

# **Spiritual Life:** ***“Life In The Open Water”*** 9-26-10

We have taken the last 4 weeks to talk about what the journey actually looks like for a person who desires to develop spiritually. Using the picture of the (slide #1) **Ocean Diagram** we have seen how these stages have played themselves out in episodes with those who followed Jesus. Hopefully it has given you the opportunity to ask yourself the question: “Where am I in all of this?” “What stage do I seem to be experiencing at this time in my life?”

Many people ask me, “Can you be experiencing multiple stages at once?” YES. It is exactly why the ocean is the picture for this journey, because it represents the constant movement of our journey, it captures the ebb and flow of the Christian life. Somedays I am in deep water and taking a huge risky faith step, other days I am testing the water on getting to know other people.

With that said, there typically seems to be one stage, however, that God zeros in on in a person’s life at any particular time, and if we don’t give that stage due justice then we risk missing the full measure of what God was trying to teach us.

A prime example of that is in the conversation I introduced last week between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a man who had been at stage 4 long enough. His frustration with his own spiritual journey had caused him to risk coming to Jesus. Same old-same old wasn’t working any more. Jesus recognizes where Nicodemus was on this spiritual continuum and introduces him to life at stage 5.

*“You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:7-8*

Using this metaphor of the ocean, Jesus was, in essence saying, Nicodemus, when your feet come off the bottom and you give up control of how the spiritual journey should go in your mind, then (Jesus likened it to the wind – I am likening it to the currents of the ocean) the currents come from somewhere and push you where they want to. Your job literally as the song goes is to Trust & Obey. (Examples: 10% giving vs. what God tells you to give)

The primary person at this 5<sup>th</sup> stage of spiritual development is a (slide #2) **New Paradigm Follower** of Christ. They live life by a whole new set of rules. It is what Paul called the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> book to the Thessalonians. In chapter 1 verse 7-8a he said this *“And so you became a model (paradigm) to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you...”*

The people of this church, moved forward in spite of their fears, they learned from the example of Paul and others and they now find themselves in that very rare place of effectiveness for the Kingdom of God.

Returning to the metaphor of the ocean, when a person who is not able to touch bottom looks at the shoreline; with all its predictability, then turns and looks at the open water of the rolling ocean with all its risk, and mystery and unknown. And knowingly chooses to move toward the deep, something happens deep in the heart of that person. Life as they have known it,

is surrendered. This person has given up the comforts of the shallows for the greater values that are yet to be found in the deep. A primary question emerges in the mind of a person at this place in their spiritual journey, that is (slide #3)**Where has this been all my life?**

There is a redesigning process that has been taking place at the character level of this person. The person is allowing God to remake them, to redesign their dreams.

Think about how God redesigned the disciples' dreams:

1. Remember the request of James & John (two of the disciples) *Mark 10:37* *"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."* These men had no clue the kind of Kingdom Jesus was ushering in, but he redesigned their desires and dreams and they both later died for their redesigned beliefs.

2. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus said in *Luke 24:21* *"but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."* These men had their heads hung low because the story had ended not how they thought it would, but Jesus caused them to do a 180 and go right back to the town that just crucified him.

In order to move into the deep, we have to go through a redesigning process. We have to go right through our fears, we have to face our destructive behaviors and tendencies. We have to release them to God or they will become the very things that drag us under.

The disciples wanted a new glorious rule in Israel and they thought they had the man for the job in Jesus. But when they watched him get crucified, all of their dreams that were based on how they thought life was going to be, died on that cross.

There are 2 primary relationships that need to be in the life of a stage 5 follower. The disciples had to that point, been relying on the physical presence of Jesus, their (slide #4)**Discipler**, and now they were going to be introduced to the other primary relationship that would move them forward in their spiritual development and that was **The Holy Spirit**.

They were going to be without that physical support that they had grown accustomed to, and they were going to feel like they were abandoned and a drift on their own. They were experiencing what Paul described to the Thessalonian church. *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord;* in verse 6a. (Option: Get someone from the audience to imitate swimming)

The disciples could not even remember that Jesus had said in the upper room in, *John 16:7* *"It is for your good that I am going away, unless I go, the Counselor, will not come to you."* By saying this, he had described to them the evolution of a healthy discipling relationship. In other words, first they relied on the physical presence of Jesus as an example of Kingdom like behavior, then after he left the Holy Spirit would become their life-long guide and counselor, reminding them of the lessons they had learned.

