Disciples of Jesus Christ

Go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20)

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
The Three Greatest Needs of the Christian Church

by Bob Tedesco

A number of years ago, a friend and co-worker came to me and said, “I need to talk to you about some serious questions that I have about the Catholic Church.” Al had been listening to a televangelist who had been systematically criticizing the various denominations, and apparently it was the Catholics’ turn. Al is a free-church assistant pastor with a number of Catholic friends. I was able to adequately address his concerns, and at the end of our discussion, I said, “Al, this was fun, but you have somehow missed the main issues!” He said, “Well, what are they?” My response was, “I’ll never tell!”

That is the subject of this article…not just for Catholics, but for the Christian churches in general. It is the case that the Christian churches drift in and out of the need for reform and renewal and even restoration. Even the first century church, which gets so many positive reviews, drifted in and out of trouble.

- **Ephesus:** “You do not love me now as you did at first.” Revelation 2:3 (Today’s English Version)
- **Smyrna:** “You are rich!” Revelation 2:9b (Today’s English Version)
- **Pergamum:** “There are a few things that I have against you.” Revelation 2:14 (Today’s English Version)
- **Thyatira:** “But this is what I have against you.” Revelation 2:20 (Today’s English Version)
- **Sardis:** “I know that you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead!” Revelation 3:1 (Today’s English Version)
- **Philadelphia:** “Because you have kept my command to endure…I love you.” Revelation 3:10a, 9b (Today’s English Version)
- **Laodicea:** “But because you are lukewarm…You are poor, naked, and blind.” Revelation 3:16-17c (Today’s English Version)

So, five of the seven churches mentioned needed something between renewal and restoration.

**What is needed?**

A group of 40-50 active Christians met to discuss and brainstorm the needs of the church in an attempt to identify the three greatest needs, and the range of input was remarkable. The activity itself assumes that one cares enough to even ask the question! It also assumes that humans might be able to discern the mind and heart of God well enough to identify the right needs. Furthermore, if you look over the Lord’s complaints in Revelation, you’ll see a list with some variety, some personalized or localized shortcomings.
The short list generated in this article is intended to be general in its observation and application. It relies heavily on scripture, as well as quotes from Baptist and Catholic Church leaders.

1. Born Again

“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” John 3:3 (New International Version)

Billy Graham has repeated this verse thousands of times to individuals, and to crowds of thousands and tens of thousands. It is the basis of the evangelical movement; it has been the theme of countless crusades, retreats, rallies, revivals, days of renewal, Bible studies, etc.

Pope Benedict XVI describes this as “when the person is struck and opened by Christ…” Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko says, “…there is always a personal encounter with Christ.” He also says, “The greatest challenge facing the church (is) evangelization.” Bishop Cordes laments, “(many) have been sacramentalized but not evangelized.” Andre Fossard exclaims, “God exists and I have experienced him!”

So, many Baptist, Catholic and other Christian leaders would agree that the number one need of the Christian church is the encounter with Christ; to be struck and opened, to be born anew; and born again to a new life in Christ: evangelism.

2. Discipleship/Formation

While many Christian leaders would agree on the number one need of the church, perhaps fewer would agree on my choice for number two: discipleship and formation. It is worth noting that the Billy Graham organization takes great care to ensure that new converts will be cared for locally before he agrees to do a crusade.

In speaking of the movements and new communities, Benedict XVI said, “It is their task to bring the message of Christ to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) and to make disciples of all men.” (Matthew 28:19). Bishop Rylko has said, “The first and greatest priority is, therefore, Christian formation.” Bishop Rylko further quotes John Paul II as equating the making of disciples with two priorities: a “solid and deep formation” and a “strong testimony.” “These are two areas in which the new ecclesial movements and new communities are producing stupendous fruits for the life of the church. These two groups have become true laboratories of faith and authentic schools of Christian life, holiness, and mission for thousands of Christians in every part of the World.”
3. An Environment of Discipleship

Evangelism and discipleship need an environment that teaches disciples “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19). This is raising the issue of how people change and grow. We need teaching and instruction, and we also need training in which a more experienced brother helps us to apply a principle in practice (teaching them to observe: knowing and doing).

In addition to the one-on-one training and help, we need to be immersed in an environment that models and supports the Christian life. In this environment we witness the joy and the reality of the Christian life and we “absorb” it. The body of Christ is pastoral by its nature and is a part of the pastoral care that we receive.

