

Infusing Life

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Some things are like tea leaves—they need to steep.

Time and heat draw flavor from tea leaves.

I like tea. To brew a good cup of tea, heat fresh water in a pot. Different types of tea brew at different heats, so at home we have a tea pot that can control the temperature of the water. After you heat the water, you put tea leaves in (in a bag or straight into the water). When you put dried tea leaves in hot water, they swell and unfurl and release flavor and goodness into the water. It takes a while for the tea to steep, but it gives you a great cup of tea.

Like tea steeping, spiritual life passes from one person to another over time.

By spiritual life, I mean **the habits and character of a disciple of Jesus**. Spiritual life is like the flavor of tea or the aroma of the presence of the Holy Spirit. God has it, and we need it. God gives us new life in Christ in a moment, but He passes the habits and character of a disciple to us over time. And God frequently uses us in the process. Say I have had the habits and character of a disciple of Jesus for a while, and say you need the habits and character of a disciple, then I can pass them to you. But it's a process. It takes time.

My grandfather passed life to me on trips to the post office.

When I was growing up, visits to my grandparents' house always involved a trip to the post office with my grandfather. But going to the post office was just code language for running errands and saying "hello" to people. We might go to the grocery store and stop by the hardware store before the post office. Everywhere we went, he was passing life to me. We had long talks about life and God and growing up. But my grandfather was also an incurable extravert. Everywhere he went, he ran into someone he knew. I watched him make friends and network, and I was taking notes! Everywhere we went he would introduce me as his, "number-one grandson" which made me feel like a million dollars. And it taught me something about what was expected of me in life—he expected me to contribute to society as I grew up. Almost every time we went to the post office, we stopped by the church. His church was an important part of my life. It was at his church that I preached my first sermon, felt the call to ministry, and had my first church job. So, he really was passing spiritual life to me along the way.

Life passed among the Minnesota Vikings.

It's NFL playoff season, and every playoff season, I think back to the Minneapolis Miracle of 2018. The Vikings were playing the Saints, and the Saints were ahead with just 10 seconds to go. Case Keenum threw a pass to Stefon Diggs who leapt into the air to catch it and run it in for a touchdown. The Vikings won as the game clock wound down to zero. It was the Minneapolis Miracle. Stefon Diggs went on air to give the glory to God after the game. It turns out that Case Keenum was also a Christian. As was wide receiver Adam Theilen. And, as it turns out, lots of other Viking players. Faith in Christ was spreading among team members like wildfire. Which is the real Minneapolis Miracle! But that's how life passes—from one person to another.

In 1 Thessalonians, we get a front-row seat for how life passed from Paul to his disciples.

Paul and his team went to Thessalonica. They spent time with people there, and those people became disciples of Jesus Christ who owned their faith and passed their faith to others. The results speak for themselves. We want what Paul did for them for ourselves. And we want to learn how to do what Paul did, too!

Paul's life was worth infusing!

He stood tall when life became a heavy burden to carry.

In chapter two, Paul starts by reminding us that he and his team members had not backed down when proclaiming the Gospel and infusing life became difficult. The details are in **1 Thessalonians 2:1-2**:

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

They had been beaten and humiliated in Philippi, but they walked into Thessalonica ready to share the Gospel and do what God wanted them to do. There's lots more detail, but let's skip to the end:

Paul lived right by God and right by others.

He makes a surprising statement in **1 Thessalonians 2:10**,

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

The accusations made against Paul, his team, and the Thessalonian disciples were that they were godless and traitors. They were godless because they had abandoned the gods of the Romans and of the city. They were traitors because they preached a new King, Jesus, who was Lord in place of Caesar. Paul flatly contradicted that thought. He said that he was holy; he lived according to God's plan. And he was righteous; he lived rightly by everyone around him. He was, in fact, blameless. This was the only life worth living! Paul's case was airtight. This is life worth infusing.

Many Christian leaders have fallen, and it raises a heartbreaking question about all of us.

For me personally, the toughest one was Bill Hybels. In the 90s and early 2000s, I went to multiple conferences at the church he led, Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago. I read and valued his books and learned a great deal indirectly from him. So, it was awful when it became clear that Bill Hybels had abused power over decades and repeatedly engaged in sexual misconduct. I was and am deeply disappointed in him and don't know what to do with what I learned from him.

