fresh personal revival in each us for the Word of God. So let me lead the way, by saying, a part from the bible, I have nothing to say to you as a congregation. All leadership principles I read about in other books or listen to from other speakers, everything gets filtered through the wisdom and truth of scripture. These bibles that are in the pews and on the tables. They are yours to take home and keep. We are to be a people of one book. That does not mean we don't read and gain understanding from other books. It does mean that we engage the bible, and we ask 3 questions of any stories or paragraphs that we are reading out of it.

1. What is this scripture saying?
2. What does this scripture mean?
3. How does this scripture apply to me?

Listen to Peter in his first letter. Listen to what this sentence is saying:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

The word of God here spoken through Peter is saying to the believers. 'I know your tendencies, your desires, are to think negatively of others, to act in self-protective ways. The phrase 'sinful desires' can encompass even more than that. He is saying, Living as a believer in this world can make you feel like you are from another planet. It is like a war inside. Peter is saying don't give in to it. Resist it, his word here is abstain from it, in essence Deflect it.

How many of us can find it just so easy, when we have a bad situation happen to us, to just engage in shredding another person or organization or people group.

What Peter is meaning by this first part is ‘Abstain from it...’ Deflect it. Take what is a very defensive posture.

Cynicism causes us to want to put a negative slant on everything. People say to me all the time, I don’t really know what to say to unchurched people that is why I don’t share my faith. Well just start Deflecting cynical remarks that you hear coming out of your mouth, cynical gestures, biting comments. These are

But then he follows up and gives some very clear instruction on how to go on the offensive. How to then to live among stage one unchurched people.

First he says,

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong,

The word ‘pagan’ here is Peter’s word for unchurched people, people who were living without Christ.

There are 3 different times in these verses that the word Good is used and in all 3 cases they mean something different. Look what he says, *Live such good lives* This first word GOOD means **‘have your conversation be honest’**

Just speak truth into people’s lives, and speak it in a positive way. Don’t talk to people, subtly trying to get them to come to church. That is not speaking truth, that is speaking with an agenda. All people can sniff that out especially unchurched people.

So in order to be an effective witness first we need to Deflect a cynical worldview and attitude, and gain a positive God view of humanity, then our conversation among people needs to be driven by honesty and truth.

The second Good shows up in the next line

they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. This second Good means **“basically good but not necessarily benefitting others”**.

Notice the accumulating effect of these verses. Peter is saying you Deflect sinful desires, what I am referring to as a cynical negative view, then you begin to speak with honesty to people. When this happens people step back and start looking at you. They actually begin to take notice of you, how you do things, what you do. This is how our life witness to other people works.

(Example: A Dr. in the neighborhood, I grew up in, I remember him as always polite. He always had time to stop and say Hi, Danny how’s that pitching arm.”) (My parents would say about him, He is such a nice and caring man) This is the normal life, being lived in front of people day in and day out.) He did not know it but he was, by living that way, melting my heart of stone.

In other words, live in such a way as unchurched people see your normal life behaviors and they know in their heart of hearts that what drives you is something Godly.

Finally the third statement that has our last Good definition in it: It says

For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

This last “Good” means ‘To do Good so that someone derives Advantage from it’.

Are you kicking in to how this works?

You see that same Dr. who my parents obviously respected and I thought was nice, would go out on snowy days and clean the sidewalks of an elderly woman who lived next door to him. He would just do it. His good deeds, no matter how far I strayed away from God in those early years, silenced me. I could not dispute that this man was what I wanted to be like. Not the dozens and dozens of people who were telling me I needed to go to church. His good deeds did not make him a Christian, but what they did in me was lay the ground work for total life transformation. Now you add to that, if that Dr. in conversation had invited me to church, I would have gone.

So principle #1 as we probe Deeper into spiritual life. Fully committed followers who want to be effective witnesses to people at stage one.

Deflect a cynical world view with God’s word and allow that word to drive Goodness in all it’s forms to the forefront of their lives. This begins to melt the hearts of people who are watching them, and gives them the opportunity to experience the 2nd principle that drives a fully committed follower as they approach the shoreline of faith.

Let’s pray