

# D360

Nine Conversations  
About Whole-life  
Discipleship



Gregory Koenig

# **D360**

Nine Conversations about  
Whole-life Discipleship

Gregory Koenig

Copyright © 2016 Gregory Koenig  
All rights reserved.

April 2016  
ISBN-13: 978-1530836772  
ISBN-10: 1530836778

# Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	5
<i>One</i> In the Image.....	13
<i>Two</i> Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit .....	25
<i>Three</i> Christian Learning: Understanding God’s Word .....	37
<i>Four</i> Community: God, You and Others.....	49
<i>Five</i> Prayer: Your Direct Access to the God Who Listens .....	65
<i>Six</i> Worship: It Might Not Be What You Think. It’s More. ....	87
<i>Seven</i> Stewardship: It’s NOT (All) About Money? .....	117
<i>Eight</i> Disciple-building. And Witness. And Evangelism. ....	133
<i>Nine</i> What It All Could Look Like .....	153
<i>Wrap-up</i> .....	161
<i>Appendix: Big Ideas in the Bible</i> .....	167
<i>Notes</i> .....	173

## *Two*

### Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit

As we begin, it's important to deal with what discipleship is not. Disciplines such as worship, Bible study and prayer—that is, things that you *do*—play a major role in your growth as a disciple of Jesus. Yet discipleship is not works-righteousness—attempting to persuade God to award you eternal life because of the good things you do. It doesn't work that way; as we saw in the preceding conversation, our flawed nature renders us incapable of obeying God to the degree He demands (perfection). For that matter, our flawed nature also renders us incapable of even deciding on our own to live our lives as disciples of Jesus.

But, first, as a believer, you know that you already have eternal life from God, given through the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus—and you have received this free gift (in churchy language: *grace*) through faith. And second, when it

*D360: Nine Conversations About Whole-life Discipleship*

comes to living your life as a disciple of Jesus, think about this little passage:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith....

Perhaps you are familiar with these words. The Reformer Martin Luther wrote them to help explain the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed ("I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church...").<sup>1</sup> Luther's explanation points to the one thing we need to understand as we get serious about living as disciples of Jesus Christ: it's God's Holy Spirit Who prepares our hearts and minds and Who calls us to faith and a life of discipleship in Jesus. And it is because of the Spirit's transforming work in us that each of us can respond with a life of authentic discipleship.

Read that last sentence again, because it's important.

So, then: what is a life of response to the Holy Spirit's work—what is a *disciple*?

Most people understand "disciple" to mean "follower," but what does that really mean?

Kyle Idleman is a pastor and the author of a study series titled *not a fan*.<sup>2</sup> In it he claims that many people are "fans" of Jesus—enthusiastic admirers:

*Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit*

people who believe what the Bible says about Jesus, who think church is a great idea and go whenever they can, who buy—and wear—the “This kid loves Jesus” tee shirt, who get a cross tattoo ... you get the picture. But, Idleman says, Jesus didn’t command his disciples to make “fans”; He sent them to build disciples—who, in Idleman’s words, are followers who are completely committed to living their faith and advancing Jesus’ mission—living it, 24/7. Completely. Committed.

IS that what a disciple is? Well, what can we find about this in the Bible?

- Jesus says in Matthew 10:38, “Whoever doesn’t take up his cross and follow me doesn’t deserve to be my disciple.”
- He says in Luke 14:26-33, “If people come to me and are not ready to abandon their fathers, mothers, wives, children, brothers, and sisters, as well as their own lives, they cannot be my disciples. So those who do not carry their crosses and follow me cannot be my disciples.... In the same way, none of you can be my disciples unless you give up everything.”
- When a wealthy official asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus quizzes him on Moses’ Law and then advises him, “If you want to be perfect, sell what you own. Give the money

*D360: Nine Conversations About Whole-life Discipleship*

to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then follow me!" [i.e., become my disciple]... When the official rejects Jesus' advice and goes away, Jesus says, "I can guarantee this truth: It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. I can guarantee again that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples ask, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus answers that "It is impossible for people to save themselves, but everything is possible for God." Then Peter replies to him, "Look, we've given up everything to follow you. What will we get out of it?" (Matthew 19:16-27)

We see three things in this passage from Matthew: (1) when the official refuses to give up everything he has, he realizes he can't be Jesus' disciple; (2) Jesus affirms that wealth has nothing to do with salvation. Only God saves; and (3) according to Peter, being Jesus' disciples had indeed involved giving up everything.

