

The Apprenticeship Way Podcast

Episode 047

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Don't Choose Shallow Formation

Interview with Rich Vellodas

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Marc Schelske 0:00

Does our faith enable us to be a good gift to our neighbors? Even the neighbors we disagree with? Hey friends, I'm Marc Alan Schelske, and this is the Apprenticeship Way, a podcast about spiritual growth following the way of Jesus. This is episode 47. Don't choose shallow formation.

TODAY'S SPONSOR

Today's podcast is made possible by **The Writers Advance**. I'm a writer, and I love supporting writers. Three years ago, I created the writer's advance. It's a writer's weekend. And it's been crafted to be exactly what writers need to push forward their current project. It's not about networking or listening to experts speak or trying desperately to get an agent or an editor to notice you. It is about writing and reconnecting with why writing matters to you.

Now, at every event, I send all the participants an anonymous survey. You can read their words on the event website, but I want to read a few of their comments right now because they tell the story. They're writers who have come to this event. And this is what they have to say.

This is from the anonymous survey from the most recent event in November of 2021. "This was an amazing weekend. The hosting was on target, the venue was peaceful, and offered more than I expected. I love the pacing. Often retreats such as these are nice getaways with lots of listening to people speak. And I really appreciated the time to write and to wind down with points of contact along the way. Mark is a great host and a guide and provides just the right amount of encouragement and accountability. I'm so looking forward to the next one."

Here's another anonymous survey review from a previous event. "This weekend reenergize my commitment to my writing craft. It was an excellent blend of accountability, flexibility, creativity and guidance. I felt supported as a human and as a writer throughout the whole time."

Sometimes people love the event so much that they will include their names in their comments. So here's a couple of those.

"This event was a gift to myself. I needed the focus time and also found direction from the coaching. I came away with a renewed passion for the stories I am writing for my family and some concrete ways to move forward." That's from Carol H.

One last one. This is from Tara Rolstad, a professional speaker who has attended the Writers Advance twice. Her words: "I've come to see the writers advanced as a gift I can't afford not to give myself. I got more work done this weekend than I have in months. And to do it in a gorgeous peaceful, comfortable location in the company and support of smart, quality people like Marc attracts? Invaluable! I'm deeply grateful."

Well, maybe you are one of the smart quality people that I attract! Or maybe you love a writer and you would love to give them an incredible gift to help them move their project forward. There are presently eight spots left out of a total of 14 for the spring Writers Advance weekend coming up April 1-3, 2022. For more info, head over to www.TheWritersAdvance.com. You can learn all about it, you can sign up there, the link will be on the screen, in the show notes, and underneath the YouTube video.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, I was chatting with a small group of local pastors. They were from churches that were really different--small, very large, urban, rural, different denominations. It was the first time I had seen any other pastors in person since the start of the COVID pandemic. And we were talking about everything that we've been through as a result. Basically, we were telling war stories.

Even though our churches were so different, our stories were very similar. Church members were angry because of the way their church was handling COVID. Angry if the church was online, angry if the church was in person, angry if they weren't enforcing masks, angry if they were. And then there was tension over the pastor's perceived political position. Even the most general call for compassion and care for vulnerable people would get you labeled as too liberal for the denomination or one guy even got called a socialist. I know these pastors, all of them, all of them desire to protect vulnerable people, you know--as Jesus did. And almost all of them had church members who took offense at that. I've heard the same kinds of reports from pastors across the country.

It seems like there's something happening in the wider Christian church right now that is not good--by not good. I mean, not like Jesus at all. Now, I know, I know there are good Christians and good churches and good pastors. Maybe you have one of those great churches or you are one of those great pastors. That's all true. And yet, can't you see that there is a sickness bubbling to the surface in the modern Christian church? Among Christians, we're seeing increasing science denial, COVID denial, dogmatic refusal to take the vaccine or wear masks or do anything to protect vulnerable people in our communities. We're seeing wide support for intentionally cruel immigration policies, and an almost rabid pursuit of getting anti-abortion laws on the books regardless of the cost or who gets hurt, with a very little parallel concern for sustaining the life of already born people. There's also a weird, deep resistance to talking about the historical reality of racial oppression and exploitation in our countries. Even an unwillingness to take seriously the issue of sexual abuse of women and children in church communities and by church leaders.

