

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

November 2014

I almost missed going to the Great Barrier Reef. Why? I was afraid. I was a landlubber. Every time I swim in the ocean it reminds me of JAWS. But... I've learned to overcome my fears. So, scuba-diving, parachuting, zip-lining, bungee-jumping, roller coasters, hiking glaciers, white water rafting, have all become ways for me to learn to overcome my fear. The ocean is wide and deep and treacherous and truth be told I'd rather experience it by way of the beach than floating in the middle of it.

But the need to be safe is a dungeon of our own making. Fear is even the jailer of our souls. We all live in self made cells of *I can't do this*. To really know God is a special job of the courageous. It is for those martyrs who have gone on before us and earned a stained-glass window or plaster bust in some great cathedral. But this is not for us. We are too ordinary - too afraid of people who really want to know the deeper things of God. Those who hunger to know God are not like us. They are other worldly. They are funny looking. They live in monasteries. They are God-freaks who don't comb their hair. They preach on street corners and carry second-coming signs.

We rarely confess these fears out loud, but we spend a lot of our lives keeping them at a distance. Our playing it safe is done without fanfare. It is our way of amoeba-like living. We loll about our environment, bumping into life.

The ocean is too vast for us so we dump the Great Barrier Reef in favor of Gilligan's Island. I think most of us like Gilligan's Island because it was fixed sociology. The island was a prescribed world were Gilligan, the Skipper, Mary Ann, Ginger, the Professor and of course, the Howells were making life work as best as they could. None of them were going anywhere really. They were just living and talking of a bigger world. But their conversation never amounted to much and none of them sacrificed themselves in any major way to get off their island prison....

How often the church is like Gilligan's Island. Christians really aren't living on the edge. Do we really encourage each other to break out of our man-made box of insularity. So much of the teaching I hear in prison is only taught by teachers of "this is what I've been told" theology who will swear up and down they're right, because their mentor is right and their "take it to the bank" doctrines are really bankrupt spiritually. In fact, the best way to live comfortably as believers is except their "island" living. Men want you to take up your cross as long as it fits their "box". God forbid you risk yourself in some genuine spirituality like the New Testament church. No, keep your nose clean. Do your thesis work, your exegesis, your hermeneutical studies to properly tell them what the Scripture really means. Get on one of the committees or get some title in regard to the church. Attend the "deeper life" studies like Bridges to Life, yet some men's bridge looks like the Bridge over the River Kwai after the explosion, after the class. Or "Soul Survivor," finishing it acting like the game show and getting kicked off the island never to be seen again. Taking Authentic Manhood and being artificially grown, or The Bait of Satan class and still smelling "fishy". Some will say it is enough to "study" the deeper life, but remember you might lose your place on the parlay board if you actually "live" it.

Recently at another unit a popular study swept through the church called "Experiencing God". It is a very beautiful and demanding and profitable study. But I began to notice that many who were enrolled in the "Experiencing God" study course, weren't reading "Experiencing God" and experiencing God. They were only experiencing the book "Experiencing God" and then talking as if they had actually experienced God. It seemed an odd substitution to let the study of it serve as the experience. But it is fashionable these days to talk about how deep we are while we live on a "Gilligan's Island" of church life. Everything goes on as usual.

The worship teams continue their arguments. Men with no fruit in their lives are picked to be leaders. The spirit of Jezebel and a Python spirit are choking and running the chaplaincy department. False teaching is running amok. All the "opportunities for service" are parallel offerings to the "Experiencing God" study course.

I see the church not as an armory where we plan our conquests of fire, but as bunkers - island bunkers - where the chapel is nice and faith is a discussion. Occasionally we hear the roar of fusillades and we know that somewhere out there is a war. But for the moment the bunker is nice, the island is safe, and our friends are here with us.

Sometimes these "deeper life" studies are not a place to really contemplate a way to get off Gilligan's Island, but to show off your certificate to those who want to show off there's. Churches rarely ever take people to another level of knowing God. They only imprison people to come and sit for a couple of hours, affirm that the Sunday School teacher and speaker did a good job is pretty much all there is to the work of the kingdom.

Gilligan's Island might be more properly called Cape Fear. We huddle in the 'cleft of the rock' to avoid the storms, afraid to stand on the craggy height and cliffs and let them exhilarate us. I was struck one day by all the hymns that center on faith as a protective refuge: "O Safe to the Rock That is Higher Than I"; "Haven of Rest"; "I Have Found a Hiding Place"; "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus I come..."; "The Solid Rock"; "Hold the Fort For I am Coming"; "Under His Wings I am Safely Abiding"; "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" to name a few.

