

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/27/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Faith changes us. The more deeply we commit ourselves to GOD'S will and plan for ourselves and the world, the more our values and priorities change. We go from thinking about what I want to asking, "What does GOD want from me?" This change can be powerful and also a little bit scary as it leads us to places we might otherwise never have gone. But it can also be freeing as we are invited to shed old ways of doing things and embrace the new things that GOD is doing.

But what do we do if we're growing and changing and expanding our spiritual perspectives, but those around us are not? What do we do if family and friends and even fellow church members aren't changing as quickly or in the same ways. What do we do if we sense that GOD is leading us to new ventures but others don't also perceive that leading?

First, it is important to recognize that you can't take others where they don't want to go. Though you may rejoice in the freedom you've found in your walk with CHRIST, remember that these former ways still works for some people. They like it. It feels safe. It offers them meaning and security. So, be gracious and respectful of where they are even when it is not where you are.

Second, know that your growth in faith may cause friction and even damage relationships. In Luke 14:26, JESUS say, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such person cannot be my disciple.*" JESUS is not saying that one of our goals should be to "hate" our family and friends. Rather, HE is saying, first of all, that our love for HIM must cause all other relationship to pale by comparison. And secondly, the day may come when we have to choose between those close to us and CHRIST when the values and priorities of others come in conflict with that to which JESUS calls us. Families, friends, churches, organizations, and other groups have a common core which keeps things running smoothly. When our faith leads us to challenge this center, we may experience push-back or conflict. Recognize that your new response to GOD can be threatening to them. You are being a disruption to them and their status quo. You may even find yourself labeled a heretic when viewed by the rest of the group.

When such conflict comes about, don't make changing them your primary goal. While it's good to seek opportunities to share why you are in the place you are now, don't presume that they also need to be there, too. Simply hope that they will at least gain some understanding of where are and can be accepting of such change. If they are not able, then it may be necessary to set some boundaries in order to protect your ongoing growth.

Third, rejoice in where GOD is leading you. Not because of what you've done or how much better you are now, but because you are grateful for what GOD has given you. Recognize that you are not the person you were six months, a year, or however long it has taken to bring you to this point. But also note that this is not your own doing. It is a blessing from GOD that has brought you to this point. And if that doesn't first and foremost make you grateful, that what have you gained?

Fourth, remember that you are not alone. The Bible is full of stories of people who were led into new lives and new ways of doing things because of their encounter with the living GOD. And there are plenty of folks around you too who have experienced such transformation. Seek them out for their

support and encouragement and guiding. One of the ways that GOD brings about change is by bringing people into our lives that can help us in our growth. GOD calls us into community so that we can experience from and through others the kind of help that will continue to help us grow to be the people GOD wants us to be.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey