

What's Beneath The Surface? **by Kelly Johnson**

For many of us coffee is a beverage that not only provides stimulation but also has become a source of comfort and sincere enjoyment. It comes in many varieties, flavours, blends, and can be made into a variety of specialty drinks that are enjoyed by many. I have often marvelled at the coffee phenomenon that has swept our culture over the last few years. However, I realize that coffee is not a recent invention and has been a popular beverage for years. In fact, at one time the Pope actually blessed coffee and declared it a truly Christian beverage. But what should we make of this heavenly nectar? What significance could it possibly have for us as Christians? What can we learn from these little beans?

To address these questions, I'd like to discuss four main events in the life of the coffee bean and relate these to the life of a Christian. These events include harvesting, roasting/blending, grinding, and taste. Here summarizes the life of the coffee bean, or should I say Christian. I'd like to present to you Average Joe who through time becomes Joe Christian and then through even more processing and time and processing is transformed into a great Cuppa Joe.

Average Joe is what we like to call a pre-Christian here at Sunshine Hills Foursquare Church. Average Joe is just another bean on the coffee tree. He's just there growing, living life in his cluster, not knowing that he has a greater purpose in life that needs to be developed and tempered so that he can function in the role that is intended for him. Basically if Average Joe isn't harvested, he will die and not fulfill this call.

Harvesting is a handpicking process in the life of the coffee bean, much like the efforts others make in reaching people with the Gospel. God handpicks each one of us and all of us are predestined to fulfill His destiny in our lives if we choose to obey Him. If we are not harvested, then we will die in our sins and never know the life that He had set apart for us. In the case of Average Joe, we see a harvested soul who becomes a part of the Kingdom of God and is transformed into Joe Christian. One of the first things Joe Christian will experience in his new life is the amazing experience of a cleansing process that will prepare him for a life of service for the Lord.

After a bean is harvested it goes through a drying, sorting, and grading process. In this portion of preparation it is essential for the bean to be dried and then have the outer shell removed, much like the husking of corn. This is required in order to prepare the bean for its further development. As a new Christian this process is similar to the stripping away of our past life entanglements as pre-Christians. If these entanglements are not stripped away we can never become totally free in Christ. These things of the old sinful nature need to be pointed out to new Christians as something that would interfere with their relationship with Christ. This is a process that each new believer must go through. The best results usually come through discipleship, accountability, and submission to a local church body.[1] One of the next important steps after being dried and husked is grading and sorting. This is where over-fermented or unhusked beans are removed. Somewhere along the line, this little bean was neglected of proper care and didn't make the cut for further development. Just like Christians that didn't have their seeds planted in good soil – as we see in the

familiar parable where the seeds planted on rocky soil, hard soil, and the soil filled with thorns, extinguished the life of the good seed.[2]

Grading the beans is where decisions are made that determine what category the beans fall into for exporting. This is necessary so that the proper roasting method is chosen for the desired outcome of each bean. As Christians this is like determining our place in the church, not only the local body but in the church as a whole. Is Joe Christian suited for pulpit ministry, for missions, or for career development? The possibilities are endless. This is where Joe Christian develops his niche in the Christian community, where he will be able to serve in ways that are best suited to his gifting.

The next important step in the life of the coffee bean is roasting and blending. This is a very critical step indeed. Will this little bean be a lighter roast or a darker one? How much character development does Joe Christian need? What kind of flavour does he need to produce?

In short, roasting is what transforms the little green bean into the aromatic, flavourful brown beans that we purchase and consume. Roasting is usually done at temperatures reaching upwards of 550 degrees depending on the intended outcome. It is through this process that the coffee essence or oils start to emerge. This is where Joe Christian experiences the trials of faith that we all must endure so that we can be of good character and bear much fruit. Here, Joe Christian needs to trust his Maker (and Master Roaster, in the case of the bean), believing that the processes he must endure are truly for his eternal benefit and for the purpose of seeing him fulfill the calling on his life to its fullest potential. It is in these roasting trials that we experience some of our greatest pain, stretching[3], and lose more of our 'excess baggage' as Christians. I realize that I'm not stating any new revelations here, but I feel it is good to remind ourselves what one of our Foursquare mentors Ron Mehl says, "God has a plan for your life and it's always good." We truly do need to trust our Father and have faith that He sees the entire picture when we only see what's in front of our noses. It is in knowing the truth of the character and nature of God that we can rest and know that He will only lead us through that which is intended for good in our lives, not for harm.

