

# OIKOS

australia

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## OIKOS Australia

Multiplying disciple makers and simple church

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# DIRECTIONS

## WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

### Kingdom involvement

Jesus taught extensively about the Kingdom of God which involves the rule of God and his righteousness expressed in people's lives, relationships, faith and values in society. His kingdom is breaking into this world and will be fully realized when he returns to the earth again.

The church is part of the Kingdom of God and is composed of communities of disciples who love, care, share and gather to worship and encourage each other. The connection between Kingdom and church is vital.

I am observing that disciple-making can flow naturally from the relationships of kingdom engagement in the local community. Simple churches that have a community focus seem to build up strength as well as relational networks to share the Gospel with people. Some examples over the past year have been sports chaplaincy, dance groups in schools, a Soul Café in Adelaide, indigenous ministry in the far north of Australia, service in local caravan parks and community housing areas, feeding programs such as *Salt* - the list is endless. Whatever needs God places on your heart as a disciple can be an avenue for his kingdom to expand!

I met one couple who foster and raise native butterflies on Bribie Island QLD and use this to engage with people in the local community and to share the Gospel. I read recently of a Christian family who have purchased an outback pub in Blyth, SA, to operate as a Christian base in that community. It has challenged them and their community! (see recent *Eternity* magazine)



### Intentional Gospel sharing

However the gospel must be shared not only in deed but also in word to see results. Ailsa and Chris and Destiny on the NSW South Coast engage in regular prayer walking which has seen them make a disciple each this year! Praise God! Other ministries such as Praxeis are engaged in significant prayer walking and looking for persons of peace and have seen generational growth of missional communities.

### Training and equipping

My conclusion is that we need "an army of ordinary people" who are trained and equipped to share and invite people to be followers of Jesus. Recent research suggests that belonging to a missional community that supports and engages in outreach is an important factor in disciple-makers continuing to be active and effective.

**Prayer** is a vital key and really is the starting point for any growth. In reaching people the soil must be prepared and tilled to be ready to receive the seed (Mark 4, Luke 10). Prayer walking is one practice that changes the spiritual receptivity of a community.

Praying for *persons of peace* is increasingly well understood and used around the world and in Australia with success. Strange how the methods that Jesus gave so long ago are still effective!!

(Continued on page 9)



MAURICE SMITH

# REFLECTIONS ON POCKETBOOK LIVING

*Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word. And the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. And it shall be that you shall drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. And it happened after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. 1 Kings 17: 1-7*

Maurice Smith (Spokane) reflects on the vital lessons learned in times of hand-to-mouth divine provision.

## THE PRICE OF OBEDIENCE

Perhaps it was Wolfgang Simson who said it best when he observed, **"Most Christians today don't live by faith; they live by faith in their planning"**. Perhaps that's one of the characteristics which distinguish contemporary believers from someone like Elijah. Elijah didn't have a plan. He simply chose to obey God, regardless of where that obedience might lead him. Where that obedience to God led Elijah was two-fold. First, it led him to one of the most profound demonstrations of prophetic power and ministry in all of Scripture - the proclamation of a prolonged drought which was nothing less than a declaration of spiritual warfare against the local "baal gods" which were

thought to rule the weather. Second, it led him into the wilderness where he became the "victim" of his own spiritual success and the object of God's special instruction.

My impression is that Elijah had no plan for what he would do or how he would live following his pronouncement of the coming drought. He obviously couldn't stay in Israel, hunted and persecuted by an irate King Ahab. But God had a plan, one which probably had not crossed Elijah's mind. He would send Elijah off to the wilderness of Trans-Jordan, beyond the reach of human help, and provide for him there. We are not told how long Elijah sojourned east of Jordan by the brook Cherith (or Kerith). Probably for several months. But he was there long enough to experience the "consequences" of his own obedience and success. With no rain (just as Elijah had declared), the brook dried

up, and Elijah became a victim of his own success in ministry. God's promised provision came to an end, and it was soon time to trust God and move on.

There are lessons to be learned through all of this. If you choose to obey God and live by faith - and not faith in your ability to plan - several things will happen. First, God Himself will assure your success, just as He did for Elijah. Second, God Himself will provide for you in unexpected ways, ways you could never have planned on your own. Do ravens providing food morning and evening figure prominently into your plan for how God should provide for you? Didn't think so. God's plan usually isn't our plan. That's why it requires faith on our part to embrace it. Third, your obedience and success will come at a personal price. If you walk by faith in public ministry for any length of time, and should



*Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink". And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first, and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son." For thus says the Lord God of Israel, The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth.' So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke through Elijah. 1 Kings 17:8-16*

you experience any degree of success, you will eventually experience this lesson. God will work overtime to test our faith and to conform our character to match our gift and our calling. The price of obedience is the tests and trials necessary to transform our character.

F.B. Meyer summed it up this way: *"The education of our faith is incomplete if we have yet to learn that God's providence works through loss, that there is a ministry to us through failure and the fading of things, and that He gives the gift of emptiness. It is, in fact, the material insecurities of life that cause our lives to be spiritually established. The dwindling brook at the Kerith Ravine, where Elijah sat deep in thought, is a true picture of each of our lives. "Some time later the brook dried up" - this is the history of our yesterdays, and a prophecy of our tomorrows. One way or the other, we must all learn the difference between trusting in the gift and trusting in the Giver. The gift may last for a season, but the Giver is the only eternal love. The Kerith Ravine was a difficult problem for Elijah until he arrived at Zarephath, and suddenly everything became as clear as daylight to him. God's hard instructions are never His last words to us, for the woe, the waste, and the tears of life belong to its interlude, not its finale. If the Lord had led Elijah directly to Zarephath, he would have missed something that helped to make him a wiser prophet and a better man - living by faith at Kerith. And whenever our*

*earthly stream or any other outer resource has dried up, it has been allowed so we may learn that our hope and help are in God, who made heaven and earth."*  
F.B. Meyer, "Streams In The Desert"

#### **DAILY POCKET CHANGE**

I suspect that when Elijah headed for Zarephath in Sidon (a hotbed of baal worship) he genuinely had no idea what to expect. All he knew was that God had a plan to provide for him through a widow who lived there. What he found was probably a step down in his mind - from ravens providing twice-daily meat to a widow and her son, out of food, on the verge of starvation and out of hope. I also suspect that Elijah had two immediate "revelations". God quickly revealed that in His economy, He often uses those who have the least as instruments to provide for His work. The widow and her son, the widow and her mite (Mark 12:41), the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 8:1). You get the point, and I think Elijah did, too. In the process God also revealed that in His Providential ordering of all things, He planned to provide not only for Elijah, but for the Widow and her son as well. God's work in our lives often resembles a multi-layered Chess game in which one move affects many others on many levels. God's withholding in your life is intended to touch many others as they witness your response to His dealings. And His provision to meet your needs it intended to

demonstrate His faithfulness not only to you, but to all those who see and hear. Your provision is, in many ways, their provision as well.

