

XL'ent News

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The High Cost of Commitment

1 Peter 5:3

Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge,
but proving to be examples to the flock.

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example,
and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Lack of commitment to the Lord abounds in our society. Sin is quickly justified and spiritual disciplines are dismissed as legalism. Personal evangelism can be extremely awkward and is often left as a task for the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the fields are white unto harvest, and yet with more professing Christians than ever in the history of the world, we seem to be having very limited impact. Leadership in churches today is often a case of who is willing to take the job rather than who is clearly living out their faith and ministry. In the midst of the chaos, the Lord calls us to walk as examples for others to follow. The lack of commitment we see in the ranks should not deter us from the Christian walk. We should be all the more diligent to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. At times it would be far easier to join the ranks of the moderates than to call out for personal commitment and sacrifice. Even in the ministry of Jesus there were only a few times when the multitudes would follow Him. He was most popular when He gave them what they wanted (bread, healing, hints of a kingdom to come). Most of the time there were only a few who were truly committed. At times, even they wavered. For those of you who are continuing to serve the Lord, please don't allow Satan to cause you to be distracted. Your personal responsibility is to live a life that presents a clear example to others of how to live out their faith. A few may follow, many will only talk about it. Regardless, Jesus changed the world with only a few. Be imitators of Him!

Camps, The Lifeblood of Youth Ministry

Ah camps and retreats, the lifeblood of youth ministry. What a joy to spend several days away from the hustle and bustle of life while turning thoughts and attention toward God. These sorts of events just naturally flow from anyone interested in youth ministry right? Wrong! Running even a small retreat can be more complicated than programming a VCR or trying to understand the simplest of political decisions. Following is the story of one man's adventurous journey into the bizarre world of retreat planning and preparation.

It really did not seem like running the retreat would be that big of a deal. After all, it was only two nights and twenty-six people (or was it 28?). Any ways, things were cruising along smoothly until I looked at the calendar. "Wasn't it just yesterday that I had two weeks to make the reservation?" I thought as I frantically dialed the phone, "Oooh, my youth pastor was going to be steamed when he learned of the two hundred dollars extra it was going to cost to reserve late."

With that crisis past, I turned my efforts to the easy stuff, buying food. "Piece of cake," I thought as I stood in line at Sam's, "Why was I worried about a simple thing like buying food?" I made a mental note to stop asking myself stupid questions as I reached the cashier and realized my brain spasm in forgetting to bring any form of payment (youth pastors with checkbooks are a Godsend!).

Finally the day for departure arrived. Everything went smoothly until we started loading into vehicles. It soon became apparent that in order to get everyone to camp we were going to have to set a new Guinness Book of World Records record for the amount of teenagers who could be stuffed into, underneath and on top of a suburban. I'm still not sure where the extra car came from, but we didn't have to leave anyone in the parking lot.

Once at the camp I learned some interesting things. First, I am a better cook than I thought. Second, trying to cook and run a camp is a little like trying to stop a locomotive with a fly swatter — no matter how you try it, you're gonna get creamed! My crowning achievement was bringing enough cash to pay for everything...except the cost of taking the vehicles into the camp area. Why is it that asking your parents for money is easy, but asking a frowning youth pastor for a little extra cash takes the courage of a bungee jumper (or was that stupidity)! All in all things worked out pretty well, and I sure learned a lot. I thank the Lord for His grace, good leaders, and opportunity to learn about ministry (with someone to lean on when things go wrong!).

Editor's Note

Zephaniah 3:17

"The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, *He will be quiet in His love*, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."
(*Emphasis mine*)

I recently came across this verse while teaching an overview of the Minor Prophets to our Junior High group. This particular passage comes at the end of a book which is filled with doom, gloom and the utter destruction of the nations by God in the "Great Day of the Lord!" What a joy it was for me to be reminded, that although there will be a day of judgment; I as a child of God will be saved from destruction. In fact, my Savior exults over me with joy! Certainly this image of God is much different than the one I often carry in my head — The rational, powerful, stern, Creator of the Universe sitting in heaven and calmly surveying all that is His. He is so excited about His children, His "remnant," that He cannot contain himself, but bursts out with shouts of joy! The phrase that really galvanized my attention,

however, states simply, "He will be quiet in His love." When I looked at commentaries for a way to translate this statement I found that most disagreed on what exactly it meant.