Finally, the environment of discipleship is also supportive to the lives of the disciplers. Those who teach and give pastoral care will also need support and encouragement. Too many Christian ministries focus on a single, gifted person who may be in danger of collapsing under the stress, or “burning out.” In the Sword of the Spirit, our approach is more corporate and more environmental.

Covenant Love

Evangelism (conversion), discipleship (formation), and an environment of discipleship (community), are given here as the three greatest needs of the church. In my mind, a fourth is important: covenant (or covenant love). All great projects, achievements or civilizations are marked by serious commitment to the cause. Covenant characteristics are also noteworthy in Judeo-Christian history. In fact, before covenant was expressed in law and legal documents (deeds, etc.), it existed in the nature of God. Before there were an Old Covenant and a New Covenant, and before there was a covenant with Noah…there was a covenantal God! It is his nature to be loyal, faithful, reliable, consistent and true to his word. Commitment, it seems, does not scare him at all. He relishes it; he invites it; he models it; he initiates it.

Yet covenant, and covenant love are not frequent topics in Christian books and sermons. Why is that? Nothing is more repulsive to the flesh than being “locked in” or “decided.” We would always like to be doing what we “feel like” doing. Certain lawyers make a living by getting us out of clear agreements and commitments that we have made. The best phone plans are the ones where “no commitment is necessary.” After a while, we mistakenly attempt serious things (family life, starting a business, building the kingdom of God) with a “no commitment” attitude and those things are doomed to fail.
Covenant and covenant love are the glue that holds the discipleship environment together. The love of God is a constant. In desiring to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect (Matthew 5:48), we intend to model his nature, and model his love to our brothers and sisters. We are “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5) and covenant love is the mortar that allows us to be built into a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14).

**Word**

God is a “man of His word.” He is faithful, his word is everlasting. His word, and his approach to it, defines the divine. His word is so essential, so crucial, so defining that he named his son the “Word of God.”

- “The Word was God.” John 1:1
- “And the Word became flesh.” John 1:14
- “The name by which he is called is the Word of God.” Revelation 19:13
- “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” 1 John 5:7

**Summary**

In the Sword of the Spirit, we say we are a “community of disciples on mission.” In this short descriptive phrase, we can see those first three elements. The fact that our communities have lasted over thirty-five years is at least an initial sign that the covenant love of God and the love of the brethren are in place.

This entire chapter is based on the assumption that the reader has some concern or questions about the needs of the church. Those who think everything is just fine will not be stirred by this discussion, while others may have a different list. When I first heard of the Baptism in the Spirit in 1970, I remember thinking, “I knew there was supposed to be more than what we were experiencing!” Something in me was expecting more. The scripture readings on Sundays always pointed to the hope of something more. There is more, much more, and we in the Sword of the Spirit are just scratching the surface of what the Lord has for us.

“There is an urgent need for a strong testimony and Christian formation. What great need there is of living Christian communities! This is where the ecclesial movements and new communities appear. They are the answer which has been raised up by the power of the Holy Spirit to the dramatic challenge at the end of the millennium. You are this providential answer.” 5 Pope John Paul II

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**Notes**

1 Note: There are denominational differences about the “born again” experience versus the salvation reality which some say takes place at baptism, others at accepting Christ. There are sacramental and experiential differences and emphases.

2 The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements (resource TL), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 1998; p. 1, para.1

3 On Ecclesial Movements and New Communities (resource M), Cardinal Rylko, Zenit Weekly News Analysis, April 1, 2006; section 3, para. 6

4 Ibid, section 1, para. 1

5 Ibid, section 3, para. 7

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Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 38 years.
Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?

by Dallas Willard

The word 'disciple' occurs 269 times in the New Testament. 'Christian' is found only 3 times and was first introduced to refer precisely to the disciples. The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.

Undisciplined Disciples

For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional...Churches are filled with 'undisciplined disciples' as Jess Moody has called them. Most problems in contemporary churches can be explained by the fact that members have not yet decided to follow Christ.

Great Omission for the Great Commission

The first goal Jesus set forth for the early church was to use his all encompassing power and authority to make disciples....Having made disciples, these alone were to be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. With this twofold preparation they were to be taught to treasure and keep 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you'. The Christian church of the first century resulted from following this plan...
for church growth - a result hard to improve upon.

But instead of Christ's plan, historically the church as substituted 'Make converts (to a particular faith and practice) and baptize them into church membership.' This causes two great omissions from the Great Commission to stand out. First: We omit the making of disciples or enrolling people as Christ's students, when we should let all else wait for that. Second: We omit the step of taking our converts through training that will bring them ever increasingly to do what Jesus directed.

