



Navigating the Rapids

By
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What does it mean to grow in the Christian life? When I work with churches and coach clergy and lay folk, I often talk about the fact that God wants us to grow in our faith, that God is calling us to “go deeper.” For many in my mainline flavor of Christianity, this is confusing. Mainline churches don’t often talk about the details of Christian discipleship. So I am asked what the steps are in “going deeper.”

Obviously, there is a rich literature in this. And it is important to remember that “going deeper” is a process that will never end in our lifetimes. We will never become the “perfect Christian disciple.” But I have found that there are seven building blocks that help to explain this complex process in a simple way. These are not my invention; they are developed from scripture and from Christian tradition. I was helped in articulating them by writer and church consultant, Tom Bandy, who is a fellow columnist for Net Results.

The first three building blocks are as follows, I will talk about the next four in my next column:

Daily prayer for strangers: Research tells us that most Americans pray. But if you ask what they pray about, you will find that most of our prayers concern those that are closest to us: family, friends, and things like our health, paying the bills, or finding a job. These things should be prayed for, but a Christian who desires to go deeper will go beyond these and conscientiously pray for strangers. Whether it be praying for those in emergency vehicles and all that they will encounter as you hear their sirens, praying after reading or hearing news events, or just reviewing your day and pray-

ing for each person you encountered; daily prayer for strangers is a building block in the discipleship process.

Daily engagement with scripture: Few of us are biblical scholars, but all are called to seek ways in which to apply biblical truths in our lives. A disciple engages with scripture. This may mean something as complex as deep Bible study with intense notes and commentaries. It may mean reading devotionals that are based on scripture. It may even mean just opening the Bible and reading a psalm. The difference depends upon the personality and need of the disciple. The point is to set aside the time every day to read some scripture and reflect upon how it applies in your life and in God’s world.

Daily coming before God and taking an inventory of personal behavior: The language of this building block comes to us from steps nine and ten of the Twelve Step tradition. Other traditions within Christianity call it “a time of personal confession before God.” Quite simply, it means to take the time daily to come before God in prayer and write about or just review your behavior over the last twenty-four hours, asking yourself the following questions: How did my behavior reflect on my faith in Jesus Christ? In which situations did I show my best self, the self that God created me to be? In which situations did I fail in this? And do I need to make amends for any of my behavior today?

The most important thing about these building blocks is that they work. As a disciple uses these tools in a disciplined way, he or she will find that they are “going deeper” and drawing nearer to God. 