

Intentional Faith Development II

I'm going to reiterate a couple of points from last week so I can build on them and launch into something new.

When you become a Christian, when you are saved, when you convert, when you join the church that is not the end. You cannot sit back and relax because you've "made it." Your commitment to Christ, no matter how or when you made it, is the beginning of your Christian spiritual journey – a journey that will lead you closer and closer to God, and to greater and greater maturity in your faith. If your faith today is identical to your faith 10 years ago, you need to be rattled.

Intentional Faith Development occurs in groups, small group, where you might find a mentor or role models in the faith. In addition, you will be held accountable to do what you agreed to do when you joined the group, whether it's to read the Bible regularly, or practice prayer regularly, or read the chapter of the book you are scheduled to discuss each week. We are all more likely to do something when other people are counting on us to do it. This is not a word against personal devotions all by yourself at home. That is very important also. The two practices – personal devotions and small group practices – compliment each other. To not do one (or either) is to cheat yourself out of a means of grace, a way for God to enter your heart and transform you.

A friend of mine, who is a pastor on this district, said he was in a "town hall meeting" with his congregation. At some point a member said, "I'll show up on Sundays, bring my pledge, and you should visit me when I go into the nursing home, and preside at my funeral. Otherwise, leave me alone." Evidently, this was the attitude of much of his congregation.

These sad folks are not interested in Intentional Faith Development, or any kind of spiritual growth. They seem to see the church as a kind of service station, where they pay for what they want, but they don't want to be bothered otherwise.

Another way to look at Intentional Faith Development is to compare it with one's education. How many of us went to Sunday school as children? How many of us stopped going to Sunday school as soon as our parents stopped making us go? This show of hands would indicate that many of us are going through our spiritual lives with approximately a sixth grade education. How many of us would be where we are today if our secular education stopped when our Sunday school education stopped?

Over the years, this church has sponsored a number of Bible Studies (long-term and short-term), book studies and prayer groups. The opportunities for Intentional Faith Development have always been available. As we continue through the Five Practices, we'll find new and exciting ways to have these groups, so that you might find a way to devote yourself more intentionally to listening to God, to Intentional Faith Development.

Walt Westbrook, October 25, 2009