Come on, Christians are ostensibly people who've been taught to love their neighbors as themselves. These are people who've heard Paul's words in the church that to bear one another's burdens is to fulfill the law of Christ. These are people who've been taught about God's grace and forgiveness, people who read Jesus' words, "Whatsoever you do for the least of these, you've done for me." So what is going on? Now, of course, I'll grant that there are great churches and great pastors, and great Christians out there doing good gospel things. But even so, I think we're witnessing across the nation, and even the world, a massive failure of discipleship. Discipleship is that old word we use in church to talk about the process of

learning to follow Jesus. And this process is not meant just to teach us churchy skills like how to study the Bible or pray more. It's supposed to change our essential values. But it seems in too many cases, that is just not happening.

Early in the pandemic, my church and I read a book that offered an intervention on this front, *The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformational Values to Root us in the Way of Jesus.*" This book isn't written by some ivory-tower theorist. It's written by a pastor, Rich Vellodas. He's the pastor of New Life Fellowship in Queens, New York, New Life is a multiracial, multi-class, multi-generational urban immigrant church that has had to walk through some of these very difficult issues. In *The Deeply Formed Life*, Vellodas offers five values that he suggests we are missing in the church right now, five values that the church needs in this particular moment. The book was really helpful to me and to my church.

And so I asked Rich to sit down with me and chat about this crisis of discipleship. And I started out by asking him, "Why is this happening?"

Rich Vellodas 7:11

We're living in a CPR world. That's how I've tried to explain what's going on in our day, Marc. In a world that is marked by COVID, Political Hostility, Racial Injustice, and the convergence of those things, CPR is leading to us to have ailing hearts and difficulty breathing. And I think the past year and a half has revealed to us the complexity, the stress, the anxiety, the particular moment that we're in is so fragmented. And the call to discipleship in this particular moment requires a vision that's large enough, and deep enough to encompass the particular moment that we find ourselves in. Yes, we need the classic practices of discipleship, of prayer, and reading the Bible, and bearing witness to Christ, and church and all the rest, but discipleship--for it to truly impact people in ways that goes beyond the surface--It's one that resists the pull of formational compartmentalization that we find ourselves in. And we require a new really paradigm or a fresh paradigm, at least.

Marc Schelske 8:36

In the book, you talk about how we've experienced a shallow formation. Can you talk about, a little bit of what that means? And maybe how that shallow formation is what we are seeing fall down right now?

Rich Vellodas 8:48

Yeah, by shallow formation, I'm talking about a way of life that leaves very little space for interiority, a formation that often doesn't go beyond behavior modification, doctrinal affirmations, political associations. It's a very thin approach. And so to go beneath the surface, you know, when I think about the various traditions, that I've been shaped by, traditions that I love, traditions that have helped me, what I often find is that there tends to have a particular accent. So for example, in the evangelical tradition--I use that in the theological sense of the word not in the political sense of that word--And the theology in the evangelical tradition is often about right thinking. That as long as you have the right thinking, and you believe certain things about the divinity of Jesus, and about the way of salvation and about something related to the Bible, then you're good to go. I mean, you got the right thinking, or it's right--in the Pentecostal tradition, where I have spent many years as well, It's the right experiences. Do you have the right experience? Whether it's mainline traditions or progressive traditions or traditions that are oriented by justice? Is there a right action? Are we giving ourselves to the right action in the world? And so it's often right thinking, right experiences, right action. There's often in light of that very little interiority, where we're not examining some of the larger issues from a deeper center.

Marc Schelske 10:23

It sounds like you're talking about the, I mean, kind of the iceberg metaphor that, you know, I first saw in the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality material, talking about how we have so much of our interior life beneath the surface. That metaphor was talking about our emotional reality. And it sounds like you're taking the same metaphor and expanding it to the rest of our inner life, political identity, racial identity, culture, all that stuff.

Rich Vellodas 10:52

That's absolutely right. I mean, we...there are no icebergs in Queens, but we made that image the logo of our church. And it is, in many respects, the primary image that we come back to talk about--whether it's our emotional life, whether it's our political identification--the ways that we navigate and so absolutely right.

