

"Late one night just before I slipped off to sleep, my wife asked me a question. It shed a spotlight on a nagging reality in my career as a pastor and as a 35-year follower of Jesus: "Does anything bring you joy anymore?"

**Her question would mark the beginning to...**

# A DANCING HEART

by Denny Heiberg



**F**or the past 15 years I had been the lead pastor of a growing congregation that had all the outward appearances of being a successful church according to the measurements of our denominational tribe. Our congregation experienced steady numerical growth. We had added a spacious and attractive new worship center. Our operating budget kept pace with our increasing staff and ministry programs, and, by God's grace, we were debt-free.

However, my wife knew all too well what very few people saw. I was unsettled in my role as a pastor, and I was ready to resign. Truth be told, I realized that I had become a CEO of a religious institution; I was running a church instead of developing and making disciples of those whom God brought under my influence.

I remembered that my original desire for responding to God's call into the ordained ministry was to help people to become maturing followers of Jesus. However, somewhere through the years I had drifted off course and was spending each week responding to the demands of what others thought my priorities should entail, instead of me being proactive and focusing on making Jesus' last words my first priority!

Through a series of God-ordained circumstances, I began to pour my life of faith into the lives of men who had committed to a discipling relationship. Within days, genuine joy began to flood into my emotional reservoir. Over these last six years of intentionally focusing upon the mandate of Jesus to make disciples, I have experienced a joy that is hard to match. I shouldn't be surprised.

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As Jesus was leaving the upper room with His 11 disciples on the way to the Mount of Olives, He gave them a vivid analogy of how they were to continue His mission of disciple making. Their responsibility was to abide in Him as a branch abides in a vine. As they did, they would bear much fruit and the Father would be glorified. In addition, each of them would be filled with His joy and, as a result, their joy would be full and complete. "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." (John 15:11)

## Passing it on

*Sharing lessons he receives with others, this missionary tells of the astonishing ripple effects of discipleship happening in his European community and in his own heart.*

**I grew up in church but was never formally disciplined. It is a wonder that I ever came to know Christ.** My understanding of Him was through Sunday school or sermons, and that was not very deep.

It was not until later in life that I had the opportunity to get to know Him on



a deeper level, but still through informal methods. Even then it was not stressed that I should share what I learned.

The intentionality of discipleship had been lost on me. Over the past several years, though, the idea of discipleship's being an essential practice for believers has become very important to me.

Recently I sought to be disciplined by

my colleague, Denny Heiberg. I began sharing with others what I learned from him. (These lessons are available at [www.mobilizingdisciples.com/life-transformation-studies.html](http://www.mobilizingdisciples.com/life-transformation-studies.html).)

I started sharing them with the Sunday school class that we teach in our country of service in Western Europe.

They are youth, 13-18 years of age, and great kids. We have a blast. I had them read the passages, and we discussed them one at a time. They were so engaged that we had to stop before we were finished because we ran out of class time. One boy who is usually only marginally engaged was so excited that he now wants to share what he is learning with his high school friends during their religion class. He says most don't accept the existence of God, and he never

knows what to say. "Finally! Now I have information!" he said. "Now I know what to say!"

Another youth at one point shouted out, "Wait, wait! This is making my head explode!" He was getting so much out of our discussion, and Christ was being revealed before his eyes. The girl who helps us with the class is a 20-year-

old youth helper. She asked if my wife and I could start meeting with her individually to walk through this and teach her how to study the Bible!

I am also sharing this with two men I meet with every other week. Before, we would read a text. Then, the leader of the group would give his thoughts and comments, and that would be that. Now we all dig into scripture together and with great depth. One of the men in the group (a new believer) immediately began sharing what he was learning with other non-believers in his workplace. Without asking, he took the Bible verses and read them with another man at his work.