Early on in my Christian life I had heard of stories where God had come through in some financial way for people who had stepped out in faith. But then in 1982 I moved my pregnant wife and our one year old into a farm house parsonage, as we made the decision to follow God's call and enter the pastoral ministry, with a \$5300.00/year salary. I needed to go back and finish my last year at West Virginia University, after a 3 year lay off from school. We were broke and I didn't know how I was going to pay for it. I had applied for financial aid through the usual methods and was just hoping to hear something. It was on a Saturday morning in March of 1982. I awoke to hear a truck backing up to the barn that was on the farm that the church was renting for the parsonage. The truck had stalled out and was not starting. I didn't know who this was. For all I knew someone was stealing bales of hay that were stored in the barn. I got up and got dressed and walked out to see if I could be of assistance, and silently wondering if I was stopping

a thief in the act. I came upon a man and his two teenage kids, loading hay that they had bought from the owner of the farm. I invited them back to the house for coffee when the man said he really needed to use the telephone. On the way back to the house, we struck up a conversation. He asked what I did, and I explained that we had just recently gone into the ministry and that this was a parsonage that the church had rented from the owner. Then I asked what he did, and he said, "I am the Financial Aid Director at West Virginia University!" Stunned but still acting normal, I explained that I had just applied through his office to finish out my college education. He asked what my name was, and I told him. Then he said, Dan Glover, I have a young man working in my office by that name, I won't forget that name. 2 weeks later we received a check from the office of financial aid which was a grant that covered the entire amount for the entire year books and tuition.

At first, in our spiritual journey, we hear stories about and see other people living out lives of deeper faith commitments and we watch and listen, all the while the Spirit of God is saying move forward, believe and choose the new dreams I have put in front of you personally. When we move forward we begin to see a shift from reliance on others to reliance on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

As you move into a deeper more risky faith walk fear soon begins to be replaced by new barriers.

There will be a price to pay for deep and lasting impact for the Kingdom of God. If you really make the conscious choice to start power stroking away from the safe and predictable shoreline there will be a price to be paid. How the obstacle of suffering becomes a primary barrier to your spiritual development is when you misinterpret it. The (slide #5) **misinterpretation of suffering** is a primary barrier to movement forward in the deep. Remember the Thessalonian church and how Paul said it was a model church in chapter 1 verse 7. Look at what Paul says made that church such a model, verse 6, *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."*

Suffering comes in many forms.

- It may come in the form of a close friend gossiping about you behind your back;
- It may come in a snide comment from someone who doesn't understand what you are doing.
- It may come from a lack of resources, or an unsupportive spouse
- It may come in miscommunication or lack of communication

Whatever form the suffering takes, it is like arrows that pierce our hearts and they hurt. But whether it's the first arrow or the 50<sup>th</sup> arrow, the one that will take the stage 5 follower out is the one that's taken personally.

Stage 5 is not a life that is free of suffering, it is a life that has the capacity to understand and interpret the suffering that comes its way.

The other primary barrier for a stage 5 follower is the (slide #6) **lack of focus and discipline**. In writing to the young believers, after addressing the elders, Peter gives stage 5 type instruction to them by saying in 1 Peter 5:8, *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* What Peter is fore warning these believers about is the potential disaster that awaits them if they don't equip themselves with

1. A sense of focus - The ability to sort through and manage all the things that seek to consume your time and distract you from the overall mission.

2. An overall life of discipline – The ability to bring your emotions and desires under submission so that you will not be easily led astray.

How we get equipped with Focus and discipline happens primarily in what we do in stages 1-4 and they are tested in stage 5.

Tony Dungy, former head coach for the National Football League - Indianapolis Colts, put preparation this way, *“It’s the journey that matters. Learning is more important than the rest. Practice well and the games will take care of themselves.”*

A stage 5 follower is fully in the game and if they have not prepared to be there, the current will continually push them back to the shallows in order to become better prepared. That is God’s plan of mercy for an unprepared believer who finds themselves carrying the responsibilities of stage 5 production. It is the stage 5 followers who does not heed the call to return to the shallows for more learning that finds themselves as a dead body, washing back up on shore lonely, cynical and ready to give up the journey.

These are primary barriers in the life of a stage 5 follower, if they are prepared a person at this stage of spiritual development will move on into deeper and deeper Kingdom impact and the primary ministry and the commission of the church which is (slide #7)**Opportunities to**

**Go and Make** disciples will be the focus of their life. Jesus said it in Matthew 28:19-20,

*“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.”*

Jesus put the mission out there for all of us to see. It is the stage 5 follower who has faced their fears, endured suffering and not taken it personally and remained focused and disciplined and is still on mission who will experience the joy and satisfaction of participating in this mission over the long haul.

As they continue to practice these disciplines of the faith they eventually find themselves entering into a whole new world, a world we call the deep. Let’s pray (concluding remarks)