Marc Schelske 11:13

Right, because we want, we want life transformation and that's not going to be the surface things you've talked about. It's not just, "Do you understand and articulate your doctrine in the right way? Do you have you added the right set of behaviors to your life?" Those are fruit, that's Jesus metaphor, right? Fruit on the tree. So something about the tree, something about the roots is what needs to be changed. That's where we're headed. And right now in this world, it feels like the roots are missing.

Rich Vellodas 11:37

In the world that we live in, the pace is just nonstop. And this is not just that I'm from New York, I'm in the city that never sleeps. And so we're accustomed to this. But this is not just a New York phenomenon. There's just a chaotic, frenzied, hurried pace that we live. And because of this chaotic pace, there's very little time to actually take inventory of our own souls, let alone some of the deeper ways that we are to be thinking about some of the more challenging and important issues of our day.

Marc Schelske 12:10

In the book, you pick out five particular themes that you're suggesting are kind of the intervention to this to this problem that we're facing.

Rich Vellodas 12:21

That's the first time I've heard it that way and I like it, Marc. That's the first time I've heard it that way.

Marc Schelske 12:26

We want to get down into the roots or down into the iceberg. Talk us through what these values are and what they're intervening about.

Rich Vellodas 12:35

Yeah, so the five values that I write about, and those values are Contemplative Rhythms, Racial Reconciliation, Interior Examination, Sexual Wholeness, and Missional presence.

For Contemplative Rhythms, the intervention is we are living often at a pace that is exhausting, and leaves no room for us to catch up to God. And so in order to catch up to God, we need to slow down our lives. That's the paradox of the way of Jesus.

The intervention for that Racial Reconciliation chapter is that we live in a world that's so increasingly fragmented around racial, ethnic lines, and we often don't have formational language to help us navigate this. You know, to talk about race. We have to talk about it on so many levels theologically, historically, sociologically, ecclesiologically, politically. I thought, I need to...the intervention is we need to talk formationally.

Interior Examination, the intervention is that we are living often on the surface of our own lives. And we're not taking inventory on what's happening. And so the intervention is that Jesus wants to transform all of our lives, especially our interior lives.

Sexual Wholeness is we live in a culture--this is within the church and outside the church--that splits souls from bodies, as opposed to seeing the dynamic interplay between the two. And we are to hold these things together.

And that Missional Presence value, really the intervention is we are called to make something of the world. We're not just called to be consumers of the world, we're called to participate with God in the creation of something that has yet to be seen in its fullness. That's how I tried to in essence articulate what I think we need individually and collectively.

Marc Schelske 14:28

I think the book came out in 2020. That means that you were writing it, working on it, for two or three years prior to that. So now, here we are a year and a half, more than a year and a half, into this weird CPR world that you've talked about. It seems like these five values are maybe even more urgent than they were when you were working on the book.

Rich Vellodas 14:53

I knew there were problems. That's why I wrote I wrote it, but it does seem like a deepening and an acceleration of the problems in the past year and a half.

Marc Schelske 15:03

You know, we're so wired up to avoid discomfort. And, and when it comes to church, honestly, what people want from church is to go to church and feel encouraged and hopeful and leave church carrying that encouragement into the world that they're in.

Rich Vellodas 15:23

Right.

Marc Schelske 15:23

Right. That's the thing that they--that may not be what they need, but it's the thing they want.

Rich Vellodas 15:29

Yeah.

Marc Schelske 15:29

And so this acceleration that you speak of, I think part of what has happened is it has accelerated or made more plain, the discomfort! All of us, all of us that are pastors in the last year and a half have had to rethink how we even do church like, like the church...

Rich Vellodas 15:44

Or if I wanna do it!

Marc Schelske 15:48

Exactly, you know, and the expectations that church members have of what church is like that has changed. How we expect the election to go, that is changed, and how we expect our politicians to talk to each other, that is changed, you know, our expectations of the racial conversation, that is changed. And so all of a sudden it's like there's this rawness, this open discomfort, and that emotional immaturity, or emotional unhealth-- we just run into all kinds of places to avoid facing that interior discomfort,

Rich Vellodas 16:22

What the pandemic has revealed, in many ways, as you mentioned, beyond just the crisis of discipleship, but particularly related to the crisis of discipleship, is the ways that we have not navigated our own interior life in such a way that leads us to being a good gift to our neighbors, even our neighbors that we profoundly disagree with. And so, the church, instead of the church being a place that demonstrates what is possible when Jesus gets a hold of a community, and the kind of compassion and justice and love and humility, what we've seen in the church and our discipleship is in many ways, a sad reflection of the world.