You may have been scarred by the fall of Christian leaders.

It may have been a pastor who had an affair or a church leader who stole money. It may be a priest you knew who abused young boys and a church that covered it up. It may be as simple as a Christian leader who didn't act like a Christian when you needed them. None of it is okay. And it may leave you scarred. Less likely to trust. Less likely to absorb any life being shared with you. But let me recalibrate the dilemma for you. We're saying that not all Christian leaders have lived lives worth infusing into someone else. But that raises a question we want to ask ourselves:

Are our lives worth infusing?

Would our lives stand up under the bright light of scrutiny? We can never hope to be perfect this side of eternity. But we are meant to be worthy of imitating, safe to infuse. Are our lives worth infusing?

Paul infused life like a mother AND a father.

Like a mother, he nurtured the new disciples in Thessalonica.

It's surprising when Paul says that he (a man) loved the Thessalonians like a mother, but he did. In **1 Thessalonians 2:7-8** he wrote:

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Paul repeatedly said that he and the members of the team loved the people in Thessalonica, the disciples in particular. They cared for them. Fed them spiritual food. Helped them take their first few steps as disciples. They showed the kind of love a mother might show. But that's not all.

Like a father, he exhorted them.

Paul is drawing on the ancient Greek concepts of what a father is like. To the Greeks, the father's job was to teach children their morals and their ethical responsibility. He wrote in **1 Thessalonians 2:11-12**:

For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

As new Christians, there was a lot the Thessalonians needed to hear. They were going to live entirely new lives, lives completely out of step with everyone else around them. Paul had to teach them by his words what to do and then reinforce that teaching with his example, correcting them when they got it wrong, and encouraging them when they did it right.

Charles Granger and Margie Duncan infused life into students when I was in college.

Charles was the Baptist Campus Minister, and Margie was the Associate. Margie was like a mother to college students—some of whom were away from home and their own mothers for the first time in their lives. She was the listening ear, the hand holder, the nurturer. Charles, on the other hand, was the one who was constantly reminding people what they needed to be doing as disciples of Jesus. He was like an on-campus father to many people. Together, Charles and Margie helped both me and my future wife, Tammi, follow Jesus during college. They infused spiritual life into us at an important time in life.

But the idea of infusing life makes some of us put a "CLOSED" sign on the front door of our minds.

I'm talking about sharing our lives with others, and some of us are instantly saying, "Nope!" We are not open to sharing our lives with others. Why? We struggle to be transparent; we don't want people to see the "real me". We don't think we have margin; we are so busy that we just don't have time and don't want to take the time. We are afraid; we think that people won't like what they see. I get that sharing your life with someone else can be scary, but that is exactly what Paul did with the Thessalonians. It's the only way to become or make disciples. And it is what Jesus has done for us!

Jesus infuses His Life into us.

Some of us hear, "LIFE" and say, "Yes, please! I need that!"

Is that you? Do you need life today? You may be longing to have spiritual life when you feel a sense of emptiness or even that you feel spiritually dead. We can't give life until we get it. And there is only one true source of life.

Jesus infuses the life of heaven into us.

We were created by God with the life of heaven coursing through our being. But when we sinned, we died spiritually speaking, spiritual life left us, and physical death became our inevitable future. But in Jesus Christ, the life of heaven entered creation again. And because Jesus died to pay the price for our sin and rose again, forgiveness and the life of heaven are available to us once again. When we accept salvation through Jesus, God the Holy Spirit comes into us, and the life of heaven is once again coursing through our souls, making us new. And one day, we will be resurrected, and the life of heaven will be our life for eternity. That life is available to you today through Jesus Christ! GETTING life in Jesus Christ is one thing. LIVING the life of a disciple is something else. That, too, needs to be infused into us.

Jesus like Paul took a YouTube approach instead of an owner's manual approach.

