**Indisputable Evidence**

**FBC Albemarle**

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In his book *The Good and Beautiful God*, James Bryan Smith tells a story of Craig. “Craig is a zoo architect, which requires him to travel a lot. One day he and his business colleague were flying back to the United States from Germany when they got stuck in the Atlanta airport and were told their flight home would be delayed several hours. Those several hours passed, and a few more, and then finally they were told the flight had been cancelled. The delay meant that there were no options to get home that night, and they would have to spend the night in Atlanta.

As you might imagine, the anger level at the gate was reaching a fever pitch. All of the passengers were forced into a long line to rebook their flights. Craig and his friend stood in line and watched as each person spoke harshly to the young woman who was trying to help them. When it was Craig’s turn, he looked at the young woman, smiled and said, “I promise I am not going to be mean to you.” Her countenance softened, and she said softly, “Thank you.” Their exchange was pleasant, and he got their flights rebooked for the next day. As they walked down the concourse, Craig was smiling despite the disappointment. His business partner had been watching him. He said, “Craig, I have known you for a long time. A year ago you would have been enraged by what we went through today, and you would have lit into that woman at the counter.”

Craig said, “You know what, you’re right. But I have changed. I know who I am, and I know where I am. I am a person in who Christ dwells, and I live in the kingdom of God who loves me and is caring for me. I’m frustrated, but I’m still at peace. We’ll get home tomorrow. There’s nothing for us to do. Anger doesn’t help anything. I figure we might as well enjoy this unexpected turn of events.”

His friend just shook his head in amazement. “I’m not sure what you’ve been eating or drinking, but you have really changed.””

Craig experienced a change in his life because he chose to live by the Spirit. Verse 16 starts with “So I say,” which indicates that Paul was about to make a final statement of his argument. His argument originates back to verse 1 of chapter 5. Paul charged his readers to not subject themselves to the “yoke of slavery.” Rather, Christ set us free. Last week, we talked about the tension between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. Christ has set us free from the laws because he has fulfilled the law through his life and example. Therefore, the freedom that his followers now enjoy isn’t a freedom to engage in self-indulgence but freedom to exercise love toward others.

Paul understood that there are two competing masters who strive to control us: “the Spirit” and “the flesh.” We cannot serve both masters. We must hate one and love the other. If we live by the flesh, we will serve the world and ourselves. If we choose to live by the Spirit, Paul said that we would produce the fruit (or the by-product) of the Spirit. When we choose to follow the Spirit, we will produce indisputable evidence who our true Master is. It is only through the Spirit that we can display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Notice we don’t produce just one or two but the Spirit will produce all of these in our lives.

As we continue to ponder on this idea of having Sticky Faith (or a faith that lasts), what must we do to produce the indisputable evidence of Jesus in our lives? How must we change the way we think about our relationship with Christ? First, we need to believe discipleship is not an option as a follower of Jesus. I believe modern day church has helped to create a problem within today’s Christianity. Through over-emphasizing programs such as discipleship training and the multitude of different classes, we have made discipleship a program where people have a choice whether to participate or not. In most churches, discipleship is a program offered as voluntary classes. However, a different model was presented to the Church before Jesus ascended into heaven. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus charges his followers to go and make disciples. Only then are they to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In his book *The Spirit of Disciplines*, Dallas Willard wrote this about discipleship: “The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian—especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the Kingdom of God.” Eugene Peterson makes a similar charge in his book *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*: “Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim.” In another words, discipleship is part of our Christian lives, not an add-on or a special package we can sign up for.

In Jesus’ time, discipleship meant a person had to drop everything in life and follow Jesus from town to town, learning to be like him in thought, attitude, and action. It was costly to become a disciple of Christ. Though disciples cannot be with Jesus in the same way today, the “priorities and intentions of disciples are forever the same.” Followers of Jesus still must count the cost of discipleship and choose to become Christ-like, doing whatever it takes to be like him in faith and practice. Henri Nouwen calls this “becoming the beloved.”

Second, we must believe that spiritual disciplines are a must! Last week, I talked about the fact that spiritual disciplines in and of themselves will not make us better Christians. However, the spiritual disciplines do put us in a better position to know and trust Christ more but it isn’t easy. In a world of smart phones, high-speed Internet, and fast food, postmodern people are in a hurry—even in Christian discipleship. We might desire to be Christ-like, but few are willing to put the time and energy into what it takes to be like Jesus. Richard J. Foster labels this the “doctrine of instant satisfaction.” Christians of all ages fall into the trap of desiring to be an instantly mature disciple without putting in the hard work of practicing spiritual disciplines that lead to spiritual maturity.

Dallas Willard gives a great example of those who desire to be like Christ but are unwilling to do the work. He uses a metaphor of a fan watching his favorite baseball player and imitating everything the player does in the batter’s box. The fan stands at the plate like the player, goes through the batting ritual like the player, and might even dress like the player. However, the fan has not put in the practice time honing the skills necessary to hit a baseball that is coming toward him at 100 miles per hour. The fan has not spent time in the batting cage, whacking countless balls for hours. The fan has not trained the eye to see the spin of the pitch to determine whether it is a fastball, curve ball, or a slider. Willard says, “A baseball player who expects to excel in the game without adequate exercise of his body is no more ridiculous than the Christian who hoped to be able to act in the manner of Christ when put to the test without the appropriate exercise in godly living.” Choosing to become a disciple of Christ is immediate, but becoming Christ-like in discipleship takes a lifetime. Eugene Peterson refers to this as “long obedience in the same direction.” Discipleship is a lifelong process that requires a commitment to follow the ways of Christ in faith and practice.

Lastly, we need to know that it is the Holy Spirit’s job to change our hearts and minds. Our job is to simply trust Jesus and follow his commands. The constant aim of the Spirit is to point us to the Father and the Son. It is the Spirit that gently nudges us toward Jesus when our eyes get distracted. It is the Spirit that speaks to us in a still, small voice when we are anxious. It is the Spirit that comes alongside us, within us and around us as we engage in spiritual practices. Without the Spirit, the exercises would be in vain. When we open the Bible and begin to read slowly and listen for God, the Spirit illumines our mind and gives us direct word from God. Even prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit: Romans 8:26 says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” When we pray, we do not pray alone. The Holy Spirit subtly prompted us to pray, preceding us to prayer, and then prays with and for us. It is through the work of the Spirit that our hearts and minds are aligned with God’s kingdom, which is expressed through our attitudes, thoughts and actions.

What Craig demonstrated in the Atlanta airport from our beginning story was none other than the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot simply grit our teeth and produce the fruit. We cannot muster enough willpower to develop them in our lives. We cannot perform enough good works that will help us to have more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This “fruit” is the work of the Holy Spirit. Like the fruit on a tree, it is developed naturally from the inside to the outside. The fruit is the indisputable evidence of Sticky Faith in our lives. May we all grow together!