Marc Schelske 17:11

Right, right.

Rich Vellodas 17:11

And so what this has most certainly revealed is, yes, that immaturity, as my predecessor would say, that spiritual maturity and emotional maturity are inseparable.

Marc Schelske 17:23

One of the things that you that you say in this book is the deeply formed life is not possible without an intentional reordering of our lives. So, what I take you to mean by that is that this is not just a change of perspective. This is not like a new list of five values that I should adopt for my church. There's something more tangible, that has to happen if this is going to be real.

Rich Vellodas 17:50

Yeah, what I'm trying to get at is the shifts that need to take place in our lives are not just rational shifts, doctrinal shifts, theological shifts. I mean, we can make all the different shifts in our lives mentally, theologically, and not bear any difference in our lives. Yes, we need theological frameworks to think through and rethink how we understand the world. But if we just have frameworks without formation, we are still in the same place. What does it mean to reorder our lives around contemplative rhythms of slowing down to be with God? What does it mean to reorder our lives around taking inventory of the ways that I've been shaped racially, and the invitation to live a more just, reconciled, life? The invitation to take inventory of what's happening within my emotional life? There, it's a reordering. And so it's not just here, check this box. Have you read this book? Have you read this article? It's no... can we begin to talk about the foundational changes that need to be made.

This is why--Marc, you know, I love what you said--most people come to church to hear good news, to be encouraged. I mean, I try to preach encouragement every Sunday. At the same time, I tell our

congregation that we should have a sign in the front of our church that says, "Enter at your own risk." Because we are going to invite you to go places and to consider a reordering of our lives. That might not feel good. But when has following Jesus been about feeling good? I mean, he said, if you're gonna follow me, take up, take up your cross. That doesn't feel good. And I think what I'm trying to do in this reordering is, again, trying to contextualize in some ways, what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Marc Schelske 19:48

Okay, so let's, let's take one of these values, just as an example. So the last one you talked about the racial reconciliation. Let's just go with that one because that one is troubling for many of us. So when you say that we need to reorder our lives, and that's not just, you know, reading a book or hearing a podcast nodding your head and saying, "Yep, things were bad." Like, you're you're talking about something practical. So unpack that. What does a reordering actually look like in regard to that value?

Rich Vellodas 20:17

It means a number of things. One of the ways, that what it means is for us to actually take conscious, intentional prayerful inventory of the ways that we have been formed. And so for example, there's a tool that I've developed called Race and Racism In Our Families. In that, my attempt was to help the congregation begin to identify--and not just identify, that's the first step--begin to now resist the messages, the scripts that we have inherited, related to people who don't look like us. And so for example, how did your family consciously or unconsciously talk about black people? What were the messages that you received? About black people, about white people, about East Asian people, South Asian people, Middle Eastern people, Hispanic people, Native American people? What are those messages? Who were you taught to fear? Who were you taught were beneath you? Who were you taught was competent and who was incompetent? Who's dangerous, who's safe?

Unless we are doing that hard work and naming the ways that we've been formed, we're going to have a really hard time imagining something different. And so part of our own formation is taking radical inventory: How have I been shaped in ways that are not in step with the kingdom of God, not instead with the gospel of Jesus Christ, not in step with the way of love? You're not going to get that by just reading a book. It's going to take community and intentionality. And Marc, here's what I've discovered. I've led many people in our congregation and outside of it with that simple tool. And to name the messages that we've received is such a difficult, often shameful--it feels shameful, because if people really admit how their family gave them messages about black people, or Asian people, Hispanic people, across the board, it's embarrassing, and so no one wants to do it! And yet, this is the way of the cross. We are actually facing, we're living in truth. And we're asking the hard questions. And so that's one of the ways, Marc, that I think reordering our lives pertains to something like racial justice and reconciliation.

