

Contagious Love: Passing On Your Passion For God

BY CINDI MCMENAMIN

“Can we meet some time and talk?” Heather asked as I was packing up my teaching materials after the Bible study.

“Sure! How about now?” I responded. We ended up at a local coffee shop where Heather asked a slew of questions.

“I’m trying to learn all I can about walking with God,” she said. “What kind of books would you suggest that I read?”

I rattled off the titles of a few classics while Heather took notes.

“What else do you think I should be doing to grow spiritually?” she asked next, posing the question every discipler longs to hear.

I mentioned a Sunday morning class I would soon be teaching and a discipleship group being offered that summer. I could tell by the look on her face, however, that my answers weren’t what she was hoping for.

She dropped her eyes, and I sensed a bit of hesitation. “I want to, umm, be able to know the Bible and talk about it like you do.”

“Oh, so you’d like to teach?”

“No. I just want to, you know, get excited about it. . .really live it.”

Suddenly, I understood.

Heather wasn’t looking for books to read or things to do or classes to take. She didn’t want to know more. She wanted passion. She was searching for something to engage her heart. Our conversation opened my eyes to an element of discipling I hadn’t considered. It’s fairly simple to communicate a list of things to do and beliefs to understand. But how do we pass on our love for God?

I went home that day and began to take inventory: What had helped me move from knowing about God to a loving relationship with Him? As I began to share the following ideas with Heather, I watched her transform from a woman who simply professed Christ into a passionate follower.

Express your commitment daily.

Three basic principles have helped deepen my relationship with Jesus. They’re easy to remember and can be done every day. When Heather began to practice them, she found they made a world of difference in her love for God.

Tell God first. When I have exciting news, when my world crashes in, when I’m facing something bigger than I expected, I tell God about it before I tell anyone else. Sure, He already knows. But by going to God first with the things that are closest to my heart, I reaffirm to Him and to myself that He is the most important person in my life.

Take God seriously. I’ve found that I need to know what God wants from me and make

His will a priority. I take God seriously when I find out what He loves and cling to it, and when I become aware of what He hates and avoid it at all costs. I explained to Heather that taking God seriously means I prioritize my life so that nothing steals time from nurturing my relationship with Him.

Trust God fully. Sometimes God asks something of me, or allows something to happen, that I don't understand. That's where trust comes in. Trusting Him fully means I take my greatest fears to Him and place them at His feet. Heather and I talked about how to acknowledge that God is in control of our lives and how to trust Him to shape us for His purposes (Ro. 8:28). For example, when I say to God daily, "No matter what comes my way today, nothing comes between You and me," I am cementing my love relationship with Him.

Look for God all around you.

After Heather joined my Jazzercise class, we explored how each workout could be an expression of praise to God for the bodies and health He has given us. She began to see that worship could be incorporated into every facet of her life. Bringing God to our Jazzercise class brought up the question of how to look for Him (and how to praise Him) everywhere we go and in everything we do.

I told Heather about the day I took my daughter, Dana, to see *Hercules*. Although the movie is based on Greek mythology, one scene paralleled what Jesus did for us. After Hercules died to rescue the woman he loved, he became immortal. "Dana," I whispered excitedly, "that's what Jesus did for us—He gave His life for us so that we won't have to die. Now He lives eternally, and so will we!" The illustration made a lasting impression on my six-year-old daughter; the next day I heard her tell a four-year-old friend the story of salvation.

We can find God and examples of His story anywhere: in the beauty of creation, in the lyrics of a song, in a movie scene, in an exercise class. As I showed Heather how to be alert to God in everyday life, her relationship with Him began to encompass everything she did, not just church and Bible study.

Linger in God's presence.

The next time Heather and I got together, I told her what makes me want to meet with God every day. She was interested to hear that I originally set a daily appointment with God out of obligation. But after discovering some meaningful ways to get into His Word and to worship Him, I began coming to Him because I wanted to. The more I lingered with Him, the more my love grew. I suggested that Heather incorporate the following elements into a regular time with God.

Spend time in the Psalms. Because these emotional songs engage our hearts, it's difficult to encounter them without being changed by their passion. Together, we paraphrased a psalm, personalized it, and prayed it back to God. We even sang one. Heather was excited to realize that some of the songs we sing in church come straight from Scripture.

Put yourself in the picture. I showed Heather how to read one of the stories in the gospels and put herself in the place of one of the characters. How would it feel to be talking to Jesus

face-to-face? What would He tell her? What might He be saying to her now about a personal situation? As Heather began to experience Jesus as a person, not just a belief, reading the Bible became something she looked forward to.

How can you pass along your love for God to the person you're discipling? The ideas I shared with Heather were meaningful to her because they came out of my personal pursuit of God. The ways you maintain a love relationship with God will likely be different from mine. But no matter how we express our love for God, Heather's questions helped me understand how important it is that the relationship shows. When our passion for God is visible, the person we're discipling may be prompted to ask, "How can I experience that too?"

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