#### **SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE**

In case you haven't figured it out yet, this particular newsletter has been birthed out of my own current experiences. [And] I have received enough e-mails from people ... to know that we are not alone. The purpose of this letter is to say, "You're not alone, either". Some of you have shared heart-wrenching experiences of financial loss, bankruptcy, foreclosure, debilitating health problems, and more. Some of you feel like the widow and her son - out of provision and out of hope. Others of you are in ministry and you're wondering why God has you parked in a wilderness, withholding His provision as you live on what both you and I can only describe as "pocket change" while wondering what comes next. Be encouraged. The days of "pocket change" will come to an end. In the meantime He is using your faith in the midst of the wilderness as a testimony to others. Soon, He will vindicate your faith through a provision that meets your needs while teach others about His faithfulness to those who put their trust in Him.



**MAURICE SMITH** *Spokane, USA*  
[risingrivermedia.org](http://risingrivermedia.org) Maurice is a keen radio presenter and the instigator of Feed Spokane, a coalition of meal providers and community partners in the greater Spokane area. See Review page 14

# A POSTMODERN APPROACH TO CHURCH

**Len Hjalmarson**

*Order is always birthed out of chaos.*

*When chaos surrounds us,  
the Holy Spirit broods over us .  
. . . and God is creating a new  
masterpiece.*

— Graham Cooke

## **Participation not Spectator Mentality**

Postmodern gatherings will look chaotic to most modern leaders. In fact, in a postmodern gathering we may wonder who the leaders are.

Where traditional gatherings are leader-centred, postmodern gatherings tend to be community-centred. Furthermore, where traditional gatherings tend to be ordered and linear, postmodern gatherings tend to be non-linear, painting a picture rather than building clearly toward an end. They rely more on spontaneous connections and serendipity than on control and planned outcomes.

Strangely, this sounds a lot like a Spirit-led gathering, or like the description of the meeting outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. (For an argument that this outline is normative, see Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God.*)

A few years ago an intriguing proposal made the mailing list circuit. It carefully detailed the résumé of a certain fisherman, offering him as a pastoral leader for any growing church. The résumé included his lack of education, and his tendency to impulsive action. Somehow the Apostle Peter didn't sound like a good candidate for apostolic or pastoral ministry!

Not long afterward, a friend forwarded me this excerpt from *Second Thoughts on Missions*, by WC Lees.

Let me picture for you a jungle friend of mine. He is five feet two inches in height and pug nosed. Two enormous wild bear tusks stand out like hat pegs from his punctured ear lobes. His heavy earrings are of brass. Since childhood, they have stretched the lower part of his lobes, until now they are two inches longer than mine. His only covering, apart from a loincloth, are festoons of beads around his neck, and black grass bands around his legs just below the knees. He is just literate, which

is a notable achievement, for literacy comes with the gospel.

*It is easy to think of him as a quaint hangover from the past — a 'wild man' from Borneo. Yet he is a pastor, and one well able to use the Scriptures — his only book. He is emphatically a better pastor than I am. He has not been to a bible college, nor attended school. There were none to which he could go. He is, however, a man who is relentlessly obedient to every scrap of light which the Scriptures bring him. To such God keeps his promise and gives further understanding . . . (John 7:17).*

We desperately need the cross-cultural perspective to remind us that our professional approach to ministry has more to do with our own cultural values than with a biblical standard. Our high value set on knowledge, a particular gift mix, predictability, order, and in particular, excellence all push us toward the professionalisation of ministry. The result is decreased participation, decreased ownership and personal responsibility, boredom, and a spectator mentality.

If the 'medium is the message', the postmodern gathering may do more to empower a sense of peoplehood than the information and leader-centred gatherings we have commonly known.

*This world of a simpler way has a natural and spontaneous tendency toward organisation. It seeks order. Whatever chaos is present at the start, when elements combine, systems of organisation appear. Life is attracted to order — order gained through wandering explorations into new relationships and new possibilities.*

The interactive nature of postmodern gatherings can help us recover the

understanding that everyone is a player, and that too much leadership is as bad as no leadership. We have tended to emphasise control and rational structure, which may appear efficient while actually causing us to limit participation and thus neglect body life as outlined in Ephesians 4 where "every part does its work."

## **Truth in Paradox, Images and Story**

The Third email of Paul to the Corinthians:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ and a slave of the Lord, to the brothers in Corinth who are using e-mail accounts.*

*This is the third e-mail I am sending to you. Did you receive my other two? I have had no reply from you yet, and a 'fatal delivery' error message for the second e-mail, in which I wrote about love, faith and hope. I will send it again, just in case.*

*I sent my second message to the congregations throughout the whole of Asia Minor, but my service provider considered this to be spamming and closed down one of my accounts. To those who are using Web-based e-mail accounts, I will send Timothy to you with my message on foot. It will get there quicker.*

*Philemon and Titus send you their love. I found their e-mails amidst a flood of junk mail and get-rich-quick messages, in which there is no real profit.*

*Even though I recently upgraded my aging Pentium 90, I'm still getting an unknown WINDOWS error.*

*Look — I hope you don't mind, but I think I'll stick with the parchments next time.*

While we are becoming comfortable with mystery and paradox, we also need to

# In any gathering, particularly in a gathering where there are more possibilities than one or two leaders can envision ... What if it had been his intention to engineer even

reconnect to the imagination.

Every preacher knows that simply reading from Paul and then summarising the main points makes for a quickly forgotten message. Instead, preachers and teachers make good use of metaphor and story to anchor their message in a living example.

Picture Jesus on the shores of the lake of Galilee. Can you see the water catching the reflection of the sky, while the seabirds wheel overhead? The crowd gathers by the shore as he steps into a boat and begins to tell a story.