Marc Schelske 22:38

So then, I'm, I'm going to think this in this example, I'm going to think about my family, people that I care about. I have an example of that. I spent a summer when I was a 12, I spent a summer living with my grandmother who lived in northern Arkansas. My pictures, my memories, my associations of my grandma, are wonderful Christmases, you know, the way that she, you know, the specific things that she made, the special dishes that she made, you know, going into... going to her house for holidays, feeling really warm and loved and cared for. I have all those associations.

So then I spent the summer with her and in the course of that summer, what I learned was that she--in a very, sort of non-spiteful way--just authentically thought Black people weren't as smart as she was. She didn't curse because she was a good church lady. She didn't use foul language, because she was a teacher at the local Christian school. But just in a way that was very matter of fact, like how I would talk about the sky being blue, she just believed black people weren't that smart. And so now I have this tension in my gut over this person that I love, that I have all these wonderful associations with, that I think was a good Godly person, and also was racist. And now I have to look at both sides of that picture. That process is painful, it is painful, right? I want my people to be good people.

Rich Vellodas 24:06

Right? And that's part A. Then Part B becomes "How am I perpetuating that in ways that I might not be totally aware of, in subtle ways..."

Marc Schelske 24:20

Right.

Rich Vellodas 24:20

So now it becomes grandma, my grandma or you know, aunt So-and-so in Arkansas. Now the question is, "That's really sad, now, how are the ways that I'm now participating in that? That's the hard work and then what are the counter-instinctual acts that I need to now begin to grow into to begin to re-narrate and reorder my life in light of how I've been shaped racially by my family.

Marc Schelske 24:49

So now I'm moving past thinking about this and reflecting on it. Now you're saying, Okay, Marc, you also have to do something with it." What is... what's the reordering practices? What is the thing I'm going to do differently if I'm really engaging in this conversation?

Rich Vellodas 25:04

Yeah, in your, in your example, let's go with that example. First of all, I think it requires some level of confession. There is something about externalizing our sins. I mean, this is good Christian tradition stuff here, you know. Confession is good for our soul and confession roots us in love. And if we're able to name certain things that have been strongholds in our lives, we begin to free those things from the power it's had over us. You know, whatever we cannot name, we're a slave to. And so I think it begins with confession. This is what I have been living with, carrying. And then in that case there, you know, I do think part of it now--in this case, we're just taking a very individualistic approach to address something.

And so I think to talk about racism needs to be talked about in individual, interpersonal, and institutional ways, but let's just stick with the individual lens for a second,--How much do I need to pay attention to the various faulty messages that arise in a given day? Marc, you're at the doctor's office and someone walks in. And you see it's a black woman who walks into the doctor's office, and your first thought (or the hospital, wherever you're at) your first thought is, "This can't be the doctor." Because, you know, black people, black women can't be doctors... whatever faulty message we have, or Black people can't be a good director. So this can't be the doctor. And now you're asking yourself, you're taking inventory? What is that about? Your confessing that. You're praying. You're asking the Lord to forgive, and then by God's grace, you're opening yourself up and moving towards someone that in the past, you might have regarded as some intellectually inferior or whatever it might be?

Marc Schelske 26:57

Right.

Rich Vellodas 26:57

I think that's one of the ways that we if we play out a scenario like that, but this is a lifelong journey, requiring us to take note on notes on ourselves, and subsequently identifying what are the counter-instinctual habits, actions, that's required of me and it differs from scenario to scenario.

Marc Schelske 27:17

You mentioned, you know, that we were talking about an individualized example and that this also needs to be sort of a larger conversation about communities and systems. Okay. Your book is about values that I think you're not just proposing for individual Christians. They're coming out of your church community. And I think you're proposing that this needs to be a community conversation. So what does that look like in a church community?