I can't stand owner's manuals for tools and appliances. When I pick up an owner's manual, hoping to learn how to operate a tool or repair an appliance, it's like I'm reading a foreign language. Insert tab "a" into slot "b" and turn screw "c" makes no sense to me. And I don't think it makes sense to many people, which is why most of us throw owner's manuals away when we buy a tool. But YouTube has changed my life! YouTube has become my go-to source of how-to help. Now I can look up something I need to know how to do. Suddenly, there is a person who has done what I need to do who can show me how to do it myself. Suddenly, I feel like I can do almost anything. Well, at least more than I could do before. Paul took a YouTube approach to discipleship; he came alongside the disciples in Thessalonica and showed them how to follow Jesus. Jesus did the same thing. He shared life with His disciples for years. He taught them, but He also showed them how to follow Him and His Father. Which leads us to a truth you can take to the bank:

DISCIPLESHIP IS CAUGHT, NOT TAUGHT!

Teaching has a place. Teaching can give us important knowledge. It can help us to understand certain things about the Bible, about theology, and about the life of a disciple. Teaching can motivate and cast a powerful vision of what can be accomplished through God's power. Teaching has a place. But discipleship is not something you can get in a class or read in a book. And I get the implication; I can't preach you into being a disciple of Jesus. I get it, and that fact frustrates me incredibly. I wish I could. But discipleship is caught, not taught. We can only catch the life of a disciple from someone else who is a disciple.

We need someone to share their lives and show us how to follow Jesus!

You may not be able to follow Jesus until you see someone else doing it. If that's the case, don't feel bad. It's natural! It doesn't mean that you should give up. It means that you need someone to show you how. Find a mentor. Find someone ahead of you in the Christian life and ask them to disciple you.

Tackle them if you have to and get them to show you how to do it. But then there is a call on each of us as we learn how to be disciples and follow Jesus:

Let's infuse life like tea leaves in hot water.

Doing yard work together gave me the chance to infuse life into my sons.

When my sons were young, I loved doing yard work with them. It gave us a chance to get outside together and spend time together. At first, the boys just wanted to be outside. Then our oldest son got interested in mowing. I taught him how to push the mower. I'd walk along with him, helping him to go in a straight line. Then I watched as he mowed lines. When he was ready, he started mowing a section of the yard at a time. There were spots he missed. But he felt so grown up. Afterward, we would sit and enjoy a soda and talk. We'd talk about anything. Life. Growing up. God. We spent hours together over years. Infusing life.

We infuse life in a three-step process: 1. Show up. 2. Show how. 3. Tell why.

1. Show up. We can't infuse life from a distance. We can infuse life only when we are near one another. So, we spend time with people. That means doing things together. **2. Show how.** We have to show people how to follow Jesus. That means showing them how WE follow Jesus. We can't expect people to do something we don't do ourselves or to be someone we aren't being ourselves. We show character traits like joy, peace, and patience. We demonstrate skills like studying the Bible, praying, and sharing faith. We show how to follow Jesus. **3. Tell why.** There is an important place for teaching. We cast vision, make the case, and set the context for following Jesus. We tell why. That's the process for infusing life into another person.

Tom Lamphere is the one who infused life into the Vikings.

Tom Lamphere was the Vikings' chaplain for more than a quarter century. He built a ministry around being with the players. He led them in Bible study, yes. But he led Bible study as a chance to talk about life, faith, and the Bible honestly. More importantly, he was quietly present and available. He asked good questions. And showed up for the big moments in their lives. He helped them get ready to get married, deal with money challenges, and parent. He did all through the lens of faith. And players' lives changed. Players came to faith. Grew in faith. Owned their faith publicly. Led their families. And led their team. Behind that Minneapolis Miracle was Tom Lamphere infusing life into coaches, players, and their families.¹

This week, we can be tea leaves.

We can show up in people's lives. We can make plans to share a meal with someone, find a way to serve together, do a project together, or even just play a game together. That creates time to talk. We can show how. We are always demonstrating character, but when we ask or get asked, we can show someone how to do the critical things that disciples of Jesus do. We can tell why. Critical conversations usually happen in surprising moments.

¹ <https://sportsspectrum.com/sport/football/2018/05/18/vikings-chaplain-brings-gospel-influence-to-the-nfl/>

I believe in you!

Many of you have a passion for infusing life into family members, friends, co-workers, young people, and even someone like your personal trainer. You're willing to spend the time that's required once you decide to do it. You've got the character; you've got the skills. Slow down. Show. Then tell. That's how life flows from God through you to the people around you. That's what disciples do. Let's go be disciples who make disciples.