Jesus used stories from everyday life, describing common events familiar to his readers like a sower sowing seed, or a fisherman casting his nets. Story continues to be a popular method for framing truth.

*Tell the truth but tell it slant  
Success in circuit lies;  
Too bright for our infirm  
delight  
The Truth's superb Surprise . . .  
- Emily Dickinson*

CS Lewis wrote "the imagination is the vehicle of understanding". The reason that story is so useful is that images impact the brain at a level different from mere propositions. Pictures communicate on a variety of levels, and appeal to a variety of audiences. Stories from real life capture our attention by appealing to both heart and mind.

Where the modern world tried to escape images in favour of 'pure' truth in propositions, we

have learned that the old methods were the best. Many moderns were 'iconoclasts', trying to purge the faith by reducing it to the bare facts. Unfortunately, facts that are divorced from life are only facts. Jesus taught us by his incarnation that truth embodied in life will enter in at places that facts alone cannot reach.

The rediscovery of image-based forms is powerfully impacting our culture. Movies are the new vehicles of culture. Multimedia presentations are common as vehicles of the Gospel. The current generation was raised on images and the Internet is not only shaping the way we communicate but the way we understand ourselves and our world.

Worship is increasingly anchored in the physical world, with images, dance and drama. The only danger here is the professionalisation of worship. While no one wants to watch untrained dancers or listen to unskilled musicians, the pursuit of excellence has a way of taking us back to a passive spectator mentality where ninety-five percent of us watch while five percent perform.

In the modern world the watchword was 'balance', a Greek ideal. In the postmodern context the watchword is paradox, truth in dynamic tension. Sometimes apparently opposing truths must be held in tension. Jesus is both God and man. God is three in one. These concepts were boggling to moderns, who worked out elaborate formulas to explain the inexplicable. But the tension is not a problem to postmoderns.

While sixty-six percent of Americans

believe there is no absolute truth, nearly three out of four Americans believe that "the Bible is the word of God and completely accurate in all that it teaches". Holding mutually inconsistent ideas is not a problem for postmoderns.

God is both immanent and transcendent. The kingdom is now, but not yet. God chooses us, yet we have free

will. We are both spiritual and physical.

Is light a particle or a wave? It depends on the observer, according to the new physics.

Where moderns looked for the resolution of such tensions, often emphasising one side of the truth while minimising the other, postmoderns are comfortable with mystery and paradox. They recognise that truth is often multi-faceted, and they recognise that our knowledge will remain limited.

One of the well-known experiments that demonstrated the limits of our knowledge was performed nearly fifty years ago. Scientists attempting to measure a particle needed to know both its

size and its speed in order to understand its reaction with other particles. When they stopped the particle to measure its size, they could no longer know its speed. When they measured its speed, they could not measure its size.

This is important, because the mystical journey of union with Christ often brings more questions than answers. Furthermore, personal knowledge has characteristics that differ from scientific knowledge. While we may describe someone in startling detail, and even offer a psychological profile, it is not possible to truly know someone apart from love. The truth may not always be apparent to our mind, when it may be transparently clear to the heart.

*The heart has its reasons that  
reason cannot know.  
Pascal, Pensées*

## Non-Linear, Fluid and Spontaneous Order

*Fancy upsetting the clock-like,  
mechanical perfection of a  
great service with an  
outpouring of the Spirit! The  
thing is unthinkable!*

Martyn Lloyd-Jones' tongue in cheek comment on revival versus the lovely and efficient progress of a typical Sunday meeting is perhaps unfair in opposing the supernatural activity of God to the natural. But it is worth remembering that Lloyd-Jones saw the evolution of a technological culture at its height, and while the knowledge of clergy and laity increased, the church grew increasingly wealthy and spiritually cold.

The decentralised, non-linear experience in the context of face-to-face community is strikingly different to the institutional setting. In a home meeting, for example, an 'order of service' seems out of place. In contrast, the highly structured and linear programme of a Sunday public gathering has troubled me. Why?

The order that Paul describes in the New Testament seems spontaneous and controlled by the Spirit. It is highly participatory. Any time we rely heavily on structure and preparation, we risk losing something important.

In virtually any formal Sunday service participation is highly limited, and the order is linear and predictable: intro, call to

**Postmoderns are comfortable with mystery and paradox. ... This is important, because the mystical journey of union with Christ often brings more questions than answers.**

# The Holy Spirit is participant, there are many more what if the Lord had a different outcome in mind? events or connections that we did not imagine?

worship, worship and praise, announcements, the sermon, blessing and dismissal. And some of us say we aren't liturgical!

In the postmodern setting, even as groups get larger than a couple of dozen, things are much less linear and much less predictable. For some time I feared that this would obscure the centre — the purpose of our gathering. In fact, the centre becomes clearer, but it's a different centre.

The linearity of the rational and structured model gives way to something much more difficult to define. Where modern Christian gatherings have a machine quality (though participation is severely limited) postmodern gatherings are more like a participatory art form, where everyone is a dancer or a painter. The centre is defined in the process, and not by the end product, and 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'.

*If men and women today began by the thousands experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ in a transforming way, there would simply be no place for their expression of experience to fit into the present-day straitjackets of Christianity. Protestant or Catholic, neither one is structured to contain a mass of devoted people who long for spiritual depth. We are structured towards infancy.*

In the postmodern gathering it's no longer clear whether the centre is 'worship' or 'word' (listen and learn) or just being together. The designated leaders may not be easily identifiable, though they are still present. This is a very helpful direction in terms of the real work of the church and the purpose of our gathering, if we pay attention to Ephesians 4 and the dynamic Paul describes.

In a traditional gathering there may be space given to unplanned participation with testimonies or exhortations.

Spontaneous elements can be integrated in a highly structured context.

But what about spontaneous connections? What about unplanned outcomes? The greater the structure and the greater the need for predictability, the more the outcome is limited by our own ability at engineering. Are we really so confident in ourselves?

In any gathering, particularly in a gathering where the Holy Spirit is participant, there are many more possibilities than one or two leaders can envision. These will often be excluded. But what if the Lord had a different outcome in mind? What if it had been his intention to engineer events or connections that we did not imagine?