As I researched the words and struggled for an analogy, one finally clicked into place. I have the joy and privilege of being a new father (little Josiah is now 6 ½ months old and possibly the cutest being on the planet!). One morning not long ago I got up early for a meeting and then returned home for something I had forgotten. While I was gone, my wife had taken our son from his crib (no doubt he was screaming bloody murder), fed him, and then laid him carefully back to sleep on **my** pillow. When I peeked into our room all I could see over the snugly secured covers were his serenely closed eyelids; his red, pudgy cheeks; and just the tip of his tiny nose. In that moment, in the quietness of the early morning, I was overcome by how much I loved him. A love he had done nothing to deserve, but that flowed from the simple fact that he was **my** son. I savored the feeling of peace and calm for what seemed like a long time and then quietly shut the door and headed for work.

I wonder if that is what it means for God to love us quietly? Does He ever look deep into our hearts and simply rest in the quietness of His love for us? I think He does, and it humbles me beyond words. Why the mighty, all-powerful God would choose to love me in this way I cannot begin to fathom. When I view the love of God in this light it makes me want to serve Him faithfully, with all my heart, forever. I pray that in 1996 you will choose to serve the Lord because of His quiet love for you; that you will give Him everything you are, because He gave everything for you.

Book Nook

The Jesus I Never Knew

By Philip Yancey

In Philip Yancey's book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, the author's stated purpose is to, "look at Jesus' life 'from below,' as a spectator, one of the many who followed him around." His desire is to strip away the layers of tradition and doctrine we have built up around the person of Jesus over the last two thousand years and, in the words of Martin Luther, "draw Christ as deep as possible into the flesh."

Who He Was

In this section, the author looks at three aspects of Jesus, his birth, his background and his temptation. In discussing His birth, Yancey offers four words to represent God as he came to earth in a human body. Jesus was humble, he "made himself nothing". Jesus was approachable - God who "alone lives in unapproachable light" slept, danced, ate and cried with his disciples. Jesus was an underdog - it seemed as if he had been overmatched by the forces against him... until the third day! Jesus was courageous - he chose to lay aside power and glory to reside with violent, hateful men - he even chose to be put to death by those same puny beings. Surely these acts of courage are the greatest ever recorded in history.

Jesus also grew up in a culture that had great expectations for their Messiah and when he failed to fulfill those dreams they turned on him in savagery and hate.

Yancey analyzes the temptation of Jesus and comes away impressed with His restraint. He states this best when he says, "I believe God insists on such restraint because no pyrotechnic displays of omnipotence will achieve the response he desires."

Why He Came

In this section we get snapshots of Jesus' message, mission, miracles, death and resurrection. In detailing Jesus' message, the author notes his personal struggle with understanding the Beatitudes. His conclusion is that Jesus presented us with these words so that we would understand God's ideal, strive to reach it out of love for him, and yet understand that only through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross will we ever be able to achieve the holiness required of us.

The author now turns to a discussion of Jesus' mission. He concludes that it was one of grace. To bring in the sinner, the unlovely, and the unclean was Jesus' ultimate purpose. In Jesus' miracles, Yancey once again finds an incredible restraint. The Almighty God in the flesh, who could have done anything, chose to veil his power. The people demanded signs to gratify their desires, but ultimately rejected Jesus in spite of his miracles.

Finally, Yancey speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection. In death he sees the incredible restraint of God who could have leapt from the cross at any moment and brought down legions of angels to take revenge on a petty, evil and hateful people, but he also details the deep love of a father who was willing to relinquish power for the sake of reconciliation with his children. In Jesus' defining moment in history in which God defeats death, pain and misery and returns hope to the world in the form of eternal life spent in heaven.

What He Left Behind

The concluding section of the book deals with Jesus' ascension and the mystery of the Kingdom. Yancey is amazed at the ascension, "How can it be that he went away?" He answers this question by explaining that it is we who are the "bodies in which Jesus will begin again the life he lived on earth." While Jesus may seem to be absent, he has really taken up residence in the poor, the hungry, the prisoner and sick. He has left the church to be his hands and feet. The question to ask about history is not where is God when it hurts, but where is the church!

In the Kingdom of God, Yancey sees not a power structure or political platform (Jesus never engaged in politics), but a lifestyle. It lives and grows on the inside of human beings.

Conclusion

I enjoyed this book and was challenged to review several of the assumptions I had made about who Jesus was. Most of all, I was inspired to look at Jesus more closely

and to spend my time trying to imitate Him. So often I formulate my own opinion about what true Christianity is and then try to get Jesus to imitate me!

The final question that stood out in my mind after finishing the book was, "How can I live a life of holiness and purity, while still attracting sinners?" Jesus was a friend of sinners and they flocked to him - yet he lived a life of sinless perfection. It must have been his love, tenderness, and compassion which drew them to Him - will it be the same for me?

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