This inspires me to continue working with these handfuls of people, helping to equip them to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ to others. **I have always been grateful to those who shared with me, but I have never received so much joy as I have from being able to give.** It seems that giving is much more rewarding to me than receiving. To see the lights come on in people is pure joy. To see them start to know and understand Christ in a different way has led me to want to dig in more myself and continue to share more with them. And they are not the only ones to benefit. My understanding of Christ, who He is, and what He is doing in the world has expanded as I am being disciplined and am discipling others. †

### Communicable joy

If anyone in the world should be filled with joy, it is the disciple who follows the life and teachings of Jesus to become more like Him.

One of my greatest joys in experiencing a discipling relationship with other men is when they begin to pass along

*When was the last time your heart danced or shouted because your joy was so full?*

to others what we have experienced together. This is what Paul is referring to when he challenged Timothy to entrust what he had been taught by Paul into the lives of faithful men who would teach

others also. Above is a recent firsthand account of a missionary who is replicating what he is experiencing with

me into the lives of those in his field of ministry in Western Europe.

### Divine purpose

The word used for *joy* in the Greek New Testament is *chara*. It is a state of gladness and delight. It is the word Matthew used to describe the feeling of the two Marys who arrived at the empty tomb and received the world-shattering news from the angel that Jesus had risen

from the dead. According to Greek linguist experts, Louw and Nida, *chara* is expressed in a number of languages as “my heart is dancing” or “my heart shouts because I am happy.”

When was the last time your heart danced or shouted because your joy was so full? I encourage you to engage in a disciple-making relationship with another person. Not only will you experience the joy of bearing fruit as his or her life begins to be transformed, but you will also watch your friend’s heart dance as God pours into others.

When we answer the call to intentionally make disciples who make other disciples, there is the joy of experiencing a divine purpose in this life. And there is also the assurance that one day we will hear what every servant desires: “Well done, good and faithful servant! ...Enter into the joy of your master.” Let’s join the dance! †

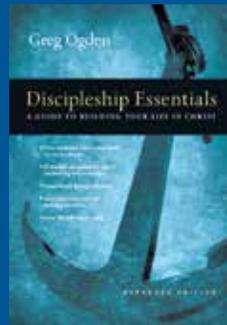
*Denny Heiberg (center) and his wife, Cindy, train pastors, missionaries, and church leaders through The Mission Society’s International Mission Mobilization and Discipleship Consultations. The Heibergs are also engaged in predeployment training for Mission Society missionaries and their local church leaders. Prior to his work with The Mission Society, Denny served for 22 years in the pastorate in The United Methodist Church.*



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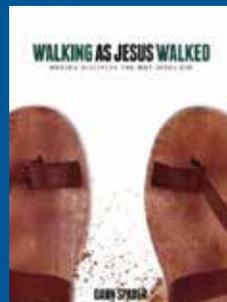
## Choose the discipleship life

*Wondering where to start? Begin with these.*



### ***Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*** by Greg Ogden

Jesus' own pattern of disciple-making was to be intimately involved with others and allow life to rub against life. This workbook by Greg Ogden is a tool designed to help you follow this pattern Jesus drew for us. Working through it will deepen your knowledge of essential Christian teaching and strengthen your faith. Each week contains a core truth, a memory verse, an inductive Bible study, a reading on the theme for the week, and discussion questions. This material is designed for groups of three. It has also been used successfully as an individual study program, a one-on-one discipling tool and small group curriculum.



### ***Walking As Jesus Walked: Making Disciples The Way Jesus Did*** by Dann Spader

This small-group, interactive resource has been developed as a 10-12 week study, but can be adapted for personal use, or for a longer time frame, depending on the needs and interests of the group. With questions for individual preparation, group discussion and interaction will aid in going deeper in this material. A leader’s guide, along with a personal video from the author introducing each lesson is available online at [WalkingAsJesus.com](http://WalkingAsJesus.com). These videos and leader’s guides are free resources and can be used in any way that will serve your group.

*Denny Heiberg has compiled 12 of the studies he shared with his missionary friend. Find them here: [www.mobilizingdisciples.com/life-transformation-studies.html](http://www.mobilizingdisciples.com/life-transformation-studies.html).*