It seems clear from passages such as these that Kyle Idleman is on the right track: being Jesus' disciple involves total commitment! God's Spirit calls each of us to whole-life discipleship—to be a follower of Jesus in every aspect of our lives. There's nothing

*Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit*

“easy” about that calling to total dedication—but the Spirit *enables us to respond*.

Now ... if *your* mission were to restore the kingdom of God—all of creation—beginning with the image of God in human beings, wouldn't you want totally committed people joining you in that project?

You're redeemed. Your whole self has been renewed for a relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is at work in you, enlightening you, teaching you, opening your eyes to the possibilities, opening your heart and mind to His call. He has enabled you to respond. So respond! No need to settle for being a *fan*, as Kyle Idleman might say. You can be a full-time disciple, joining God in His project of restoring His creation, beginning with the image of Himself in humans—in *you*. Every day, every way, from every angle and perspective: you can live life all-out—360 degrees—as a response to the Spirit's work in you.

### **D360. So what does 360-degree discipleship look like?**

You will live out your whole-life response to the Holy Spirit's work in three primary contexts: (1) as an individual in an ever-growing, ever-deepening relationship with God; (2) as a part of the body of true believers around you and around the world—in perpetual community with God and with each other;

and (3) among non-believers—people who are not (or not yet) part of the Christian church.

## **Individual**

We discussed earlier that, as human beings with a flawed nature and naturally rebellious souls, we do not have in ourselves the ability to believe that Jesus has bought us back into relationship with God by His death and resurrection. Our faith that this is a reality is born in each of us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet when that faith is born, your faith belongs to you, just as my faith belongs to me. Each of us owns his own faith; each of us responds in his or her own unique expression of revitalized spiritual living; each of us grows as an individual. Your living faith will be an intensely personal thing.

Much of your response to the work of the Holy Spirit will consist of things you yourself discover and integrate into your understanding as you grow in faith. But there will also be many things about your response to the Spirit's work that others teach you or that you learn from role models. Also, part of your response to the Spirit's work will be to lead, teach, and serve as a role model for other disciples. These are two reasons why growing as a disciple within a believing community—a larger part of the Body of Christ—is so important.

## **In the Body of Christ**

I have devoted conversation Four to the ideal of faith in community. Here in these two brief paragraphs I will lay the groundwork for that by pointing out simply that humans were created by God for community—in fact, living in community together with God and other believers is one attribute that can most strongly reflect the image of God in us. It's no accident that in his letters to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Ephesians and the Colossians, the apostle Paul uses the metaphor "Body of Christ" to describe the community of true believers—and no metaphor does a better job of capturing the importance of relationships and community (although Paul's related metaphor of marriage comes in a very close second).

Many Christians first learn about God as part of a community—typically their families. As I discussed above, those who help build us into disciples through teaching, coaching, mentoring, or modeling are members of our community—whether a narrow community such as our family or a broad community such as our church or the church of Jesus Christ around the world. *And* each of us is called to fulfill a role, or vocation, within the communities we belong to; more on vocation in conversation Six.

## **Among Those Who Might Be Outside the Body of Christ**

Perhaps at some point you have learned the term “best practice” (or “best practices”); if not yet, there’s a good chance you will. A best practice is a “method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means—and because of that is used as a benchmark.”<sup>3</sup> Consider your life as a disciple of Jesus to be a “best practice” for daily living, whether you’re around people who believe as you do or around people who have differing religious beliefs (or no religious beliefs). The disciple’s ideals for learning, community, service, vocation, stewardship—even confession, forgiveness, healing and renewal—set a standard that others typically respect and often desire to emulate.