Margaret Wheatley comments:  
*There is a simpler way to organise human endeavour. It requires a new way of being in the world. It requires being in the world without fear. Being in the world with play and creativity. Seeking after what's possible. Being willing to learn and to be surprised.*

*This simpler way to organise human endeavour requires a belief that the world is inherently orderly. Life seeks organisation. It does not require us to organise it.*

As I reflect on the last year of our own meeting with the church in our home, I realise that when we left behind the traditional centre (the functions of word and worship and formal structures of participation) the centre changed to the people themselves. We all became players, and the whole world was our stage (apologies to the Bard).

While we gather on Sunday afternoons, our relationships continue through the week. We bring groceries to one family. We meet in small clutches over coffee. We connect via phone and email. We pray with one another when a need arises. We gather a gift for

someone who needs help with rent. We have a complex network of relationships, but the centre is love for one another and for Jesus.

*Our task is to help people concentrate on the real but often hidden event of God's active presence in their lives. Hence, the question that must guide all organising activity in the church is not how to keep people busy, but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God who speaks in silence.*

When we rely less on formalised roles and structure, something interesting happens. Information flows along unexpected pathways instead of from the top down. Individuals who we thought lacked leadership gifts suddenly take responsibility in unusual ways. Where we worried things were becoming chaotic or that we were losing control, a new order arises.

*We don't need (managers) to make point to point connections to move information along linear pathways . . . We've been inspired this way by mechanistic models of the brain. Newer theories describe information as widely distributed, not limited to specific neuron sites. Instead, researchers have observed a more fluid pattern of electrical activity, with instructions distributed through a shifting network.*

In postmodern gatherings of Christians the model of a neural network is more appropriate than the model of a machine.



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**The greater the structure and the greater the need for predictability, the more the outcome is limited by our own ability at engineering. Are we really so confident in ourselves?**



# SOME NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF DISCIPLESHIP

FRANK VIOLA

On the day she first met Jesus, Mary of Bethany helped her sister Martha prepare a meal for Jesus and His disciples.

Martha's initial complaint reveals this. Martha accused Mary of leaving her. That suggests that she did help Martha before she slipped into the public room to hear Jesus teach.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

In the first century, they divided houses into the male space and the female space.

The kitchen (the courtyard) became the sphere of the women. The public room (the living area) constituted the sphere of the men.

And neither sex was supposed to

cross over either barrier. So Mary's act of moving into the public room with the men was not merely socially awkward—it bordered on high offense.

But Mary did something else scandalous. She sat at Jesus' feet. Sitting at someone's feet was the posture of a disciple. And in the first century, teachers like Jesus only had male disciples.

Here is a woman who was hungrier to learn from Jesus than she was to obey customs or traditions. And she refused to let propriety stop her from sitting at the Master's feet and becoming one of His disciples.

The Gospels make clear that a disciple is someone who embraces humility, brokenness and the willingness to die to self.

What is more, Mary seemed to instinctively know that Jesus would praise both of these acts, even though they represented cultural taboos.

She guessed right. He elevated both. When Martha chided her sister for acting like a man, leaving her to work in the kitchen, Jesus defended Mary.

The fact that Mary didn't defend herself tells us something vitally important about her. It shows us that she valued humility, understood the power of brokenness and willingly submitted to the hand of God.

The story makes clear that Martha's act of serving sprung from good motivation, though misguided. Jesus revealed this when He contrasted the "many things" (that Martha worried about) with the "one thing" (that Mary gave herself to).

The "one thing" is actually a person—Jesus Himself. And the "better thing" is to sit at His feet, to become His disciple.



## WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

But what does being a disciple mean exactly?

The Gospels make clear that a disciple is someone who ...

1. Embraces humility, brokenness and the willingness to die to self (Luke 9:23–24).
2. Treats others the way they want to be treated in the same situation (Matt. 7:12).
3. Submits to and learns from the Master at any cost (Luke 14:25–34).

In all these ways, Mary modelled the life of a disciple.

In our observation and experience, every Mary used to be a Martha at one time.

## WHAT WE GET WRONG ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

The Marthas of the Christian world are those who have been taught that the main thing that God desires of us is service. He wants us to do many things for Him. He wants us to be missional, to make converts, and then to turn those converts into disciples. He has a big to-do list.

The Marthas of this world are very busy doing good things. But eventually, they burn out or bail out. Why? Because they operate in their own power. And their priorities become crooked.

They are trying to do something for God, yet haven't learned the secret of letting God live in and through them where He is doing the work.

Countless Christians live each day out of guilt, condemnation, religious duty and obligation, trying to win brownie points with God by doing, doing and more doing. They feel happy when they check off a spiritual task, but they also embrace condemnation when they haven't created enough checks in a day. To them, the Christian life is a treadmill where you trip and fall, or you run-run-run and never arrive.



In light of this, some burn out, growing tired of serving altogether. So they create an aversion to any kind of Christian service. Others bail out. They stop following the Lord altogether because they feel that their service for God has gained them nothing. Because their eyes stay fixed on their own work for the Lord (as Martha's were), they judge their fellow disciples who haven't done as much as them, yet who seemingly enjoy God's blessing on their lives.

So they conclude: What's the use? Why am I doing all of this for God when He's blessing these others—who aren't doing a fraction of what I do—more than He's blessing me?

## DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

Don't make the mistake of thinking that Mary didn't serve the Lord. She certainly did. But her service was rooted in something higher than duty or obligation. And it wasn't motivated by fear, outward applause, condemnation or guilt. The "one thing" motivated Mary.

In light of this, look at Mary again and take your cue from her. Learn what she understood—that being a disciple isn't about serving or keeping a spiritual to-do list. It's first and foremost about opening your heart and listening to Jesus, spending time with Him.

It's about being teachable, sitting at His feet. It's about humility, acknowledging that He knows best how we should live our lives. It's about loving Him, forsaking even important tasks for the sake of revering Him alone. And out of those values flow everything else. Including service and mission.

*Adapted from The Day I Met Jesus: The Revealing Diaries of Five Women from the Gospels*

**FRANK VIOLA** is the well-known author of many books, including *Pagan Christianity*, *Reimagining Church*, and more recently *God's Favourite Place on Earth*. He blogs regularly at [www.frankviola.org](http://www.frankviola.org)

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED (Continued from page 2)

We have also found that when we have gathered in regional and other meetings that a spiritual highlight has been praying as a group for individuals and their needs.

