

Decaf Jesus?

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My life was not always like this. Granted, I was raised in church, grew up loving it and even spent years training for and participating in ministry before connecting with the prayer movement. But even with all of those preparatory experiences, it would have been hard to imagine the transformation that our family went through a few years ago.

I'm finding more and more those who become people of prayer have stories which resonate with one another. While the processes may vary in length and detail, they generally share two key experiences.

For the first 32 years of my life, had you told me I was missing something in my walk with God, I would have stared at you quizzically. I was lacking, yet entirely unaware of my own need. When the need for intimacy with God began to stir within me, my heart became awakened. It was like a decaf coffee drinker suddenly switching to regular. I was alive on the inside.

A few years ago, I had an assistant who brought a pot of coffee to a meeting. Unable to decide between decaf or regular, she brought a pot of half decaf, half regular. As I remember, no one drank any of it. Why? Because decaf and regular coffee drinkers are looking for an entirely different experience. Regular drinkers are looking for a tangible effect. Decaf drinkers just like the feel of a mug in their hands.

Me? I drink regular, almost without exception. I abhor decaf. Decaf merely appeals for our desire for a real cup of coffee without causing us any sort of internal stirring.

Within the present culture there is a very real effort to decaffeinate Jesus...to give people the ambiance of an encounter with God without actually having to encounter Him. They desire to appease their desire for God and assuage their inner cry for a walk with the Holy without succumbing to the affect it would certainly have on their heart. In effect, Jesus in a brown thrift store mug, more as a hand warmer than an actual drink. He becomes their prop to carry around, but never to partake of.

An encounter with Jesus should never be a decaffeinated experience, "And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

Regular Jesus will do something to your heart. You can't be around Him without it touching you to the core. You cannot drink from His cup and walk away unaffected.

As my family began to explore our new hunger for intimacy with God, we felt a measure of what the disciples felt as they walked on that road, our hearts burned within us. We felt newly alive. We knew we couldn't go back to the old way of thinking and feeling about Jesus and yet that alone was not enough.

While an awakened heart is the beginning of a journey deep into God, it is not enough. In fact, it's more like an aching than a fulfillment. The only thing worse than not knowing there is more is knowing there is more and not finding it.

In the book of Acts, Saul is going from town to town and persecuting Christians when Jesus appears to him. The brightness of Jesus' countenance knocks Saul to the ground and while he lays there incapacitated, Jesus speaks. Finally, Saul musters the strength to reply: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

Saul instantly goes from Chief Persecuting Officer to a man on a trajectory to become an Apostle and radically change the way billions of people would live through centuries. One would expect this sort of encounter would have been witnessed by a throng of people to confirm it. Instead, we read, "And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one" (Acts 9:7).

I wonder what was said a half mile or mile down the road, as Saul's men

led him, now blind, to the place the Voice had told him to go.

”Did you hear anything?”

“I heard nothing….”

“Me either…methinks the Captain has gone mad.”

He had not gone mad, he’d just had a very personal encounter with Jesus that no one else had experienced. It led him to a personal transformation which changed his immediate behavior and eternal destiny.

I don’t know of anyone in my circle of friends who has had this dramatic of an encounter, but those pursuing a life of prayer have experienced a distinct call to it. It’s caused them to sell businesses, leave careers, even move across the country to join likeminded people. Why? Because what began as an awakened heart grew into a call on their lives. Their decisions may not have been understood by those close to them, but they were not dissuaded.

Joining

the prayer movement was not something I could have anticipated. As the Ray Kinsella character said in the movie Field of Dreams, “…until I heard the voice, I'd never done a crazy thing in my whole life.” All I knew was I had been invited and in saying yes to the invitation, everything I had been doing seemed unbearably safe. I literally feared what the long-term affect of playing it safe would be on my young children. I had to go where this thing was taking me.

You may find yourself identifying with these two points, a heart awakening and a personal invitation to intimacy with God. If so, let me encourage you to yield to the call. It may mean staying right where you are and going deep in God, or it might mean a season as an intern at IHOP, learning how to walk out your new awakening. Either way, ask God for a clear word and walk away from anything which falls short of His plan for you.

Likewise, there may be people reading this who don't identify. You feel like you've swallowed a decaf Jesus. You've heard the teaching and you've pondered the lessons, but your heart is yet to burn within you. I'd encourage you to invite God to fill you in a new way, with the gift of hunger.

As westerners who traditionally spend a great deal of time and money avoiding need in our lives, we underestimate the value of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is actually the beginning of healthy Christian living. Ask God for the gift of dissatisfaction and then follow your hunger with prayer and fasting. You'll be amazed where it takes you