The two great omissions are connected. Not having made converts disciples, it is impossible for us to teach them how to live as Christ lived and taught.

**Discipleship Now**

We cannot literally be with Jesus the way his first disciples could. But the priorities and intentions, the heart or inner attitudes, of disciples are forever the same. In the heart of a disciple there is a desire, and there is a decision or settled intent. The disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like Him...Given this desire, usually produced by the lives and words of those already in The Way, there is yet a decision to be made: the decision to devote oneself to becoming life Christ. The disciple is one who, intent upon becoming Christ-like, and so dwelling in his 'faith and practice' systematically and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end.

**The Cost of Non-discipleship**

Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life that Jesus said He came to bring.


Dr. Dallas Willard is a distinguished philosopher with over thirty publications. He is a man of deep faith and Christian conviction. He is known for his spiritual writings on discipleship and Christian formation. His book The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God was Christianity Today's Book of the Year for 1999. Another of his books, Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ, won Christianity Today's 2003 Book Award for books on Spirituality, and The Association of Logos Bookstores' 2003 Book Award for books on Christian Living.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and a founding member of the Confessing Church. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews and the evils of the Nazi ideology. In spring of 1935 Deitrich Bonhoeffer was called by the Confessing Church in Germany to take charge of an "illegal," underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). He served as pastor, administrator, and teacher there until the seminary was closed down by Hitler's Gestapo in September, 1937. In the seminary at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer taught the importance of shared life together as disciples of Christ. He was convinced that the renewal of the church would depend upon recovering the biblical understanding of the communal practices of Christian obedience and shared life. This is where true formation of discipleship could best flourish and mature. Bonhoeffer’s teaching led to the formation of a community house for the seminarians to help them enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community. In 1937 Bonhoeffer completed two books, Life Together and The Cost of Discipleship. They were first published in German in 1939. Both books encompass Bonhoeffer’s theological understanding of what it means to live as a Christian community in the body of Christ. He was arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943. On April 8, 1945 he was hanged by the Gestapo as a traitor in the Flossenburg concentration camp. As he left his cell on his way to execution he said to his companion, "This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life."

In and through Jesus Christ
Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. What does that mean? It means first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. Second, it means that a Christian comes to others only
through Jesus Christ. It means third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time and united for eternity.

First, the Christian is the man who no longer seeks his own salvation, his deliverance, his justification in himself, but in Jesus Christ alone. He knows that God's Word in Christ pronounces him guilty even when he does not feel his guilt, and God's Word pronounces him righteous, even when he does not feel he is righteous at all. The Christian no longer lives of himself by his own claims and of his own justification, but by God's claim and justification. He lives wholly by God's Word pronounced upon him whether that Word declares him guilty or innocent.

**Righteousness from outside ourselves**
The death and life of the Christian is not determined by his own resources, rather he finds both only in the Word that comes to him from the outside, in God's Word to him. The reformers expressed it this way: Our righteousness is an 'alien righteousness' a righteousness that comes from outside us. They were saying that the Christian is dependent on the Word of God spoken to him. He is pointed outward to the Word that comes to him.

The Christian lives wholly by the truth of God's Word in Jesus Christ. Because he daily hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he daily desires the redeeming Word. In himself he is destitute and dead. Help must come from the outside, and it has come and comes daily and anew in the Word of Jesus Christ, bringing redemption, righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

**Christ in the Word of another**
But God has put this Word in to the mouth of others in order that it may be communicated to us. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find his living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth.

He needs his brother as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community. Their fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and this 'alien righteousness'. All we can say, therefore, is: the community of Christians springs solely from the biblical and reformation message of the justification of man through grace alone; this alone is the basis of the longing of Christians for one another.

**Christ opened the way**
Second, a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among people there is strife. 'He is our peace,' says Paul of Jesus. Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ became the mediator and made peace with God and among men.

Without Christ we would not know God, we could not call upon Him, nor come to Him. But without Christ we also could not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our ego. Christ opened the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only by the way of Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one, only through Jesus Christ are we bound together. To eternity He remains the one mediator.
**We are in him**

Third, when God's Son took on flesh, he truly and bodily took on, out of pure grace, our being, our nature, ourselves. This was the eternal counsel of the Triune God. Now we are in him. Where he is, there we are too, in the incarnation, on the cross and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him. That is why the Scriptures call us the Body of Christ.

But if before we could know and wish it, we have been chosen and accepted with the whole Church in Christ, then we also belong to him in eternity with one another. We who live here in fellowship with him will one day be with Him in eternal fellowship.

