

The Road Less Traveled – January 26, 2017

Do you ever pull an old book off the shelf and feel like you've reconnected with an old friend? That happened to me this week when I stumbled on a book called *Understanding God's Will*. The book was written way back in 2004 by the late Kyle Lake, who was the pastor of University Baptist Church in Waco before dying tragically during a worship service.

In the book, which I bought shortly after Lake's death, the author uses the image of a *sensei* and his students to understand the relationship between Jesus and His followers. If you are not familiar with the term, *sensei* is an honorific title used in Chinese and Japanese culture to describe a teacher. It actually translates as "one who comes before." In this country it is most often used in the martial arts setting to describe the teacher or leader of a particular group of students.

I think that's the image that Kyle Lake really drew on in his comparison. Jesus said to His disciples, "follow me," and in doing so invited them into a life of shared experience and relationship. They were not simply learners, as in the rabbinical schools of Jesus' day. They did not walk behind Jesus, but rather with Jesus. "In other words," Lake wrote, "Jesus' sense of discipleship is not entirely cerebral; it's not just a cognitive teaching that was then transmitted to another person's intellect. It was a sharing in Jesus' life and ministry."

Reading Lake's words again really took me back. When he was in elementary school, my son Connor was a student of Karate. I used to love to stand against the wall during his classes and observe the process. There were several rows of students standing in formation trying valiantly to reproduce the moves made by their *sensei*. He would demonstrate, and then they would try to mimic his technique. Then the *sensei* would move up and down the rows, sometimes correcting, sometimes praising, but always fully in charge. For the students, the art of Karate was embodied in their *sensei*. It was a relationship that turned largely on respect and trust. For those students, to do Karate was to follow the lead of the *sensei*.

What I remember most, however, is that as I watched the students, they did not simply try to learn what the *sensei* taught them. They would try to move along with him. To master his every nuance. And when everything worked correctly, the class was like a single organism that moved in fluid perfection.

Remembering those classes still gives me pause to consider my own discipleship. I firmly believe that Jesus calls each of us to a life of discipleship, but what does that life look like exactly? Too often, I fear, we make our way through our faith journeys trying to mimic Jesus, to reproduce that which Jesus did or would do. That's why so many of us went out and bought those WWJD bracelets ten years ago. But discipleship is about something deeper than simply mimicking Jesus. It's about finding a way to live with Jesus and through Jesus.

Kyle Lake wrote: "This is how discipleship takes place. This is how growth with God takes place. Jesus invites His apprentices to come and share in His life and ministry together, a life that is undoubtedly lived and learned out there on the training grounds of the workplace, a class, the hospital, a gym, a club, a restaurant, or a field of play – in essence, behind the steering wheel. Being an apprentice of Jesus is central to everything else."

See you Sunday. Class dismissed.