## Warning: "Understanding the times"

Recent world events and events in Australia call for a focus to our prayers and the unity of all freedom-loving Australians and Christians in support of the right to basic freedoms of speech and belief. Attempts are being made to close religious freedom in Australia with the recent case against the Catholic Archbishop of Hobart for sharing a leaflet to parents with children in Catholic schools supporting traditional family as understood by Christians. He is now facing a claim under Tasmania's Anti-Discrimination Act.

Further to that is the recent decision in Victoria to effectively ban the teaching of the Bible in State schools, except under very restrictive conditions so as to make it unpractical. As disciples of Jesus we need to be united and vocal in opposing these moves to stifle freedom of speech and religious belief in Australia by those who wish to crush Christianity.

## Final thoughts

We need to raise up, with a fresh urgency, many more teams who will continue to pray and to seek God's leading and empowerment in the task of making progress and seeing movements take root.

Our focus must always be on connecting people to Jesus and to his Kingdom, and on making disciples who make disciples. Disciples gather and make up the church. We want to see simple churches multiplying in every community in Australia and beyond. I trust you have had a safe, happy and refreshing Christmas season and year end, and are looking forward to exciting possibilities in the New Year!

bless you, Phil Brown  
OIKOS DIRECTOR

# A passage from India

Changing  
From  
Traditional  
Church to New  
Testament Church

Fifteen Essential Steps

Victor Choudhrie



*Victor Choudhrie is a cancer surgeon by profession. He is a senior Fellow of the American and British colleges of surgeons. He quit his job*

*as the Director (CEO) of the Christian Medical College, Ludhiana in Punjab, India in 1992 to take up full time Church planting ministry in central India. His wife Bindu is also in full time church planting ministry, equipping women to be house church leaders and trainers. God has blessed this ministry abundantly. Large numbers of grassroots level leaders have been trained who have planted thousands of house churches all over India as a result. In this article he gets straight to the point, outlining fifteen of the changes that he believes traditional churches need to make in order to return to the New Testament pattern.*

## A PASSAGE FROM INDIA - 15 vital changes

**If we truly want to see the church restored to it's New Testament effectiveness and power these are the changes that need to be made.**

**Replace professional clergy** with Priesthood of all Believers with authority to baptize, break bread and equip fishers of men. (1 Peter 2:9)

**Replace Church building** with "House of Peace." (Luke 10:5-9; Matt. 10:11-13)

**Replace programmed Sunday service** with daily informal gatherings. The Bride of Christ must have intimacy with her Lord every day and not just for a couple of hours a week lest she become unfaithful. (Acts 2:46-47; Hebrew 3:13)

**Replace tithing** with sharing the enormous financial resources and goodwill available in Christian homes. (Deut. 8:17-18; Acts 5:32-34)

**Replace the "Crumb and Sip" Holy Communion** with simple "Community meals" eaten together with gladness from house to house. (Acts 2:46; 1 Cor 11:20-23)

**Replace loud music** with speaking to each other in psalms and spiritual songs making melody in your heart. (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)

**Replace the spectator church** to participatory, interactive, prophetic and Missionary sending church. (1 Cor 14:26-31; Acts 13:13)

**Replace organizational and denominational churches** with citywide network of house churches. (Romans 16:3-15)

**Replace barren church** with multiplication. The Bride must not remain barren, but reproduce and fill the earth. (Acts 1: 8; 1 Cor 9: 19-30)

**Replace submitting to one man** - by submitting to each other. We must encourage, comfort, exhort, edify and serve one another. (Galatians 5: 13; Eph. 4: 2, 15)

**Replace purposeless church** with a goal oriented mandate to disciple nations. (Romans 15: 20; Matt. 28: 19)

**Replace powerless and fruitless church** with militants who heal the sick, raise the dead, expel the demons, bind the 'strongman' and plunder his possessions. (Matt 11:12, 12:29)

**Replace all presidents, directors, chairman, secretaries and all the other non-biblical titles** with apostles, prophets, and the fivefold ministry gifted elders. Change from a dead organization to living organism. (Eph 4:11; Titus 1:5-9)

**Replace all Sunday schools, Bible schools, and prayer cells and cottage meetings** and call them full-fledged churches. So that they can disciple, baptize, break bread, equip and send missionaries. (1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15)

**Replace all selfish goats** who are members for hatching, matching and dispatching with sheep who take care of the hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers, sick and the prisoners. (Matt. 25:31-46)



own cell and teaches what they have been taught. Each cell then becomes a house church. By the end of the year there will be over one hundred and fifty house churches with over a thousand members who will continue to multiply. More and more cells will be formed. The Lord will equip more and more men and women who have

# Multiplication of House Churches

**Something quite extraordinary is happening in Africa.** And it all began with an email from a person whose name I had never heard, from a city I did not know existed, in a country whose name was a vague presence on a map of Africa. That was the first indication that God had plans for Africa. And from that seemingly innocuous beginning the Lord is building a sovereign work across eight African countries. At its centre are house churches intent on proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and equipping the saints.

My name is Brian Byrne and I am the principal of an internet school we call The School for Disciples. In am also the leader with Marie of a house church that has flourished in our house with around eighteen members who enjoy the challenge and blessing of the Lord.

It is clear that in these last days the Lord needs multitudes of men and women who know how to fulfil the Lord's own requirements, live by faith, be filled with the Spirit and walk in step with His sovereign will. It is clear that the Lord Himself is on about building His church across the whole of Africa. And this is the essence of this report.

At present there are eleven pastors and leaders from six countries and eleven different churches who have recruited eleven cells with between eight and twelve members. The countries are Rwanda, the Democratic republic of Congo, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Soon to be added will be works in Darfur Sudan and South Africa.

In a month the number will increase from eleven to fifteen cells from eight different countries. Each pastor teaches his cell a School of Disciples course called Living by faith in the Spirit. At the end of the course each member of the cell re-teaches each other one session each and thus masters the course in knowledge and practice. He or she is thus equipped to continue the work to teach cells they themselves have equipped.

During the course the cell sets aside one night a month when non believers can be invited to an open session when there will be opportunities to ask questions, hear testimonies and understand how one can become a child of the Father.

At present there are over one hundred and fifty men and women enrolled in these cells. At the end of this period each cell member sets up his or

learned to live by faith in the Spirit to proclaim the gospel, make disciples and equip the saints. One pastor told me he expects they will fulfil the great commission in his country within his generation. Another is confidently expecting revival to come to Africa.

