

BECOMING A CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY 4 **“GROWING DEEP IS THE SOUL OF A C.C.C.”**

In week one of this series we discussed that becoming a C.C.C. might require we think differently about what the church is, and how the church functions. In week two we shared that the Heart of a C.C.C. is Meeting God; being encountered and being changed by God. In week three we discussed how Sharing Life together is the Blood of a C.C.C. Last week Ernie explained the essential components of a C.C.C. This morning I want to consider the Soul of a C.C.C; and I'll call it this: Growing Deep, growing deeper is the Soul of a C.C.C.

The basic premise is that becoming a disciple is more than making a decision to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Yes, that's the essential first step; but there are others! Becoming a disciple is a matter of making a life-long commitment to growing ever deeper in your relationship with Jesus Christ, and that life-long, ever deepening growth, is the soul of what I envision a C.C.C. to be. If you have been saved, great... but if you are not growing, then you are not living in the center of God's will, nor are you fulfilling God's plan, or enjoying all of God's favor. Accepting Jesus and being saved may get you in the door of Heaven, but growing deeper will get you closer to the Soul of God. Consider this story from Luke 5:

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught from there.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish.

“Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again.” And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell on to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me – I'm too much of a sinner to be around you." For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus. Luke 5:1-11

From this familiar story and Jesus' call to: "Go out where it is deeper..." I want to try and share 3 keys to a growing-deeper personal life, that when implemented, will create a Growing Deeper, C.C.C. They are:

1. WE MUST OBEY MORE READILY

But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again. Vs. 5

It must have seemed rather irrational for young Peter to listen to this "would-be" preacher, that everyone knew to be a carpenter's kid; telling this experienced fisherman to put out to the sea they have fished all night, what did He know about fishing?

It may often seem irrational to us when God asks us, commands us to do something we think we know better! It may seem irrational as the end of our days on this earth approach, that God would still be expecting us to grow and deepen our faith. It may seem irrational with Christian radio, Christian tv, Christian books and bookstores, Christian shopping centers and even Christian yellow pages; that God would still expect individual followers to daily and continually work at growing their own personal faith. It may seem irrational with all the church we attend, all the church meetings we have, all the church responsibilities we fulfill that God would still request of us an ever growing, ever deepening heart and head relationship with Himself. It may seem irrational that with the busyness of our lives, raising kids, earning a living, pursuing our dreams, chasing our rainbows, that God would still send us out to the deeper places...but He does!

And note how Peter responds: But if you say so...I'll let the nets down again!

Peter trusted Jesus enough not to settle for yesterday's results. Peter was growing his faith as he learned and experienced, and reminds us, through his obedience, that our past is no predictor of our future when Jesus is in our boat! That's key.

Does you no good to grow your knowledge or increase your wisdom, or expand your experiences if Jesus is not in your boat, (life). But when once that is settled, then growing deeper is ultimately conditioned on how willingly and readily we obey the call to go deeper.

Growing our faith is not hard, just steady; consistent. Growing our faith requires neither great knowledge nor wisdom, just the willingness, desire and means to increase both. In this C.C.C. each member must be on the life-long search for deeper meaning, deeper relationships, deeper knowledge, deeper wisdom, deeper experiences, deeper challenges, and deeper love. This is the first key to that reality: Readily Obey Jesus' call to push out deeper.

2. WE MUST THINK MORE REALISTICALLY

When Simon Peter realized what had happened Vs. 8

At the moment when the boats began to sink, overflowing with fish, Peter doesn't jump up and down with excitement, doesn't send off flares announcing victory, doesn't shout for more help to handle the mountains of flopping fish; no he humbly bows his knee and offers his thanks. And it is poignant, and not an accident what he says. Did you see it? *"Lord leave me for I'm too much a sinner, and you are too holy, for me to be in the same boat with you."* Peter was thinking realistically, and it helped him grow deeper in his love for Jesus.

I don't know what Christians are thinking when they determine that Sunday School is for children and youth, but not for adults. I don't know what Christians are thinking when worship becomes optional but football (golf, fishing, hunting, vacation... whatever) is not. I don't know what Christians are thinking when reading good literature is boring and watching lascivious television is not. I don't know what Christians are thinking when they allow some preacher, or Bible teacher or popular author to be their only source of devotional inspiration while their Bible collects dust and burial memorabilia. I don't know what Christians are thinking as they continually over feed their already fat bodies, and continually starve their undernourished souls. I don't know what we are thinking, but it's not realistic, and it is definitely not helpful to take us to the deeper places.

