



Discipleship

REFLECTIONS

By Stephen K. White



This first grandchild guarantees my life will never be the same again. Can I say as much about Jesus?

What a Difference

What a difference a week makes! Last week I anticipated the arrival of a child; this week he has entered my world. Last week I anticipated loving him; this week I find I'm loving him more than I anticipated. Last week I was eager to look at him; this week I find myself transfixed by him. Last week my roles were what they had been for most of 20 years—husband, father, minister; this week my life resume grew. Leyton Thomas White has entered my world, and now I am “grandfather,” “gramps,” “papa,” “papaw,” or some other title of Leyton's choice.

How can a man feel so inadequate in all of his other roles and then be given another one to fill? How is it possible that my son is now a father? How can I be married to a grandma? I can't be a grandpa; I'm still learning how to be a better father, and marriage continues to challenge my self-centeredness. Now this! In the recesses of my mind I shout the very same words that expressed my emotion when I became a father. “I'm not ready!”

This Child and God's Child

As I hold Leyton I wonder if watching this boy will ever grow old. Will I ever get bored hearing him talk? Is it possible that I would ever say to him, “We'd rather you not come over tonight”? It's unthinkable! If the testimony of seasoned grandparents is at all dependable, surely my life will never be quite the same, all because this little person has entered my life.

Two weeks from the time I write this I'll be sitting with my family on Christmas morning celebrating the most unusual Child of all coming into the world. By the time you read this, the Christmas mood will



The author and his new grand-son, Leyton Thomas White.

have long passed and we will be seeing displays of chocolate Easter eggs and longing for the buds of spring. Here's my question: “Is the entrance of that Child continuing to make a difference?”

It's easy to welcome a baby. We love the sweet smell, the silky skin, and the needy little body. But what lasting impact is the Christ child making on our lives today? One thing I'm sure about: my lasting impact on my child's child has everything to do with my relationship to God's child, Jesus Christ.

Three months from now I will know more about grandparenting than I do now. My grandchild, I'm confident, will in many ways be my teacher. What about my spiritual journey? What will I have learned this time after celebrating the joy of Christ's birth? There are some aspects of the Christian journey that must stay ever-green.

Awe

Three months after Christmas, do I “wonder as I wander” at the glory of God becoming flesh? One of the ways I can measure my “awestruckness” is by my worship. Am I experiencing the overwhelming majesty of God when I enter His presence? Am I moved by the thought of His radiance and glory? Do I recognize that I am in His presence and that His very nature calls for my very best?

One of the casualties of some worship today is a loss of God-centeredness. We must always beware of valuing the experience of worship over the worshiping of God himself. While the birth of any child moves us to wonder, it is the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that inspires awe in us.

People usually don't need more knowledge or information. They need to act on the knowledge they already possess. God is waiting for it.

Obedience

Probably somewhere in a Christmas sermon, your preacher spoke of God's call to obedience like that of the humble shepherds, courageous Joseph, responsive Mary, or the journeying Magi. It's difficult to preach any sermon without touching on obedience because, after all, that's what being a disciple is all about. We expect to hear such a challenge.

But what about actually obeying? Is your life marked by more obedience three months after Christmas than it was three months before Christmas? Was the challenge you heard for the umpteenth time taken to heart or written off as the usual Christmas jargon?

I met "Janet" years ago. She was a former minister's wife, but you wouldn't know it from her lifestyle. She was deeply involved in depraved things I don't want to think about, let alone write about. She came for counseling. After awhile, I realized I was under-qualified to provide help, if help was really what she was seeking. I came to wonder if all she really wanted was to feel better.

But I can't be too critical. More than once I've heard a sermon and said to myself, "I know that. That's nothing new." And then it dawns on me that I'm no different than Janet.

Usually, it's not more knowledge or information that I need. What God is looking for is action. Oftentimes one of my children would do something displeasing and, when confronted, respond by saying, "I'm sorry." On more than one occasion, my children heard this response: "Sorry isn't good enough. I want change."

That's what God wants too.

Service

There we were, on edge in the waiting room, involved in this adventurous moment of a new life being added to our family. A fellow came to sit near us. He was alone reading a book about karate. He had a flower with him and a gift bag. Was his mother in surgery? Girlfriend? Wife?

I wondered, but not for long because this was my day, my occasion for joy. I wondered, but I didn't investigate; I didn't reach out. This was not ministerial time; this was personal time.

Thankfully, my son's father-in-law had more of a servant's heart than I did that day. He struck up a conversation with this young Puerto Rican who had been in the United States for a few months. His wife was having surgery due to an ectopic pregnancy. We were there for joy; he was there for loss. I missed the opportunity, but not Mike, the servant. He found out about this man, discovering that he and his wife were in need of a church home and that they didn't live far from our church building.

One thing we already knew when we heard it again last Christmas was this: God loves all whom He has created. We do well to emulate Christ's model: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45, *New International Version*).

And so, Leyton Thomas White, as you learn about growing up, I want you to know I'm still learning too. I've never been a grandfather before, but I want to be a good one. I'm convinced the only way I can be what you need is to be totally devoted to God's child, Jesus. And my greatest prayer is that you will know and love Him, and let Him love you. What a difference that Baby still makes!

Stephen K. "Steve" White was born and raised in Springfield, Ohio, where he attended First Christian Church and was baptized into Christ. He graduated from Northeastern High School and then Cincinnati (Ohio) Bible Seminary (B.S. in education, 1977; M.A. in practical ministries, 1993). He held student ministries with the Fifth Avenue Church of Christ, Lancaster, Ohio, and the Indian Hills Christian Church, Danville, Kentucky. After graduation, he served as youth minister, then associate minister, with First Christian Church in Springfield, 1977-87. He has served as senior minister with Plainfield (Indiana) Christian Church since 1987, helping to oversee the growing congregation through a church relocation and construction of a new facility. Further expansion has included a family life center and a new administrative wing. Steve and his wife, the former Diana Thurman, also a CBS graduate, have three children: Justin, associate minister with PCC; Allison, a sophomore at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College; and Chelsea, a sophomore in high school. Steve and Diana became first-time grandparents on December 6, 2002, when Leyton Thomas White was born to Justin and Michelle White.