In Kigali where the headquarters of this movement is based there are now discussions about all the churches and house churches becoming part of a fellowship of churches and house churches. The Lord is uniting them as He prayed in His final prayer for the church, "That they may one, as You Father are in Me, and I in You; that they may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." (John 17:21)

Our prayer is that the Lord will established this work around the world and also in Australia and New Zealand so that the world may truly believe in our Lord.

**Brian Byrne, Principal, School for Disciples**  
Email: [christos216@yahoo.com](mailto:christos216@yahoo.com)



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**THE OIKOS 2016 NATIONAL GATHERING**  
CYC Camp, Burleigh Heads, Gold Coast, Queensland  
**AUGUST 26 -28, 2016**

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# HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CHILD IS READY FOR BAPTISM

## JOHN MURCHISON

Baptism is an important step that a believer in Christ takes to share with the world that they are a Christian. As your children see others get baptized, or read about Jesus getting baptized in their Bibles, they may begin to ask if they can get baptized. While this desire is always an occasion to rejoice, it's important for parents to discern whether or not a child understands and believes the gospel before saying "yes" to this request.

Of course, there is no system or checklist that you can go through to tell whether or not your son or daughter is ready to be baptized. But here are a few questions to help you think and pray through as you consider whether or not to baptize your children:

**Whose idea was it to get baptized?** If your child thinks that you want them to get baptized, they may do it just to please you. If your child wants to get baptized without any prompting from you, that can be evidence of the Holy Spirit calling them to get baptized.

If your child thinks that you want them to get baptized, they may do it just to please you.

## Does your child understand the gospel?

Do they understand what sin is, and that the penalty for sin has been taken by the death of Jesus? Do they understand that there's no amount of good works they can do to please God, but that Jesus was perfect on their behalf? Do they understand that Jesus's resurrection means that there is no more penalty for sin to be paid, and that we can live with God forever through faith in him?

**Is there evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in your child's life?** When a person is brought to faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live in them and begins to change them to make them look more like Jesus. Do you see conviction and repentance of sin? Do you see a love for God and His Word, the Bible?

**Do you have others that you can process this through with?** Obviously, your spouse should be the first person that you pray and discuss this with. But think about involving others as well. It's a safe bet that your friends and your small group would love to pray with you about this important decision. Your church elders and staff would also be great to talk with.

## RELEASING THE PRESSURE

I mentioned earlier that deciding whether or not to baptize your child is an important decision. And it is. But I also want you to remember that this is not a life and death decision, and not an eternal life or eternal death decision. The act of baptism itself does not save a person. Only God can do that. And a believer who doesn't get baptized has not committed the unforgivable sin.

If you're not sure if now is the right time, then it might be best to hold off. No harm can come to your child by waiting, since it doesn't impact their salvation. A child who is older will also be able to better articulate their faith, and will better remember this important step of faith.

If your child can articulate what Jesus has done for them, if you see fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and if you and your spouse agree that now is the right time, then there's no reason to wait. Talk with your family, community, and church leadership to know the best method, time, and place to celebrate your son or daughter becoming your brother or sister in Christ.

JOHN MURCHISON [vergenetwork.org](http://vergenetwork.org)



# SIMPLE CHURCH FINANCES

## from Tithing to Generosity

**ROGER THOMAN:** I see a tremendous opportunity ahead for simple churches to impact our world through their use of finances.

The question, in simple/house church circles, is often “What about money?” meaning, is there a “right way” for money to be given, collected, or made use of? Is tithing a valid scriptural principle or is it an Old Testament principle that has been misappropriated by the church in an attempt to keep the organizational systems and buildings supported? I would like to suggest that tithing, in so many ways, misses the mark. First of all, it often fosters a legalistic (even superstitious) way of thinking: “If I give God this specific amount, I will have His blessing; if I don’t, then I won’t.” On the other hand (this is important), I also think that tithing puts a limit on giving because it misses the real principle we find in Scripture: generosity. In other words, theoretically, if we followed the principles of Scripture and listened to Jesus (i.e. Luke 14:33) most of us would give more than a tithe as a regular part of our Jesus-following life.

Now, let’s take this out of the theoretical for a moment. My friend, Brian Hogan, in his missionary work in Mongolia (recounted in his wonderful book, “There’s a Sheep in My Bathtub), describes how the new Christians in this movement were taught generosity rather than tithing. The result was a net giving that far exceeded the typical tithe and a tremendous missionary impact on other

regions as a result of their giving! Here’s Brian’s story.

**BRIAN HOGAN:** The tithe is not a New Testament Command or practice of the early church. The purely Jewish churches may have continued to pay tithes to the Temple System (failure to do so would have been akin to income tax evasion), but none of the Gentile churches of the New Testament knew tithing. The reason is what you mention. The tithe was for the maintenance of the Levites and Priests (a full-time clergy also unknown to NT churches) and for the Temple complex upkeep (religious buildings were unknown to the early church which met from house to house).

So the question is, without the tithe (and verses from the OT Prophet Malachi to scare folks into coughing it up) where are we at in terms of Christian giving? In YWAM Frontier Missions we have NT Guiding Principles (non-negotiable) for planting new churches among the unreached. One of those principles (and perhaps the heart of all of them) is: We make disciples who are obedient to Jesus’ basic commands (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:37-47)

1. Repent, believe, receive the Holy Spirit (these go together, we can’t do one without the others) Mark 1:15, John 20:22
2. Be baptized (this includes living forever the new, holy life it signifies) Matt. 28:19-20

3. Love God, family, fellow disciples, neighbours and even enemies (forgiveness). Luke 10:25-37
4. Celebrate the Lord’s Supper (including cultivating the communion with Christ and His people which the meal affirms) Luke 22:14-20
5. Pray daily, Matt. 6:5-13
6. Give generously, Matt 6:19-21
7. Make disciples, (witness, teach, train leaders, etc.) Matt 28:18-19, Luke 24:46-48.

The key command above for our topic is that we teach believers to obey Jesus in generous giving. This forces them to consult the Holy Spirit about how much and how often is generous. Tithing only forces us to consult a calculator, not God. And we all know it is not generous to tithe. (Want 10% of my candy bar?) We need to radically trust the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. We can’t enforce an OT system designed to support the clergy-class while we are planting NT churches where every believer is a functioning priest. I would challenge you to ignore the last 1500 years and plant churches the way Paul did, introducing active obedient disciples to the living God who is willing to guide them in all things, including their giving.

