

Spiritual Life: “Life in the Deep” 10-3-10

Wind surfer Story:

(On my 30th birthday, my brother-in-law rented a windsurfer for the day. We were having a family reunion in the outer banks of North Carolina. Having never ridden a windsurfer before, my brother and 2 brother-in-law's and myself, started in. We surfed all day, pulling the sail up and gliding along the water until a wave would knock us over.

The rental lasted until the next day, until 10am. So about 8:30am the next day the 4 of us got back out on the water for one last right. The 3 of them took a turn then the last ride of the day about 9am was reserved for the birthday boy, me.

My brother was holding the end of the surfer, in chest deep water, so I could get on it. I hopped up on the board on my knees, than began to hoist the sail up that had been laying in the water. I felt a little tug in the sail as it raised and I thought, “Great I am going to have a good last ride.” I stood to my feet, holding the sail bar firmly and I turned to tell my brother to let go, and he was already 50 yards away from me.

I was heading straight out into deeper water and a pretty rapid clip. From that moment on I began trying to turn the windsurfer around. I would try and try. Every time I would pull the sail up to get it turned around, I would see the wake the board would make, between me and the shoreline, which meant I was moving farther and farther away from shore.

Pretty soon I got caught in the offshore currents that lye a little ways off shore. I struggled more. The first time the sail came loose from the surf board, I just drove off the board to get it, and I would reattach it while I hung in the water. After that happened the fifth time, I drove off after it, and as I was swimming after the sail that was floating away, I looked around and realized I was surrounded on all sides by walls of water. I could no longer see land and I was in the rolling swelling of the ocean off the outer banks of North Carolina. I looked at my watch and it was 12:30pm. I was hopelessly in over my head and the deep was in total control. When the Coast Guard finally came and got me. They said I was 11/4 miles off shore and in about 55 feet of water and moving dangerously close to the continental shelf. The deep is a wonderful and amazing and powerful place to be.

The person who continues moving forward into stage 6 is a **(slide #2)Fully Committed Follower**. This is a person who is fully immersed in God's purposes and has bound themselves to Christ. A person who finds themselves in this spiritual place that I am describing, is a man or woman whose life is no longer their own. Though they live and breathe and take out the trash like all the rest of us. They have been forever changed. These people are the most powerful force on earth. When they step away from the path God has for them, they instantly know it, and though they may continue to function, their spirit goes quiet and waits to regain its God bearing before moving on.

The primary question on the mind of this person is, **(slide # 3)“What do you want me to do, Lord?”**

It sounds a lot like how can I help but do you see the difference? This person has been through the divine filtering process of fear and suffering, remains undeterred and is still on the mission. They do not serve because they like the pastor or want to work along side their friends. They serve only when and where God tells them to serve. **We have begun training our children**

that one of the priorities of our church will be to serve. This Saturday (Oct 9th) the children from our children's ministry are going to Kennedy Hall on McKaig Ave in Troy to serve at a Soup Kitchen there. They will start at 10:30am and they will be preparing tables, serving the meal, cleaning up and singing some songs during the meal. Make no mistake, we are from this point on preparing our children to be fully committed followers.

Seldom do these people approach the church with a good idea for ministry. Often they simply begin the slow steady process of positioning themselves, their lifestyle and their finances into a more appropriate alignment to carry out the work they believe God is calling them, through the Holy Spirit, to do. The church would be well served to line up alongside these fire-tested followers, and join them.

Too often we subtly label these individuals, as 'too distant' and 'kind of unpredictable', but if we pull back the curtain, what we will see is these people embody the kind of divinely wild movement of God, that we read about in the Bible. There are many examples of this kind of person asking this kind of question in the bible, but by far the most well known example is that I Jesus in the garden praying before He was arrested.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:42

This is the way stage 6 followers respond. God is their God and if God says do it. They do it.

Think of our city, think of the surrounding area, if there was a church filled with fully committed followers, who responded like this to God's voice. These are the people who live in the deep and abiding presence of God.

The primary relationships that will sustain and keep a fully committed follower moving forward in constant pursuit of God's will and purposes are the (slide #4) **Holy Spirit and the authentic spiritual community.**

The relationship between the stage 6 follower and the Holy Spirit that was enhanced in Stage 5 now becomes everything. In Jesus' words in the upper room he was trying to convey this, *"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."* John 14:20 Jesus was experiencing a oneness with God the Father that would carry him through any persecutions, any torture and suffering, right into overwhelming victory, and he was letting his followers know that we would realize that same oneness, if we obeyed and held on.

