

## Going Deeper

I received a mailing this week from a young musician trying to kick-start a career by scheduling any concerts he can with any church willing to host him and collect a love offering. As many would-be Christian musicians as there are out there trying to get started, a young fellow had better say something striking in his marketing efforts that will set him apart from the pack. What this young fellow wrote was not really unique, but it was the one I received two days out from having a newsletter article due. His message was to the effect that we should “go deeper” than a surface Christian experience.

“Going deeper” ... Who can argue with the need as stated? Still, it dawned on me that I really don’t even know what that phrase means any more. I do know that nothing anyone can say to me in a song lyric will take me deeper with God. Perhaps, it can encourage me in that direction, but how much guidance for the journey will I derive from a concert?

I used to know what going deeper meant. Back when I was a teenager, I absolutely knew. Every year when I’d come home from a week of church camp and fall back into the dead old worship rhythm of my home church, I’d lament the fact that folks there did not want to be as deep or spiritual as me.

When I became a man, I put aside childish thinking, but maybe not. Going deeper became more a matter of looking for something more “intense” in worship, in Christian relationships and in other experiences. Anyone who did not share this yearning for intensity was clearly not as “deep” as me. But, over time, and after much disappointment in “shallower” believers, I finally arrived at a point of asking myself, “Is this yearning for intensity truly spiritual depth, or is it simply something that tires everyone around me, people who would be content to just be my friend?”

I wonder if “depth” measured in spiritual intensity is why Paul parted ways with Barnabas. On their first missionary journey, Barnabas’ nephew, Mark, had lost his nerve when the entourage approached the border of some truly pagan territory. Barnabas, the teddy bear of the pairing, was all for giving the young man a second chance. Paul, the intense one, was opposed. My inclination had always been to believe that Paul must have been right in this particular dispute. After all, he was Paul. But years later, from prison, Paul would long for Mark’s company. Surely, Mark had matured, but is it also possible that Paul had become a bit more like Barnabas through the years and trials of ministry?

I think of people I have known through the years who were constantly yearning to go deeper. I have not kept track of all of them, but I have kept track of some of them. I know of some who have shipwrecked their faith and dropped away from God altogether because, in their pursuit of experience and depth, they latched onto unreliable teachers. Others, who are too sound and who love the Lord too much to fall away, remain as joyless as ever. Some are still actively looking for the next deep thing, while still others have forged weird tiny cloisters of fellowship that are essentially impenetrable to the shallow outsider.

All of this is compounded when I observe some person I never considered particularly deep or thoughtful go through some horrible trial with a grace and faith that I can only hope I would demonstrate under similar circumstances. That, especially that, throws everything I thought I understood about spiritual depth upside down.

**Perhaps, we don't go deeper at all. Perhaps, deeper just happens.  
Better yet, perhaps, it is God Who takes us deeper.**

Who is not moved by music, camps, retreats, mission trips, beautiful landscapes and the like? But, while these things can cause us, to varying degrees, to sense God's hand and to intensify our yearning for Him, they are powerless to take us deeper. They can only point to "deeper".

If we really want to go deeper, we should start with the Bible and with prayer, but we cannot stop there as though there is some magic just in developing those disciplines. The key to going deeper is faithful obedience. When a certain course of obedience to God is hard, costly, frightening, unpopular in the world's eyes and foolish according to the wisdom of man, can we still exercise faith's courage to choose God's way? Can we choose generosity over self-interest? Can we choose service over being served?

This very well may be the path to "deeper," even though we may not realize it immediately. All we may notice is a marked improvement in the areas of "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*" (*Galatians 5:22, 23*).

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