A sister step to roasting is blending. Blending is essential for creating a balanced flavour once the beans are ground. Blending is important because one coffee bean will not produce or possess the best-rounded flavour or impact on its own. I see this as being much like being a part of the local body of Christ; like teamwork. One bean on its own doesn't offer enough flavour, but with the right mix it is incredible. Just as one Christian on their own has a lot of potential, but more is released when they are a part of the whole body, and are being complemented by those around them.

Which part of the Body does Joe Christian fit into? Whichever role he is blended into, he is a valuable and an important asset. His role makes a difference in the greater picture of the body of Christ, even though he may not recognize that. Joe needs to be secure in his own identity and know who he is and what he is called to and remain faithful to that call. When the Master Roaster is creating his blend, he knows the potential of each bean and keeps his blends a closely guarded secret because every blend he makes is an expression of his own creativity. Is not our Father like that? Does He not know each one of us and place us where we need to be? Do we not need to trust His expertise and not ask too many questions? Our Father knows us better than we do ourselves therefore we must trust that

His view is higher than ours.

Furthermore, the roasting of beans develops their flavour, but how is the most flavour extracted from the bean? One word: grinding. Grinding the bean is what prepares the bean for infusion into hot water, which in turn releases the flavour of the bean. A coffee bean dumped into hot water on its own will not release anywhere near the desired potency. However, after it is ground up a delightful infusion of flavour occurs.

So what about grinding anyway? If grinding releases flavour, what type of grind is the best? Well, the type of grind is dependant on the taste of the consumer, and potency of flavour needed. Coffee can be ground from coarse to extra fine and can even be pulverized to a fine powder in the case of the Turkish coffee type. If coffee is ground too coarse it actually doesn't produce the best flavour because it over extracts the bitter oils and acids. So the finer the grind (to a point) the more optimum the flavour extraction.

If grinding releases flavour, I'd like to ask what flavour do you give when you are ground and extracted?[4] When we as Christians encounter circumstances that test our patience, grace, peace, and basically all of our spiritual fruits, what kind of response are we going to have? Will we offer a pleasing aroma to others or will we be pungent and offensive? Will Joe Christian snap at others or will he remember Proverbs 15:1... "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words cause quarrels." (TLB). The grinding process in the life of a Christian is what tests the fruit in our lives to see what kind of adjustments or work that we need.

The final stage of the life of a coffee bean is the taste that is experienced when the coffee is poured out. Taste in the coffee realm is broken down into four categories: acidity, aroma, body, and flavour.

Acidity is a desirable characteristic in determining the taste or flavour of coffee. Acidity is what keeps the coffee from tasting flat and should not be confused with a sour taste. I liken acidity to that of being salt and light in the Christian world. Christians should be adding that subtle flavour that keeps the world around them from being flat and insipid. We should be impacting our marketplaces with that edge that sets us apart from the world. We should be affecting those around us in positive ways and have them wanting us to be around them.

Aroma is a characteristic that's more of a sensation and can be difficult to tell the difference from flavour. Aroma is what brings the balance to what we taste. Without aroma we'd only experience sweet, salty, bitter, and sour. Aroma is what brings life to what we're experiencing when we taste. This is evident when one has a cold, if the nose is plugged up the person rarely fully enjoys what they are eating because their sense of taste is not balanced. As for Joe Christian, aroma for him would be like the evidence of the Holy Spirit living in him. If the Spirit were not alive and active within him, it would be like someone having a plugged nose. All of the components for a fabulous cup of coffee are present but the coffee is missing the fullness of the intended flavour. The Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian brings balance and life to their relationship with Christ. If the Holy Spirit is not actively a part, or recognized to be a part of the Christian's life they will miss out on the fullness of God's plan for them. They are still very much a Christian, but they are lacking in fullness of life.