I will ever be grateful for the Great Barrier Reef. For once in my life (one of the first times) I faced my fears as I stood to board the boat, even as I felt the churning in my stomach. I wanted the adventure but doubted my ability. I thought of sharks. Could I? Should I? I climbed aboard. Glass masked young people, like movie stars, stretched their rubber suits around them and looked like glamorous Martians ready for an interplanetary invasion. The Great Barrier Reef? Should I?

So often these days I am caught trying to figure out what daring things I still have the courage to do. When I was younger nothing intimidated me, no hike seemed too dangerous. I once dove off a 70 foot waterfall. I have hiked the Grand Canyon at night. Snowboarded the Swiss Alps. Rafted the Mendenhall River in Alaska. Parachuted over the mountains of East Glacier National Park and kayaked through the Box at Taos, New Mexico. Now I consider the things I still haven't done but would like to: hike some distance along the Great Wall, hike and climb Mount Kilimanjaro, surf off Hawaii to name a few.

Jesus' point in the parable of the talents is that the kingdom of God is not for those who want to play it safe (Matthew 25:14-30). One servant received five talents, another two, and still another one. The man who received one was not rebuked because he only had one but because he was afraid to invest it and see what he could do with it. The man who is cast into outer darkness for his failure to try and increase his holdings is candid about why he didn't risk himself: "*I was afraid*" (Matthew 25:25)

FEAR

I couldn't help wonder if I might not be able to scuba dive into the depths. There are three primary fears that could have kept me from the depths. First the fear of *I've never done that before*. I believe that most Christians at one time or another wonder what life is like at the depths. But they are frightened away simply in knowing they've never done it before. A friend once went to a national franchise pizza parlor. These places are known for their children's play areas, which include a tube maze. His very small son wanted to go in the tubes and play, but it was dark inside the tubes and he was paralyzed by fear. His daddy sensed his fear and did a wonderful thing. While his son watched from a safe distance, his father crawled into the tubes and emerged smiling and happy. His son, in joyful abandon, went and did likewise.

This, of course, is the meaning of the incarnation. Jesus became a man to show us that what we fear is altogether possible. He didn't live close to God to show us His special status, but to say that everyone can do this. Hebrews 12:2, speaking of Jesus, says, "*let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.*" The word "pioneer", *archegos*, is used here. It means "first goer". Jesus lived the deeper life not to intimidate us with something unmanageable but to mentor for us a wholly accessible lifestyle.

The second fear that intimidates us is *I don't want to end up some kind of religious kook!* We all know of religious fanatics who have gone off on some kind of tangent. Their lives are lived beyond the "circle" of "normal" people. These fanatics may appear odd to those on the inside, but some of them have one great gift that those on the outside do not: perspective. They - because they are on the outside - can see the whole circle at once.

Jesus in this sense was a part of Judaism but was divergent at the same time. This is called being tangential. Not being a member of the Pharisees and Sadducees may have left him without the academic credentials He needed to be certified as a genuine Rabbi, but it gave Him the perspective to see the oddities and inconsistencies of those 'inside'. Most often those who have lived the deeper life were outsiders to popular esteem. Wesley, the Carmelites, Luther and others were forced out of the circle by those 'inside'. But in the light of history, they were not kooks but luminaries. Those who never risk themselves to know the deep, never know the triumph of a daring spirituality. Preach the gospel! Lay hands on the sick, cleanse the leper, cast out devils, speak in tongues, prophesy!

The final fear we have is *I am just not material for the deeper life*. To this I can only say that those who have risked themselves in the depths of God never did it to establish themselves as saints. They never saw themselves as heroes. In fact they turned from every notion that they were in any sense a religious specialist or icon. They were merely people hungry for God.

But once you have known the depths of Christ, being head honcho seems less important. Those who have dared to live the deeper life never meant to orient their preferences around longing for the deep, it's just that once you've been to the Great Barrier Reef, wading pools hold little interest.

Ezekiel saw the God who ever entices us into a richer experience with Him. God is always out ahead beckoning us out into the deep. Ezekiel wrote:

As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off 1000 cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand but now it was a river that I could not cross because the water had risen and it was deep enough to swim in a river that no one could cross. (Ezekiel 47:3-5)

But Ezekiel's flood does not threaten us. It is the grand enticement that overwhelms us with joy. It fits us for the anthem of our addiction to all things glorious!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean
in its fullness over me;
underneath me, all around me,
is the current of your love;
leading onward, leading homeward,
to my glorious rest above

....Samuel Francis hymn-writer

Be real my brothers! Don't be swayed by the speakers but not doers! Have No Fear! He said He'd be with us - on our adventures - even to the end of the world!

Going deeper still.....

Chief

If you want to know more about CHIEF Ministries or would like to be a part of this, please go to www.chiefministries.com and www.chiefshouse.org

Christ's Heart In Every Felon



330 Rayford Rd. # 231
Spring, Texas, 77386

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