Does this actually bring in the bucks for church activities? YES! I can affirm this from personal experience. In Erdenet, Mongolia, where our team planted the church, the believers were largely unemployed and poor. They were taught the commands of Christ in accordance

# Review

## THE LEAST OF THESE R. Maurice Smith (Amazon)

*"Our Postmodern culture has concluded that it can manifest 'good deeds' without Jesus. The Church has concluded that it can manifest Jesus without 'good deeds'. Our Postmodern culture's plan appears to be working. The Church's plan is a disaster."*

Maurice Smith

**The Least of These** is the third book of the Safe Houses of Hope and Prayer series on organic house church and the coming Spiritual Awakening. Where the previous two books in this series provided practical insights into the philosophy and functioning of organic house church, this third volume sounds a clear call for organic house churches to become incarnational and legendary in their practice of good deeds. Drawing on history, in-depth biblical studies and years of experience ministering to "the least of these", the author

challenges his readers to reflect on the importance of good deeds when it comes to being "the light of the world" in our Postmodern culture.

In the process he examines:

- Attractional versus Incarnational Christianity;
- The WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) phenomenon of the past few years;
- How Jesus Himself manifested good deeds;
- 15 "Good Deeds Principles" drawn from the New Testament;
- The on-going debate over whether good deeds are optional in the spiritual life of a Jesus-disciple;
- The importance of individuals and organic house churches becoming legendary for their good deeds.

As a follow up to this book you can download **"30 Days And 30 Ways Of Doing**

with the Great Commission ("Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you") and our YWAM principles. They learned that the standard for ALL believers was generous giving. (Obviously generous looks a bit different for Bill Gates than it does for a poor widow. It is much more fair to the poor than tithing. 10% is NOTHING for the rich and may mean malnutrition or worse to one on the brink). The Mongolian believers gave generously - cash, jewellery, marmot furs they shot and cured, all sorts of things.

And God blessed their generous obedience. After a year and a half the leaders we were training asked us to ask the church in Sweden to stop sending any money to them. The local church was fully self-supported by the gifts and offerings of her people! I praise God we didn't teach them to tithe!

By the way, if you are following the NT principles for church planting, then your group has no professional clergy to pay and no building to buy and maintain. House churches led by "lay" people have plenty of money for OUTREACH (and books and picnics)! And you can be

content with whatever comes in as your people learn to obey Christ by generous giving.

**ROGER THOMAN:** So, here is where I see an explosive possibility! First, suppose "simple-church folk" began moving out of the limitations of tithing and into the dynamic realm of generosity. Imagine the release of finances this would bring.

Second, imagine all of these resources being channelled into workers (missionaries, regional facilitators of movements) and to meet the needs of the poor. I happen to believe that both of these areas are important and scriptural, but will not debate this at the moment. My point is this: In the USA alone, over 72 billion dollars goes to religious institutions mostly for clergy salaries and buildings. I am not going to condemn this preferring, instead, to focus on getting the log out of my own eye and determining what I can do. I simply want to suggest that if we can sustain a movement without buildings and unnecessary staff, and add a new level of



**Good** from Maurice's publishing site [risingrivermedia.org](http://risingrivermedia.org)

**Maurice Smith** is a graduate of Denver Seminary. He is an accomplished author of several books, including *River Houses Rising* and *Safe Houses of Hope And Prayer*. Maurice resides in Spokane, Washington with Gale, his wife of 30 years. Together they coordinate Rising River Media.

generosity, we have tremendous potential to use finances in a way that can change our world spiritually (deploying missionaries and workers where they are most needed) and physically (alleviating a good percentage of the world's greatest poverty). One final note. When I speak of "poverty," I want to remind us that there is "true" poverty in the world. By that I mean (for example) that there are 27,000 children who die unnecessarily every day from causes related directly to poverty (i.e. no safe drinking water, no sanitation, malnutrition, or parents unable to afford medical treatment). We often think that poverty is an issue too big to tackle, but there is actually a great deal that we can do to alleviate the most deadly faces of need.

I am wondering if simple, Jesus-followers might be able to have a significant impact on some of these critical issues of our time!

**ROGER THOMAN** [simplechurchjournal.com](http://simplechurchjournal.com)  
**BRIAN HOGAN** YWAM / Amazon

# CHRIST EXPRESSED TOGETHER

**Years ago we were in a gathering of saints where Christ blossomed in a totally unexpected way.**

His presence was for sure not connected to any human planning or human leadership. This group met in an old school building. That morning everything went wrong. People were standing outside on a cold, damp morning and waited for the janitor to show up with the key — forty minutes late. Then, once inside, it was discovered that no one had a key to open the storage room that contained the chairs, songbooks, and other items necessary to set up for the meeting. Getting the room opened took another fifteen minutes. Needless to say, by then most brothers and sisters had become edgy and frustrated.

But there was also a deeply emotional dimension to this particular get-together. A cloud of sorrow and confusion hung over their heads because that past Tuesday a car had gone through a stop sign, T-boned the car of a family in this body, and killed the pregnant wife and her baby.

The chairs were set up in circles and people took their seats. The uneasy silence was broken by a simple prayer asking for Jesus' help. Despite the emotional chemistry going on among everyone in the room, it was in such a gathering as this that the Lord Jesus flowed freely through the saints! It was absolutely amazing. The singing was charged. The believers began to express Christ from their hearts with love and tears.

Then the bereaved husband stood up from his seat and opened his heart to those around him. Given the fresh wounds that had just come upon him, his words were incredibly appropriate, penetrating and moving. He spoke of Job's losses and his own in a beautiful way that exalted Jesus Christ. Such candor on his part could only happen in a community where deepening relationships existed.

The family we came with had to leave before the meeting was fully over. When we got into the Volkswagen bus and the engine started, I realized I was numb, but in the best sense. Words would be hard to find to express what had just happened when those saints came together. We had just experienced an unbelievable manifestation of Christ through His body —

yet everything on the human level had gone very much awry.

Using this story as a spring board, I want to share a few of many perspectives that are vital in considering how we express Christ together.

**1. Be careful not to put much stock in the physical elements that surround our getting together in Christ.** It's not about planning, picking the right song, or anything else on the human level. I am not saying that all planning is wrong. The issue must be that we wish for Christ to lead by His Spirit. It is just too easy to rely on doing things in a certain way — the way we did things last week, and the week before. The Spirit is wind, not concrete.