In a good cup of coffee body is what you feel in your mouth. It is the heaviness, thickness, or richness that the tongue senses. Another example of body would be comparing the feeling of hot chocolate and apple juice in your mouth. The hot chocolate is more dense, rich and is heavy. Where as the apple juice resembles the feeling of water in your mouth. Body is what gives the coffee its desirable feeling in your mouth. We all know what thin, watery coffee is like - the viscosity isn't even enough to lube up your tonsils. Body is the substance of the coffee perceived in the mouth that adds to balancing the full experience of the cup of coffee. Without body, coffee would lack the savour and richness that is needed for a well-rounded cup. In the life of a Christian body would be similar to having well-rounded knowledge of the Bible. We're all pretty thin and weak when we don't have enough of the Word in us. Reading our Bible is what gives us the balance internally to be well received by those around us. Bible reading is what teaches us about the character and nature of God, principles of right living, and allows us to always be ready in season and out for whatever challenges come our way. It also provides the daily encouragement that we all need. Reading our Bibles is also that personal time with God that helps us to stay close to Him. If we don't have the time with Him that we need, we lack in our palatability to those around us. We need to be rich and full in our knowledge of Him so that we can be effective to the world around us.

Lastly, in order to understand what good flavour is, I should mention what qualities make up desirable characteristics and what makes up undesirable characteristics. Typically desirable characteristics include richness[5], complexity[6], and balance[7], fragrant, sweet, and mellow. As Christians, we should have desirable characteristics that reflect the image of Christ. We should be balanced in our spirits, souls, and bodies, and we should be examples that bear the fruit of the Spirit. Desirable characteristics are anything that would display the love of Christ to another in friendship. We need to have love as our drive for being whole as individuals and being balanced in our walk with Him. The love of Christ is what brings the whole package together and without it, we're all in sinking ships. He is the only one that can change our lives and make it possible for us to reach others on His behalf. We cannot accomplish these things in our own strength but only in His. Typical undesirable characteristics of flavour include bitterness, flat[8], thin[9], harsh, and sour. I can imagine that most of us would know what undesirable characteristics as Christians would be. Fortunately for Christians, if we have undesirable characteristics we are not thrown out or dumped down the drain. We have a loving Father that wants the best for us and is never finished with us and can use us no matter what flavour we have. Jesus can turn the water in our lives to wine whenever He needs to. All He wants for us is to be poured out into the lives of others and be a blessing to them no matter where we come from.

In conclusion, the life of a coffee bean is a complex one yet is one that we can all relate to. We all need to experience the salvation of God in our lives and have Him harvest us out of our sinful state. We need to have our outer shells removed, and we need to be graded and sorted into those places that He has planned for us. We should submit ourselves to His will and endure through those trials that are like the fires that roast the little coffee beans. We need to be blended together in the body of Christ and work together for the common goal of reaching others for Jesus, no matter what role we take on. We all need to have our flavours extracted from us and experience the loving care of the Father as He grinds away the edges in our lives. We need Him to extract the best possible flavour from us so that when we are poured out we are truly a great Cuppa Joe.

[1] I feel that I should mention that this is a process that is continuous throughout the entire life of a Christian but that it may be a little more intense in its initial processing as a new believer

[2] Luke 8: 9-15

[3] UBI: coffee beans swell and increase in size by over 50% while greatly decreasing their weight.

[4] Kind of like what I've heard Pastor Tom Gardner say, "we're all like tubes of toothpaste and God likes to see what comes out of us when we're squeezed

[5] Refers to body and fullness

[6] The perception of multiple flavours

[7] The presence of the basic taste characteristics where no one over-powers another

[8] Lack of acidity, aroma, and aftertaste

[9] Lacking acidity, usually a result of under brewing

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Last modified: July 22, 2000

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