This is not to say that everyone will appreciate the outward witness of your “best practices.” Jesus Himself advises us,

If the world hates you, realize that it hated me before it hated you. If you had anything in common with the world, the world would love you as one of its own. But you don’t have anything in common with the world. I chose you from the world, and that’s why the world hates you.... If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. (John 15:18-20)

*Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit*

But Jesus also encourages us,

You are light for the world.... Let your light shine in front of people. Then they will see the good that you do and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14, 16)

Your discipleship ideals—your *best practices*—are worth practicing, always, no matter whom you're with.

## **Summary**

As a disciple of Jesus, you will live your faith as an individual, as a member of a believing community and as a member of the human family. Your faith is a gift, planted in you by God's Holy Spirit; your faith is your own, but your response to God's call to discipleship is the result of the Spirit's ongoing work in you. You will learn discipleship and pass it on as part of the fellowship of true believers in Jesus. As you go about your daily life, you will demonstrate your faith—sometimes among people who will not share your beliefs but who will often respect those beliefs and the way you live.

## **Deal With It**

1. Some of the things author Rob Bell has written in recent years have become controversial among

*D360: Nine Conversations About Whole-life Discipleship*

Christ-followers, but he has always had a gift for asking questions that cause people to think deeply about faith. Setting aside any notions you might have about his more recent ideas for a bit, track down and watch his NOOMA video *Dust* (a pay-per-view version is available on YouTube's NOOMA Channel<sup>4</sup>). Share your thoughts about the relationship between disciples and their rabbis. Take some time to think and talk about it.

2. Describe the Holy Spirit's role(s) in disciple-building.
3. Is there such a thing as a casual or part-time commitment to being a disciple of Jesus Christ? Explain your response.
4. Billy Graham is often quoted as having said, "Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything we have." Apart from the cost of total commitment of your life to Jesus and the restoration of His kingdom, what other costs might be associated with discipleship?

### **Go and Do**

Think of someone in your family or in your church whose attitude of discipleship you would

*Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit*

like to emulate in some way. What would you need to give up to follow his or her example? How would following his or her example change the way people perceive *your* attitude of discipleship?

## **Two Discipleship: A Life of Response to the Work of the Holy Spirit**

1. Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. <http://catechism.cph.org/en/creed.html>.
2. Kyle Idleman, *not a fan*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011.
3. "Best practice," [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).
4. [www.youtube.com/user/NOOMAtube](http://www.youtube.com/user/NOOMAtube)

## **Three Christian Learning: Understanding God's Word**

1. There is some disagreement as to how the name is actually pronounced. When it is written, it consists of four Hebrew letters, yod-he-waw-he/yud-heh-vav-heh (HWHY). Often it is referred to as the Tetragrammaton (four letters). A significant number of scholars assent that "Yahweh" is the most likely pronunciation.
2. *Names of God Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing Group, 2011. Or go to [www.biblegateway.com/versions/Names-of-God-NOG-Bible](http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Names-of-God-NOG-Bible).

## *About the Author*

Greg Koenig is a preacher's kid, educator and writer who has dedicated a lot of his adult life to understanding and interpreting faith and the Christian experience from the perspective of someone unacquainted with churchspeak (often also called *Christiane*). "The phrase *image of God* in this book is a good example," says Greg. "Many of us insiders love to use the term *imago Dei*, which is the Latin equivalent of the Hebrew *b'tzelem Elohim*—image, or shadow, or likeness of God. There is an elegance and a mystique to the phrase *imago Dei*, but the elegance and mystique are not particularly helpful to someone who is just learning to respond to the message of the Bible. That simple message from God needs to strike a chord and then resonate; the language we use must allow it to do that."

Greg is the servant-leader of the Lutheran Campus Mission Association (GoLCMA.org), an organization dedicated to equipping leaders to reach out with the Gospel in college/university communities. He and his wife Deb live in St. Louis, Missouri; they have four children and (at last count) four grandchildren.