**2. While not a pleasant thought, we must embrace the reality that community life is enhanced as Christ is glorified through our trials.** In the tragedy that occurred in the group we visited, Jesus was vibrantly expressed through the husband, and through the community as they came alongside him. One of the marks of ekklesia-life in this age is to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Suffering precedes glory.

**3. Christ's expression comes to settings where people pursue Him, not human agendas, whether overt or covert.** What a blessing to have people come together who are willing to shelve their preferences and opinions, and be satisfied with Jesus Christ alone. Nothing kills the flow of the Lord like individuals wearing their convictions and agendas on their sleeve.

**4. Christ manifests Himself among humble people.** "God resists the proud." Nothing grieves the Spirit more than pride. There is no telling what the Lord can do in a group of people who are "low to the ground," not in the sense of grovelling, but in the sense that they know well their need of Jesus and His followers. As Thomas Dubay put it beautifully, "In order to listen to others we need to be humble, small in our own estimation. Finding the solution to a math problem is possible without humility, but finding God's will is impossible without this virtue."

**5. Christ is expressed most pointedly when we enter into the burdens of others.** In the story above, this group was faced with coming alongside the husband for an extended period of caring. Paul said in Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." If our New Testament was burned up, and only this verse was left, we would have more than enough for Christ to work through us for the rest of our days. Paul also said, "Do

good to everyone, especially the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). When the Son of Man comes in glory, He will say to those who fed, clothed and visited others, "You did it to Me."

Because Christ is in each believer, the assumption is that they, as Paul put it, have a manifestation of the Spirit for benefit of the ekklesia. The most oft-repeated promise in the New Testament is that the Spirit in Christ's people will result in rivers of living water springing up within them. The Son having returned to the Father, it is now God's will for Christ to be

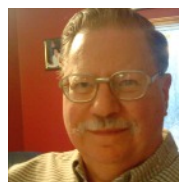
expressed on earth through the ekklesia.

We know painfully well that there are obstacles and challenges to Christ being expressed through people like us. We can all be like porcupines. What, therefore, is our hope? Well, as I have often said, we must find hope in the sure promise of Jesus: *Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?* (Luke 11:11-12)

As Christ's body on earth, we must never forget that our key posture is that of a branch abiding in the Vine. If His living water is impeded, it is not a new or better method or formula we need, or a prophecy conference, but rather to ask ourselves, "Are we abiding in Jesus our Vine?" We must not forget that without Him we can do nothing. Fruitfulness only results from us resting in Him.

Jon Zens [searchingtogether.org](http://searchingtogether.org)

One of the marks of ekklesia-life in this age is to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Suffering precedes glory.



## THE HEALING POWER OF COMMUNITY Keith Giles Posted: 06 Nov 2015 08:43 AM PST

Sometimes I think God hammers me over the head with something until I get it. That's what's been happening with me lately.

First, I started noticing a pattern in the conversations I was having with all sorts of people. The pattern that started to form was the common denominator in every conversation. Eventually I saw a video clip that, at first glance, had nothing to do with the pattern, until the very end. That's when I realized that God was trying to show me something profound.

(The video was) about addiction – which is not the subject that God has been talking to me about – but near the end the narrator (said) something that most certainly (did) relate to the concept. (It was the) part where he reveals that one of the strongest weapons against drug addiction is community. The most powerful part of the video for me was this part:

*“Human beings have an innate need to bond and connect. When we are happy and healthy we will bond with the people around us. But when we can't because we're traumatized, isolated or beaten down by life, we will bond with something that gives us some sense of relief. It might be checking our smart phones constantly. It might be pornography. It might be gambling, etc. but we will bond with something because that is our human nature. The path out of unhealthy bonding is to form healthy bonds - to be connected to people who you want to be present with. Addiction is just one symptom of the crisis of disconnection that's happening all around us. We all feel it. “*

And the absolute best quote of all is this one: *“The opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is connection.”* I would like to substitute the word “community” for “connection”.

In almost every single conversation I have had with various people over the last few months, the theme of community, and the evidence that what people need more than anything else is community, has been unmistakable. Some of these were conversations with homeless people, others were conversations with small business owners and with self-employed entrepreneurs. Some of these people were lifelong friends and some of them were practically strangers to me. But in every case the solution to their inner struggle was to find a community of people who would love them for who they are and provide a stable support system for them when they felt weak, or lonely, or tempted to return to bad habits.

What does all this mean? It means that the Ekklesia of Christ is what people are looking for most. They all want, and desperately need, a place to belong. They crave a true family of people who will offer love and acceptance. They are dying to find a community of support and faith that gathers around Jesus and looks to Him for love, hope, relief and peace.

Bottom line: We were not made to survive alone. Community is what connects us to life. Ekklesia is what connects us to Jesus and to one another.

Sadly, the barriers to finding community are numerous. Many people are surrounded by those who would love to welcome them and embrace them into a community of faith, but for various reasons these people cannot – or will not – make the decisions necessary to prioritize community over work, or sleep, or convenience. That's been the most frustrating thing for me, honestly. I've listened to these different people as they share their brokenness and I see how being surrounded by a loving community of fellow Christians would alleviate their suffering and propel them into a healthier lifestyle. But in nearly every case the person has one excuse or the other about why they must remain alone, or isolated. In some cases the person is reaching out for community but is constantly sabotaged by an unrealistic expectation of perfection in other people. So, when people within a community prove to be flawed, that's enough for them to justify disengagement.

What I'd love to do is to connect all of these different people to one another, or to help them discover a community of believers who could help them to see and experience the presence of Jesus more powerfully. But as desperate as some people are for community and connection, the truth is that there is a cost and sadly many are not willing to give up what they have to realize it.

What I'm learning is that Ekklesia as God designed it is exactly what people need to be happy and healthy and productive. But at the same time, there is an Enemy who works day and night to place roadblocks and obstacles in the way to make sure they never actually get connected to Christ through His Body.

Loneliness is a powerful weapon. It crushes people. It strips them of the connections they need for life. It can even kill someone with enough sustained exposure. Yes, loneliness is powerful. The only thing more powerful than loneliness is love.

My prayer is that those who need love most will have the courage to do whatever it takes to find connection and to experience the community of Christ before it's too late. *Keith Giles* [subversive1.blogspot.com.au](http://subversive1.blogspot.com.au)



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