Rich Vellodas 27:42

Number one, understanding the power dynamics. We want to be more than just what we call "a sanctified subway car," in which we get a group of anonymous, diverse people in close proximity to each other. And, you know, as someone said, plantations were diverse as well, you know, so we're not trying to be just the sanctified subway car. Part of that is how, who's making decisions? Who shaping the community, whose fears are we paying attention to? Which values are we highlighting? And I don't know if that happens unless there are diverse people in the room at various levels of power and influence and authority. And so in our church, for example, you know, every level, it's--now granted, it's a very diverse church--at the same time, we have worked hard and intentionally to ensure that at every level of our community, there is diversity and shared power. And who stories are we listening to? What are the fears that we're paying attention to? What are the values that we're prioritizing? And so that's really related to identity, you know? Who we are, what we look like, but then on another level, it's a mission, what are we giving ourselves to? As as a congregation, we have worked hard over 30 years, to pay attention to the racialized world that we live in. And to try to be a witness that in the name of Jesus, a new possibility, a new racial possibility, is before us.

And so what does this look like? Our engagement with our local community. Right? And you know, what, we were not just involved in evangelism, we're not just trying to preach the gospel and get people to make an individual decision. We're asking ourselves, what are, where are their points of inequity? Where are the points of disproportionate resources? So for example, right now, you know, our church is involved with a group of other communities within our neighborhood, addressing affordable housing in a community in which gentrification is taking over. For us this is an issue of justice, of racial justice. This is part of our discipleship. This is part... you know, does God care about our our souls or our bodies? The answer is yes. We're saying this is a holistic gospel that we're trying to live out. And so whether it's individually, interpersonally, institutionally as a congregation, we have tried to work through all this. And it's hard, because these are massive issues before us. And we realize we're not going to solve most of these problems, but by God's grace, maybe we can touch a few. And as we work together, try to see something of the kingdom of God become more of a reality, within our local spaces.

Marc Schelske 30:35

In the book, you have a chapter for each of these values. And that chapter is followed by a chapter that is practices. That structure by itself says something because it says it's not enough to think these thoughts.

It's not enough to agree with a perspective. It's not enough for Mark to just acknowledge that his grandmother was racist, right? There's a deeper thing that needs to happen. That thing involves personal reflection, community reflection, but also has to show up in tangible actions.

Rich Vellodas 31:12

I just didn't want to give theological frameworks for people to say, "Well, I believe that," or "That's insightful, and I read the book, and you know what, maybe I'll read it again if I have to teach on it." For me, it was, How can this be a resource to guide people into a new way of being in the world? And it was very intentional to offer--I love theology, it's not that I'm anti-theology. I love theology. I want theology to have flesh on it. I want it to be livable. I want you know... Jesus prays, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done" that there is... I just don't want to think about it. I want to be about it. And so the practices are really trying to orient our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our relationships into a new way of being.

Marc Schelske 32:04

Yeah, 'cause it's very often that in doing things, our minds become conscious of and aware of the implications. We very often live our way into theology.

Rich Vellodas 32:18

Yes!

Marc Schelske 32:19

Even though we like to think we thought our way into it! It's the practices that actually shaped us. And maybe that's part of the crisis of this moment, that we're seeing the church engaged in practices, that when you look at these practices pastorally, you're like, "That practice isn't taking you closer to Jesus! That is headed off a cliff, that practice has to shift.

Rich Vellodas 32:40

And you're right. I mean, it comes to a point where I think, the more... the more I give myself to contemplative prayer, the more now my body starts.... And so it's not... my body starts craving it...

Marc Schelske 32:52

Yes. Oh, man. Yeah, that's such a big deal. I--a couple times a year--go down to a Benedictine abbey that's about an hour from where I live. And I just did this last week, actually, for two days, to go down and just disconnect from all the obligations, spend some time in silence, you know. Follow the hours, be in a place that the focus is interiority. And what I noticed as I drive onto the campus is I can feel in my body a shift, I can feel... I've done it enough times now, that just driving onto the campus, I feel the tone of my muscles and the presence of my mind shift, like some of that pressure, some of those obligations, some of the performance that I constantly live in, and all the other areas of my life, doesn't belong here. And I feel it, I feel it in me in a way that's not intellectual at all. It's it's in my body.

