



The Disciple as Wanderer

by | **Chris Folmsbee & Doug Jones**

So the Israelites set out from the wilderness of Sinai and traveled on from place to place until the cloud stopped in the wilderness of Paran. (Numbers 10:12 NLT)

There's nothing quite like spending an hour or two meandering along the sidewalk of a city street or over a mountainside trail. Wandering has a way of lowering the anxiety level and raising our spirits. We seem to be able to disconnect from the pressures and responsibilities we perceive in our lives (as spouse, parent, minister, the expectations of others, etc.) and connect to something "other" deep within us.

The Way of Trust

We wander because for millennia God's people have been a wandering people. Sometimes this wandering took the form of walking away from God—though people were also called to wander so they could learn to trust and be formed by God. In wandering, we find the way of active trust.

Brennan Manning describes this way of trust as "a movement into obscurity, into the undefined, into ambiguity, not into some predetermined, clearly delineated plan for the future." Trust is that space where we don't know what the future brings—equally distant from the familiar and routine. We are "between here and there." We are traveling in unknown territory that demands we rely on God's presence that brings hope and comfort, God's provision that equips and sustains us, and God's power that keeps us following.

Between Here and There

The disciple who wanders after the way of trust discovers that "between here and there" is where God is waiting for us—often found at a provisional residence (and often following trials or triumphs) off our "well-beaten paths"—waiting for us to wander close where God can address our needs, form and reform us, and guide us down our next life path.

As disciples we are called to move beyond our past (settlements), and from undue focus on the future (our preferred destinations) that we might be wandering in that place of trust, abiding with Christ. Have you found yourself in this place, the place *between*, where God transforms your life and guides your steps? May we learn to wander with our Lord, to accompany the Spirit, to abide in Christ.

As ministers, we are called to help our students be disciples who wander, as well. Our students need to learn to trust God in those spaces

between comfortable familiarity and a clear, certain future. We need to help our students discover that God is waiting for them, wanting them to wander God's direction. Perhaps the best place to start in teaching this reality and practice is by helping our students understand what's behind the meaning of that old word: *abide*.

Abiding in Christ

Abiding in Christ connotes being fully present with, resting in the comfort of, dwelling together with, and journeying beside Jesus. It is by abiding in Christ, that we find direction in life, are shaped to serve, and discover our true selves. What we must realize is that we can only "be with" or "journey beside" an invisible God by pursuing a life of trust.

All of life for the wandering disciple is a life that lives *as if* God is beside, in front of, behind, over, and under us. We live daily trusting Jesus' promise: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Helping others to live a life of trust is no easy feat, but there are ways we can reinforce and experience the story of God's wandering people (e.g. Exodus 14, Deuteronomy 26:4-5, I Kings 19, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 24: 13-34, Hebrews 10:35-11).

Resting. Provide time and space in our corporate gatherings for folks to be quiet and still before God, helping us all learn to trust that the Holy Spirit is present, despite our inability to see God with our eyes.

Answered Prayer. Follow up frequently in our gatherings and small groups on prayer requests that we have prayed about in the past in order to demonstrate some of how God has been active in the lives of people in the group.

Testimonies. Consider inviting students, guests, and adult leaders to share about those times in their lives where "between here and there" they wandered with God and found it to be a time of trust, testing, and transformation.

Exercises. Encourage students to look for evidence of God's grace, love, or activity in their daily lives to help them become more alert to, aware of, and attentive to God's presence around them.



Through these and other spiritual practices, we can rehearse and reinforce the great drama of God meeting people as they wandered where they were led. May we all become, and help others become, disciples who wander.



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