At the moment of God's greatest increase, Peter became uniquely aware of exactly who he was...and exactly Whose he was. He was undone at the reality of his own sinfulness, and overcome with Jesus' resident holiness. Are we? It's not that we have to live in the perpetual state of beating ourselves up with our own sin and guilt, but we have to initially and periodically at least, acknowledge it and be reminded that our only status is secured as we are directly and intricately linked to the Savior who sits across the mound of fish in our boat! Think realistically of who we are...and Whose we are. We are sinners...saved by a graceful Savior. We don't have it all figured out, we can't explain all its details, we don't understand all its mysteries, we've only scratched the surface of its depth...but we are not willing to settle for that...we'll push out deeper, in this new C.C.C. we'll join one another on this life-long quest to discover who and Whose we are as we think soberly, humbly, honestly, and realistically.

3. WE MUST FOLLOW MORE RELIANTLY
they left everything and followed Jesus Vs. 11

Can you imagine Peter, James and John just walking away from the greatest return they have ever had in their business? Their stock portfolio had just increased 1000 fold! Can you imagine the complete shock of the bystanders as this huge pile of fish is left unattended as the google-eyed wanna-be disciples march off after Jesus? Can you imagine yourself leaving your career or livelihood to follow a drifter? I can't either. And I'm not so sure all of us are asked to resign our posts and join the convent, monastery or seminary either.

What I do know is that each of us, who would go deeper with Jesus, must follow more closely, more intimately, more intentionally, more reliantly. We too naturally think of what they left; their nets, their reward, their livelihood, and we forgot what they became: Disciples and Apostles!

My friends, we must not fear the call to become a follower of Jesus, it's not about what we'll have to leave behind, it's all about what we will become. We must not fear the call to grow deeper; it's all about what we will become. We must not fear that we'll have to leave our job, or career, or church or family or community; it's all about what we will become. When Jesus leads us, and we follow reliantly, its not so much about leaving our occupation but allowing our occupation to become our avocation; our passion, our soul!

God has most of you right where He wants you, right now. He is just trying to get your attention to help you see that your occupation can be a tool you together can use to deeper your own life and broaden His influence in the world! Now, for some of you, God is calling you to leave your career, and answer His call to pursue another. I don't believe that Cody and Brandon and Vicky were the last ones from this great church to answer the call to ministry. I have a hunch who some of you are, and we both might be surprised.

Dependency creates deepening. The more dependent we are on God, the more Jesus is able to teach us. The more dependent we are on God, the less resistant we are to change. The more dependent we are on God, the less we have to fear new truth, or new lies! The more dependent we are on God, the less we are tempted by sin and Satan. The more dependent we are on God, the less we are sucked in and swayed by the ever-shifting standards of our culture. The more dependent we are on God, the deeper our lives will become. The more dependent we are on God, the more risks we are willing to take. The more dependent we are on God, the more money, and time we will give to God's work. The more dependent we are on God, the greater miracles we'll see in our lives. The more dependent we are on God, the more we'll become like Jesus. The more dependent we are on God, the more we'll cease the nonsense that passes for "Church" and the more we'll become an authentic, C.C.C! AMEN! Our soul...depends on God!

Growing deeper is not a natural byproduct of growing older, it's a supernatural byproduct of obeying...unwaveringly, thinking...honestly, following...dependently. I want to encourage you, no matter your place or station in life; no matter your physical age or spiritual position; no matter your social condition or occupational reality; I want to encourage each of US to grow our faith NOW, start today. Read your Bible, pray your prayers, join a Bible Study, attend a class, share your life, GROW YOUR FAITH! What ever it takes, where ever it takes you, whenever you can, however you must; get your life in order to journey deeper with Jesus...and watch how our soul emerges healthier in this new C.C.C.

The apostle Paul, who knew a thing or two about growing deeper; wrote an encouraging message to the church at Ephesus. Here is how Eugene Peterson translated that message; I think it speaks well to us, and summarizes what I've tried to say today:

God handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ. No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love. Ephesians 4: 11-16

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Three Keys to a ‘Growing-Deeper’ Life:

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