

# BodyLife Articles

## Sharing the Journey

By Wayne Jacobsen and Clay Jacobsen

BodyLife • July 2003

Isn't it interesting that you can spend all day wandering through the busy streets of Manhattan without anyone noticing you, and yet anyone you pass on a hiking trail will not only notice you but usually will pause to find out where you've been and where you are headed? The street is anonymous - people passing in a hurry to get somewhere else. There are far too many people to even consider engaging in a conversation. You would never get anywhere.

Loneliness flourishes in large crowds. But I have yet to pass anyone on a hiking trail who didn't stop and talk at least briefly. The camaraderie of the trails is immediate, even if you are not likely to see each other again. For those brief moments the help and insight two people can share can make a huge difference.

If your Christian experience is a living journey instead of a plodding ritual, you will find the same thing to be true. When my Christianity was more static - consisting of attending services, doing church work and trying to be good - my fellowship with others stayed shallow. I remember coming home many nights frustrated from having spent an entire evening with other people but somehow having been unable to move the conversation beyond the weather, sports, family and current movies.

I wanted fellowship, but every time I would try to bring up something about God or Scripture the conversation grew stilted and awkward. Only in the last few years have I come to recognize that Christianity is a journey into ever-deepening levels of relationship and ever-widening spaces of freedom. When you're on that journey you will naturally talk about it in virtually every conversation you have, and when you connect with someone else who is sharing that journey, your conversation will be the best. Sharing the journey is as natural as breathing.

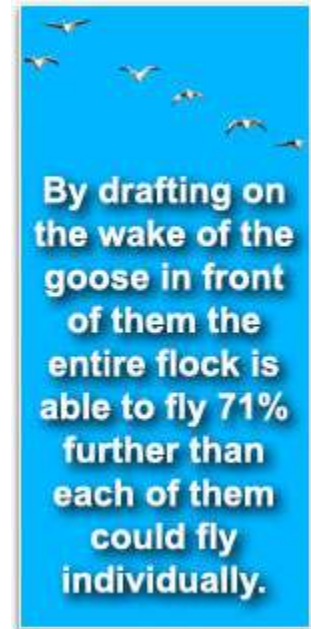
## Geese or Sparrows?

Watching a flock of Canada geese fly over in precise V-formation is an enthralling sight? How do you suppose they do that? Do they attend V-formation flying school when they are young? I can just see an older goose projecting a Powerpoint presentation against a birch tree and explaining to the younger birds that they must fly two feet to the outside wing of the goose in front of them, one foot behind and eighteen inches above its flight path so it will impress the humans below.

No, geese fly in a V-formation because flying in that exact spot allows them to fly in smoother air with less effort. If a goose falls out of position it immediately feels the added stress of flying on its own and moves back into position. Scientists estimate that by drafting on the wake of the goose in front of them the entire

flock is able to fly 71% further than each of them could fly individually. To accomplish this incredible feat the stronger birds in the flock will rotate the lead position so that no one bird wears out. According to NASA, "This allows a flock of birds with differing abilities to fly at a constant speed with a common endurance."

The reason you never see a flock of sparrows fly in V-formation is because they are not going anywhere. They flit around the yard from tree to tree, but at the end of the day they are in the same area. They could try to learn to fly in a V-formation, but by the time they got the formation together they would already be to the next tree and not need it. The same is true about fellowship. If Christianity is about rituals, routines and morals, our fellowship will suffer. We can rearrange our groupings or try a number of novel small-group techniques, but they will be as awkward as sparrows trying to fly in formation. But when Christianity is a life of growing dependence on God through the joys and challenges of our circumstances, pooling our wisdom becomes a natural extension of that life for us as it is for geese to fly in formation. When God is more real to you than the weather and the events of your day, you'll find him filling your conversations and fellowship will be immediate, powerful and alive.



## **Journey Talk**

I went to a men's breakfast group one morning where the participants pulled out scorecards and each reported how many days the previous week they had read Scripture, witnessed to an unbeliever or 'hit their knees' before 'hitting the shower.' They were holding each other accountable to disciplines they thought important. As sincere as they may have been to encourage each other, they were sincerely wrong.

These men had embraced a process of conformity, thinking it was their responsibility to motivate people to comply with their standards. Little did they realize that this process is the opposite of sharing the Christian journey. That is why accountability groups start with a wealth of zeal and quickly fade away. Can you imagine Jesus pulling out similar scorecards to check on his disciples?

Growing in relationship with God does not come through conformity, but through transformation. Relationships are organic and therefore defy all attempts to fit into any one-size-fits-all model. Rules, routines and rituals are the building blocks of religion, not relationship. People caught up in religion will always focus on obeying authority, accountability, meeting standards by human effort, finding fault, confronting failure and blaming others. In short conforming to these things can be quite painful, especially for those who struggle to conform to do the accepted thing. People instinctively know that instead of helping them know God better, these religious activities add stress and strain to the journey. That is why Paul told us over and over again not to have anything to do with people who wanted to boss

others, even if their aim was greater righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Galatians 5:7-10, 6:11-19; Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:16-19).