Rich Vellodas 33:48

Now, this is music to my ears, Marc, because I mean, I go to a Benedictine monastery in the Boston area, usually every year. And that's exactly my experience. I'm there, as I'm driving up, first of all, it feels like a pilgrimage every time I'm going there, like I'm going to meet God. I'm not just going on a little trip here, a little vacation, I am going to meet the living God, and something in my body adjusts to it. The question that I wrestle with, and this is why I've needed rhythms of this, is how do I carry this with me, when I'm back into the day-to-day operations of the world. And taking the kids to school and getting

dinner and grocery shopping, I have to, by God's grace, I need time to go up the mountain. And for me going up the mountain is the monastery, is silence, is retreats, and then I come back down and then realize soon enough, I better go back up again. Because it is so easy to be dragged down by the pace and the priorities and the values of this world

Marc Schelske 34:53

Well, it's almost like that what happens on the mountain is that you get to practice something that your normal life structure would mediate against. And the more you practice it, the more you can bring it into your normal life structure.

Rich Vellodas 35:05

Yes!

Marc Schelske 35:06

I think what you're saying is, you know, contemplative rhythm shouldn't be a special event, it should be a normal way of living. Racial reconciliation shouldn't be an annual conference, it should be your attitude toward people around you. Interior examination shouldn't be something that you're doing just--you know--at your therapist's office, it should be a daily practice, it should be your response to watching yourself live. Sexual wholeness, that's not, you know, something that just happens in certain places. You should be thinking about the body that God made you in and the bodies that God made everyone else in and the dignity that those bodies have and how to relate to everybody's bodies in that way, you know. Missional presence isn't an evangelistic event. It's a way of engaging the world. And so now we're moving from values, which could easily be interpreted as sort of ideals that we put up on the plaque.

Rich Vellodas 35:58

Right.

Marc Schelske 35:58

Now we're bringing that down to the actual woven fabric of the minutes of my life.

Rich Vellodas 36:06

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Marc, that's beautiful. You should take that clip right there, And--I don't know--put that everywhere. You distilled it beautifully. And the question, I think, when I read the Bible--I think this is Eugene Peterson's--He believed that what the Bible said was, it was livable, and that's what concerned him. Is this livable? Is not just is this thinkable? But is this liveable? And for me, that's the hope, not just that we're just thinking about new ways of being Christian, but that we're living into new ways of what it means to follow Jesus.

REFLECTION

Marc Schelske 36:46

The call to discipleship requires a vision that is large enough to encompass the moment we find ourselves in. Did you hear Rich say that? Whether you agree with the five values that Rich's proposing, and the way that he articulated them, it seems like he's really onto something. The discipleship of many Christians over the last generation is so thin, so brittle, and often exclusionary. It seems not to be able to handle much discomfort and that's a problem. Because the gospel is just the opposite of that!

One reason I resonate with Rich's five values is that they help us, in his words, "resist the pull of formational compartmentalization." That's a great phrase, right? That's when our Christianity only impacts certain narrow compartments of our lives. These values give us practical ways to have our faith shape every part of our lives: How we see our bodies and the bodies of other people, how we relate to our community and the politics necessary to govern ourselves in a pluralistic world, how we think about race, how we think about our own identity. We're not Christians because we believe certain abstract ideas about God and the world. We're Christians because we follow the way of Jesus. The way, how we live, how we relate, how we engage others, all of that matters. This is the goal for spiritual maturity, that we would push beyond inflexible intellectual definitions and into a gracious love, an other-centered co-suffering love.

One more quote from Rich, "The deeply formed life is not possible without an intentional reordering of our lives." Think about that. Do you have space for interiority? Is your faith deeper than behavioral modification, doctrinal affirmation, and political affiliation? Does the pace of your life allow for this kind of deep reflective faith? Or does the rush keep you skating on the surface? Does your faith enable you to be a good gift to your neighbors? Even the neighbors you disagree with? May you push deeper than a surface religion into the depths of interior faith that can overflow into every aspect of your life, making you more gracious, more loving, and more and more like Jesus. Thanks for listening.

Notes for today's episode and any links that have been mentioned, you can find them at www.MarcAlanSchelske.com/taw047.

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In it, I teach us short spiritual practice that has been absolutely essential for me, as I face the anxiety and uncertainty of our time and some deeply anxious things I'm facing in my own personal life and health. So this practice has been helpful to me. I want to share it with You. Subscribe and get the book at www.MarkOptIn.com.

Until next time, remember, in this one present moment, you are loved. You are known and you are not alone.

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