The other relationship is this authentic spiritual community. At first glance we might think that this would be a bunch of stage 6 followers that have all broken through their personal fear barriers and are now living life at a whole different level of understanding. This is not quite, the case. Although, as we will see it is important that a stage 6 follower have other stage 6 followers around them, primarily this authentic spiritual community will consist of the people at each stage who are leaning forward into the spiritual journey. This was Jesus' priority, he was at a dinner put on by a tax collector, Matthew, and he said:

"It is not the well who need a doctor, but the sick."
Mark 2:17

Stage 1 - Think about who Jesus hung with. Tax collectors and sinners. These were certainly stage 1 people who were searching for truth.

Stage 2 - What about Zaccheus, that wee little man who climbed the sycamore tree, 'for the Lord he wanted to see.' Yes you remember the song. This is a perfect picture of a curious person. He simply wanted to get a look at this Jesus. Then what happened? Jesus came to the tree and said to Zaccheus, "I want to go and eat at your house today. He used hospitality, only this time reverse hospitality didn't he. But think about it. He invited Zaccheus away from what very likely was a hostile crowd, to go into Zaccheus' own home where his sensitivities to his surroundings could lower and he could get a good look at Jesus and respond in an honest and not defensive way. What happened. Scripture says that approach worked because salvation not only came to Zaccheus that day but to his whole household.

Stage 4 and beyond - Jesus hung with people at each stage. It may have been a seasoned but restless believer genuinely struggling to break through the fear barrier, like Nicodemus or another fully committed follower who bears the scars of long term ministry.

These are the people who continually bring hope to the fully committed follower and remind him or her that God is alive and well and actively working in the world. They refuel the followers at stage six and give them reason to continue moving ahead toward the goal.

The primary barrier to forward movement, however, is **(slide #5) isolation.**

Let me ask you a question. What is the number one rule in scuba diving? (story: Nitrogen Narcosis)

I have many questions about that day on the windsurfer but one question I have pondered a lot and that was, "Why didn't anybody come after me?" It is because they thought I could get it turned around on my own.

This same type of reality exists in the lives of fully committed followers. If isolated and out of touch with a legitimate buddy system, they can begin to show signs of a spiritual nitrogen narcosis.

We've all seen it, haven't we?

Clergy and Laity whose ministries grow under their leadership but then they begin to entertain thoughts that if the ministry is going to continue to grow it is all up to them and they place the burden of the whole ministry on themselves to make it or break it, and the paranoia that ensues causes depression as well as many other ailments.

Or highly effective lay people in the church who have significantly contributed to ministry over the years, but they slowly have begun to think that their ideas are superior to everyone else and that they should be given special consideration, as if the rules don't really apply to them anymore. Isolation is a huge barrier and it can cause highly distorted thinking.

There is a method behind Jesus' training of the disciples. In Mark 6:6b-7 it says,

"Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the 12 to him, he sent them out 2 by 2 and gave them authority..."

Jesus was releasing these men into the deep. He knew that there are many strategies of the enemy of our faith, but one stands out above them all. Divide and Conquer/ Isolate and Destroy. So he sent them out 2 by 2.

Listen very carefully, some of you sitting in this room know exactly what I am talking about. You have seen things God is capable of, you have given yourself fully over to the purposes of God. Yet you know that you are dangerously close to this place of spiritual isolation. You have learned how to deflect the arrows of suffering that I spoke of last week, but this isolation thing is not an arrow, it is more like an all consuming fog.

The primary ministry that helps overcome the barrier of isolation is (slide #6) **one-on-one discipling.**

Scripture offers a couple of very important verses about this type of relationship in the life of a stage 6 follower

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24

This verse is not talking here about the authentic spiritual community, this relationship is different. This is the one man or one woman who though they may care deeply for you is not impressed with you, and will tell you the truth.

The second verse is this

Proverbs 20:5 says, *“The purposes of a person’s heart are like deep waters, but someone of understanding draws them out.”*

Here is what this verse is trying to tell us, there is deep within the heart of each of us purposes, plans that God has laid in there. They are not on the surface of our lives, they are dreams and plans, visions and purposes that God has placed in the depths of our lives, that can only be brought to the light if we allow someone we trust to draw them out of us.

Communion was Christ’s way of saying to us ‘Come further’ Come Deeper and abide with me. Live in my presence, with all of its unknowns, all of its risks,

Let’s pray.

Communion

This last verse, Proverbs 20:5 says, *“The purposes of a person’s heart are like deep waters, but someone of understanding draws them out.”* Means we have to go deeper. We have taken this last 6 weeks to introduce the spiritual life. I want you to join us over the next 6 weeks as we take this introduction to spiritual life, and now ask the question, “What does a fully committed follower need to know and do to become an effective witness at each of these stages?” In a series we are calling DEEPER.