Paul wasn't against righteousness, but knew that true righteousness grew only out of a trusting relationship to the Father. This kingdom does not result from our efforts, but from his. "Apart from me you can do nothing," (John 15:5) Jesus said, calling us to depend on him. We do not share the journey by conforming others to what we think is best for them, but by encouraging each other to lean on Jesus.

Those on the journey talk about encouragement, help, service, support, love, compassion, forgiveness and trust. They will focus on loving God more freely and one another more openly, trusting God instead of trusting ourselves, being real instead of repeating 'right' answers, and taking the risk to follow God instead of meeting people's expectations. They won't force people into a mold, because they know people have to have their own journey with God so he can transform them into his likeness. Doing so lifts people higher instead of weighing them down with added obligations and responsibilities.

### **"Instruct one another"**

Teach? Me? Absolutely not! I couldn't possibly do that. I hate standing in front of people.

It is tragic that when most of us hear the word 'teaching' we think of standing in front of a roomful of people lecturing. That is a small slice of what real teaching is. In fact for most of human history teaching was done one-on-one, in tutoring or apprenticeships. When share a favorite recipe with a friend; tell someone about a favorite article, book or thought; or you show a child how to use a fork, you are teaching.

We are all teachers. Sharing with others the insights God drops into our lives, or lessons we have picked up from others is the most powerful process for learning the lessons we need for the journey. The vast majority of teaching doesn't happen in lecture halls, but in conversations in which we share what we have discovered to help others.

One of the hardest things to motivate small-group participants to do is to come ready to share. We have for so long been schooled in the notion that we gather as a body to receive what a few professionals have prepared for us that believers shy away from sharing a psalm, a word, a prayer - anything! Getting together with other Christians should be like a spiritual potluck where different ones bring something to share (I Corinthians 14:26).

I once met with a home group that grew awkwardly quiet as we began. It was the kind of meeting everyone hates, because no one has anything to share. After a song or two, it was clear that we weren't going anywhere. "It seems to me that we're all a bit tired tonight," I ventured. People nodded. "Did anyone bring anything to share with us?" Everyone looked around the room but there were no takers. "We have two choices, then. We can either press through our tiredness and see if God has something for

us tonight, or we can just admit that we're all tired and unprepared, call it a night, and try again next week.?

We agreed to try again next week. It was only a 10-minute meeting, but a powerful learning experience. We didn't force anything to happen, nor did we go through the motions just to make us feel good. If we had it would have been the same as pretending to eat at a potluck to which no one had brought food. We wouldn't do it nor would we ask our hosts to empty their freezer and feed everyone who hadn't come prepared.

Until that notion of body life captures our heart, and we realize that God wants to use each of us to share his wisdom with others, we'll miss out on the best teaching available in the body of Christ today. Whenever I see something in Scripture that touches my life, I always look for someone else it might bless.

### **"Admonishing one another"**

"Don't you think that was the most manipulative thing you've ever said?"

I couldn't have been more shocked at his words. He always encouraged me in things I'd written or preached. I thought yesterday's sermon on having a heart for outreach had been one of my best. I had looked forward to our lunch appointment all day because I knew Dave would be impressed.

"You're kidding, right?" I said laughing it off. His face told me he wasn't. I told him how powerful I thought the message had been and the positive feedback others had given me.

"I could be wrong," he said shrugging his shoulders. "But it looked to me like you were manipulating people with guilt to make them do what you wanted. I've learned that anytime my success depends on another person's response, I will manipulate them."

Only after a few days of mulling over my friend's words in prayer, did I finally understand. Even though my aim was noble, I had manipulated my audience and I called Dave to tell him so. That one conversation changed my life in powerful ways. Dave had spoken the truth to me out of a personal friendship that allowed it to bear fruit.

I love the way Dave spoke to me. He had the relationship to speak truthfully and firmly to me - as my friend, not my judge. He was honest with me, but didn't try to convince me even when I resisted. He trusted that God would have to make it clear. That is admonishment - our willingness to be gently honest with people we see making hurtful choices. How many times have you walked away from a conversation wishing you had been more honest?

Admonishment was part of the early church's body life. Paul rebuked Peter for discriminating against

Gentile believers in the face of his Jewish friends (Galatians 2:11-15). And the writer of Hebrews rebuked believers who were throwing away their confidence in the mist of difficult times (Hebrews 10:35-39). Still, the New Testament uses words like encourage or build up fifty-six times, and to rebuke or admonish only 7 times. That seems like a pretty good ratio to me. Though I have learned some of my greatest lessons from Dave, he has affirmed God's work in me at least eight times more than he has pointed out something that concerned him.

When people use admonishment to point out the faults of others so the former feel better about themselves, they kill genuine fellowship. We are not called to confront one another constantly or hold each other to exacting standards. We are to encourage one another along the journey of being transformed by God and only admonish each other when it will help them walk in greater wisdom.

Our past encouragements will make any admonishment easier to heed. Don't force admonishment on others. Share what you see and trust the Holy Spirit to make it clear to them. Remember, we are only sharing a journey; we are not called to badger one another into righteousness or nit pick at one another's faults.

---

© Copyright 2012 Lifestream Ministries

*Permission is hereby granted to anyone wishing to make copies for free distribution.*