



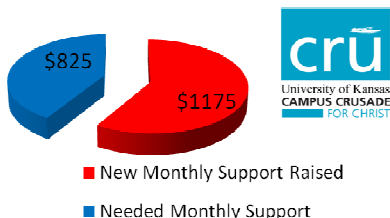
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Prayer Requests

We leave for our Summer Project in Colorado May 30th. Please pray for us as we spend 6 weeks mentoring students and staff and 10 days at our National Staff Conference in Fort Collins.

Mark and Brenda's monthly support needs to return to the KU and Regional Faculty Commons Ministry



Campus Crusade for Christ

FACULTY COMMONS
 CONNECTING PROFESSORS TO HELP CHANGE THE WORLD

KU and the Great Plains Region

The Oxford Freshmen who Changed the World and his Friend Ralph

May 2009

J.I. Packer has written over 40 books, co-authored others and was the general editor of the recently published, "English Standard Version" of the Bible. While his best known book is "Knowing God," the books that have helped me the most are "Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God" and "Keeping in Step with the Spirit." In working on a recent project I had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Packer and have an interview about the topic of discipleship.

It was 10:55 and time to meet Dr. Packer. Several people had told me I should be a little nervous and now I was feeling it. As I approached the door it was already cracked open and I could see some movement inside. "Come in...," the voice came with an unmistakable British accent. The room was small, maybe 10' by 10'. Not the office I expected of a well-known scholar. On the desk were a few stacks of papers and the notable absence of a computer. I had just learned he still does all his writing with a pen and yellow pad. Two filing cabinets, a desk and three small chairs. On the wall hung three pictures of train engines, near the door was one old-time coat rack. On it a tan jacket hung and one umbrella in the base, perhaps a tribute to his days at Oxford, maybe just a frequent need in Vancouver, BC. His worn leather attaché was at his side and in his shirt pocket a glasses case marked "Optical Dept. of London Drugs."

Dr. Packer, How do you keep from becoming mechanical or programmatic in discipleship?

"I had decided that whatever your first question was I would begin with talking about the importance of relationships. Discipleship begins with a commitment of friendship. It is an explicit relationship, the goal of growing in discipleship should be made clear but it is out of a commitment to friendship."

"Give yourself to a person as a friend, think of them in friendship terms. So that what builds between you and what bonds you is that here we have two people, each appre-

ciating the other for what he or she is, the discipleship bit is an attempt to build out of that friendship.

That leads to another issue. If you are committed before God to try to help that person grow into a deeper relationship with God, in all honesty there needs to be an explicit statement of the goal, what you hope to grow out of the friendship.

By nature I am not an outgoing or friendly person. When I was a kid I was a quiet, isolated person. When I became a believer I saw reason to start challenging that in myself and seeking to change it. I think the good Lord has done a fair amount of changing at that point.

I think I am making a very fundamental point; the person who is doing the discipling must be free and whole hearted in the commitment to friendship. This is critical, especially for the person that starts where I started, kind of cool and withdrawn. I wasn't judgmental but I did watch the world go by and assessed everything I saw. That was a big and basic pleasure of life for me.

As distinct from other people that want to have a finger in everything that goes by and be involved in everything around them, me, I just wanted to watch. As I said, that isn't good enough for the disciple of the Lord Jesus and the one trying to help others become disciples of the Lord Jesus. That had to change, that pretty much has changed."

This surprised me. Dr. Packer, a well-known writer and scholar, and yet his first words were, "it all starts with a commitment to friendship." It seems like we have made this a little too hard, a little too complicated.

Would you tell us about a significant relationship in your life in which you were discipled or discipled another?

It was 1944 when I was converted at Oxford. It was the second Sunday of my freshman year at a student ministry meeting. The guy who discipled...

Hear about Ralph and check out the "Rest of the story" on our web page, WWW.MarkandBrendaBrown.com

Mark, Brenda & Katie

me, that is the word we would use now days, though we wouldn't have used that word then. "What word would you have used?" I interjected." I don't think there was any word for it but follow-up. That sounds pretty impersonal but that is what was used. It was Christian Union jargon in Oxford in 1944. The guy doing follow up at Oxford was a chemist, an able chap, a vugarian culturally. He was a guy with a great sense of humor and all sorts of hobbies and interest. He was very different from me. He was constantly inviting me to do things with him. I was still very reserved and he was my friend. We weren't self-conscious about relationships in those days. We didn't have any theory, we didn't talk about it. I knew in a broad sense that he was making friends with me and following me up. He was informally and casually helping me. If he had tried to be formal or structured with me I would have clammed up. When I was 18 years old I didn't like being told what to do!

His name was Ralph. Only once did he pin me to the wall. When I got to Oxford I was self taught in jazz clarinet and he challenged me about my involvement in the Saturday night Oxford Jazz combo. My entire first semester I played with the band,, it was called the "Oxford Bandits." The whole experience had my heart, I loved it and patterned my play after New Orleans jazz men. Ralph pinned me to the wall beginning the second term. On Saturday night the Christian Union speaker did Bible exposition, and Ralph said that Bible teaching should be my priority. That was the first big test of loyalty that came my way. He was right, I knew he was right, but it took a certain amount of deciding to go with what he was telling me. I went with it, quit playing in the band and haven't played jazz clarinet in a band since.

The friendship was on until he became a professor, teaching at the university in the capitol city of Guyana . After that he worked at St. Andrews University in Scotland. We kept in touch and the friendship went on until alas he drove his car straight into a heavy army truck, and I have to say, that was the end of him (stated dryly as a matter of fact, :-)) That was when he was in his early 60s and therefore so was I.

It was a discipling friendship. Whenever I was with him, my mind was alert to take from him anything he had to give. I got the idea, this fellow was ahead of me, he was wise and talked sense. When he said anything, I listened.

This was my first and fullest experience in discipleship.

Dr. Packer went on to tell us about his relationship with the Senior Clergymen and Vice Principle of Oak Hill Theological College, Alan Stems. Dr. Packer was a 22 years old and the new Greek and Latin professor. Alan was his teaching mentor and helped Dr. Packer take the next steps in his walk and development. They would frequently talk walks in the university park and gardens.

The interview went I but I wanted to highlight a few things. The man that had the most profound role in Dr. Packers early development was an obedient student that was merely a year older. Ralph loved and challenged him. He was a mentor that would be surpassed by his disciple but was always appreciated and respected for the role he played in Dr. Packer's life.

Later it was a faculty member at Oak Hill that God used to "friend" him toward maturity in Christ. Our mission with Faculty Commons is to "take the whole campus to the whole world." In the end, that will happen as we make friends in Christ with the faculty in our region and encourage them in the vision of mentoring other professors and students in the fertile soil of friendship.