

Why Your Lows Can be Highs When It Comes to Making Disciples

When you grow up in Texas, as I did, you were schooled up in the stories of the Alamo. It's legendary – a small group of freedom fighters that took their stand against incredible odds in the small mission in San Antonio (of course, I only later found out that these “heroes” were not quite the upstanding patriots I thought they were as a kid, but I digress...)

Stories of Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, and William Barrett Travis were the stuff of legend. I'm sure I wasn't the only kid who petitioned his or her parents to, at some point, jump in the car and make our way down to San Antonio to see the real Alamo. And one year, we did.

I was... disappointed. I don't know what I expected, but it was certainly a little more than what was there. Just a few crumbling walls. Right in the middle of the city. In fact, the only real part of the tour I remember was that they had Davy Crockett's actual razor.

That's sort of picture of life in some ways, isn't it? You get yourself worked up over something – some vacation, some promotion, some relationship, some next stage of life, and then that “thing” happens. The vast majority of the time, it in no way lives up to the expectations you had for it in your mind. Or even worse, it doesn't happen at all, and you are crushed under the weight of what might have been. What *should* have been. At least in your mind. But in the end, the result is the same:

Disappointment.

And yet here again we see the truth that the best school of discipleship is life. Real life is where our faith is honed, grown, and proven. And moments of disappointment are moments ripe for discipleship. If you're experiencing some measure of disappointment today, then consider for a moment that this disappointment is actually a chance for spiritual growth for at least these four reasons:

1. Disappointment reminds of the only lasting satisfaction.

Ecclesiastes is a book all about disappointment. Solomon tried everything, and he tried everything to the extreme. But no matter what he devoted himself to, no matter what it was that he soaked the marrow from, he came up empty. His constant refrain through all his attempts at satisfaction was “Vanity! Meaningless!” There was nothing under the sun for him that offered true and lasting satisfaction.

It's still true. All these things on which we hang our greatest expectations will in some way come up short. The disappointment we feel is a cue to remind us again and again that true satisfaction can only be found out from under the sun. Take heed not only from Ecclesiastes, but from the prophet Isaiah in this:

“Come, everyone who is thirsty,

*come to the water;
and you without silver,
come, buy, and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without silver and without cost!
Why do you spend silver on what is not food,
and your wages on what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and you will enjoy the choicest of foods.
Pay attention and come to me;
listen, so that you will live” (Isaiah 55:1-3).*

2. Disappointment exposes the truth in our hearts.

We have an incredible knack for self-deception. Often times, we don't actually know the depths of our own hearts. We don't know just how much of our hope, how much of our joy, how much of our self-worth and value we have invested in a particular thing until that thing goes away. The level of disappointment we feel is more than just painful; it's revelatory. It shows us the truth about our own hearts. And the truth is always a good thing.

It's a good thing for us because we have an incredible capacity for self-deception. We can talk ourselves into thinking that we are loving Jesus, treasuring Jesus, valuing Jesus above all things. In fact, the only way we might know that it's not true is through our level of disappointment. So when we are disappointed, it's a great chance for us to have a window of clarity in our own hearts so that we might repent and then continue forward with Jesus. So says the prophet Jeremiah:

*“For my people have committed a double evil:
They have abandoned me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug cisterns for themselves—
cracked cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13).*

3. Disappointment is a chance to grow in perseverance.

It's really not a question of whether or not you will be disappointed; it's only a question of when, and to what level. So if it's a certainty that we will experience disappointment, then we ought to be asking ourselves what will happen next. Disappointment can either crush us, paralyzing us into inactivity, or we can carry on. Keep moving. Keep showing up.

If we choose the latter, then we find ourselves in a posture ready for discipleship, for that willingness to doggedly move forward, despite disappointment, is about perseverance. And perseverance is an essential component to growing in Christ:

Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance

have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4).

4. Disappointment reaffirms our faith in God as Father.

Finally, disappointment is an opportunity for discipleship because it's a chance for us to remind ourselves of God's goodness as our Father. Jesus taught His followers about the good Fatherhood of God in Luke 11:

"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:11-13).

Jesus' point is pretty simple here: God is a good Father. And a good Father knows how to give good gifts to His children. That doesn't mean He gives His children everything they ask for; this would, in fact, make Him a weak, insecure Father. He's better than that. He only gives fish. He only gives eggs.

Sometimes from our perspective, it might look as if God has given us a snake or a scorpion because we did not receive what we wanted from Him, and we feel disappointment. But in that moment, it's a chance for us to remind ourselves that despite what His answer looks like, He has given us a good gift. We can move forward in confidence, even if we are disappointed, because by faith we trust our Father.

Friends, you will be disappointed soon. Remember, disappointment might be painful, but it's also an opportunity. Don't waste it.

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