



DISCIPLESHIP IS MESSY BUSINESS



his place is gorgeous! But the people!” blurted out a fellow traveler as he dealt with a bureaucrat while visiting a Mediterranean country. We were in one of the most picturesque places on the planet, yet the idiotic and illogical actions of a ticket agent had tainted the scene. Isn’t it amazing how the ugly actions and attitudes of even one person can put a damper on your day and steal the beauty?

Working with people can be a real pain. But shouldn’t this be expected? After all, each of us comes from the same fallen parents, Adam and Eve. As one of my friends puts it, “We’re all a mess.”

But shouldn’t the church be different from the world? Once we’ve trusted Christ and been saved, shouldn’t we all just get along in the church and be set free from the irritating habits and ugly behaviors of the world?

The answer to these questions from my reading of Scripture is a yes and a no. On the one hand, once we surrender our lives to Jesus, the Scriptures declare that we are holy. Paul writes to the believers in Corinth, “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people” (1 Cor 1:2).

Notice that believers are characterized as being “sanctified,” in other words, they have been declared holy and set apart for God. At the same time, they are still “called to be holy” and actually live out their new identity in Christ.

If Paul’s letter of 1 Corinthians is any clue to us, we shouldn’t expect relationships in the church to be easy. Paul addresses all kinds of human foibles, busted relationships, and corruption that are taking place in the midst of God’s people, the church. It is clear that it would be naïve to think that church life will be easy.

On the other hand, we should expect relationships among Christians to get better if we are seeking the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to help us live righteous and godly lives. As we seek to carry out the Great Commission, make disciples, and learn to obey all that Jesus commanded, we should see marked improvement in the way we love and care for one another.

If we don’t see improvement, then we need to question whether or not we are really Jesus’s disciples.

It is clear that discipleship is messy business. Just look at the antics of the apostles who walked and talked with Jesus. They were far from perfect and did some pretty stupid things. Yet God used them to “turn the world upside down.” That should be encouraging to us.

The good news for us is that Jesus has also chosen to work with you and me despite our “issues.”

If we are able to work through the messiness of our own discipleship process, I trust people will be able to say, “This place, the church, is gorgeous! And what loving and beautiful people!” ■





C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

JOEL S. WOODRUFF, ED.D.

DISCIPLESHIP IS MESSY BUSINESS



JOEL S. WOODRUFF, ED.D.

PRESIDENT, C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE

Joel Woodruff, President, C.S. Lewis Institute, has worked in higher education, “tent-making,” nonprofit administration, and pastoral ministries in Alaska, Israel, Hungary, France, and Northern Virginia. He served as Dean of Students, Chaplain, and Professor of Bible & Theology at European Bible Institute, where he helped train Europeans both for professional ministry and to be Christian leaders in the marketplace. Prior to joining the Institute, he was on the leadership team of Oakwood Services International, a nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization. He is a graduate of Wheaton College, earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

As a Parish-Pulpit Fellow, he studied Biblical Backgrounds & Archaeology in Israel for a year.