He who looks upon his brother should know that he will be eternally united with him in Christ. Christian community means community in and through Jesus Christ.

**Made ready to forgive**

God himself has undertaken to teach brotherly love; all that men can do to add is to remember this divine instruction and the admonition to excel in it more and more. When God was merciful, when he revealed Jesus Christ to us as our Brother, when he won our hearts by his love, this was the beginning or our instruction in divine love.

When God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with our brethren. When we received forgiveness instead of judgment, we too were made ready to forgive our brethren. What God did to us, we then owed to others. The more we received, the more we were able to give; and the more meager our brotherly love, the less we were living by God's mercy and love. Thus God taught us to meet one another as God met us in Christ.

**The basis of our community**

The fact that we are brethren only through Jesus Christ is of immeasurable significance. Not only the other person who is earnest and devout, who comes to me seeking brotherhood, must I deal with in fellowship. My brother is rather that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, delivered from sin and called to faith and eternal life.

Our community with one another consists solely of what Christ has done to both of us. I have community with others and I shall continue to have community only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.

Christian community is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

[This excerpt from *Life Together, Chapter 1 Community*, was written in German by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1937 and was originally published in 1939 under the German title *Gemeinsames Leben*. It was first translated into English in 1954 and published by Harper & Row, London, New York, San Francisco.]

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
If Anyone Would Come After Me

*Jesus is no ordinary master. And what he asks of his disciples is no ordinary commitment.*

by Steve Clark

**Jesus invites us to follow him**

“Come follow me.” Jesus says these words many times in the gospels. He says them to Peter and Andrew, and thy leave their nets to follow him. He says them to Matthew the tax collector, and Matthew leaves his post. He says them to Philip, to James and John, and to others. Those who accept his invitation become his disciples.

Jesus also invites us to follow him. And while we want to say yes and follow, it is not always immediately obvious what following him means. We call ourselves disciples of Jesus, but we may not understand exactly what being a disciple involves.

In the time when Jesus lived, the master-disciple relationship was a familiar one. It was the most common way to train or educate people for their life’s work, and it was very different from education today in the typical classroom.

To begin with, you would actually go to live with your master. There would be a much more personal connection...
than the average university student has with any of his professors. You would, in fact, be entering into a personal relation that would last for the rest of your life. The training you would get from your master would also be more personal than today’s student receives. It would include training in how to handle all the situations that arise in normal life. You would learn these things primarily by modeling yourself on your master. One of the purposes of living with him would be to watch how he handled various situations so that you could imitate him.

At the end of the process, when the master was satisfied that you were fully trained, he would commission you to do the things he had trained you to do.

**A different kind of master**

Jesus followed this model in his relationship with his disciples. They lived together. He gave them personal training, and the disciples modeled themselves on him. At a certain point, Jesus sent his disciples out to do the work he had trained them for.

Yet being a disciple of Jesus involved – and still involves – something beyond discipleship to any other master. First of all, this particular master is not just another wise man. He is the Lord himself, the Son of God. Those who become Jesus’ disciples become disciples of the Lord of all creation. Such a master expects of his disciples a personal loyalty and dedication that go beyond just getting some personal training.

The first disciples, of course, did not fully realize all this when they decided to follow Jesus. The gospels tell us that gradually over the course of Jesus’ ministry they learned who he was and what he was asking of them. As we reflect on the things Jesus taught them about being disciples, we learn what it means to be disciples of Jesus today.

**If anyone would come after me**

One of the passages in the gospels that speaks most directly about being a disciple of Jesus is in the gospel of Mark:

> “And he called to him the multitude with his disciples and said to them, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it’” (Mark 8:34-35).

It is important to notice the context in which Jesus is speaking. The disciples have just witnessed the multiplication of the loaves and fishes; they have seen Jesus walk on water; they have seen him heal. They have begun to realize that they have something more than an ordinary master. When Jesus asks them, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Christ” – in other words, the Messiah sent by God (Mark 8:29-30).

At that point, Jesus begins to teach his disciples what being the Messiah means. Contrary to what they and most Jews of their time believed about the Messiah coming as a glorious king, he said “the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). The disciples are clearly taken aback; Peter even earns himself a strong rebuke when he takes his master aside to tell him not to say such things.

It is in this context, then, that Jesus calls together his disciples and the multitude, the whole crowd of people who followed him. Some of these followed him with belief and commitment, others just thought he was the most interesting thing they had seen in years.

To all these people Jesus says, “This is more serious than you realize. You cannot just tag along with me to benefit from my miracles and healings. That is not an option. If you want to follow me, it is going to involve commitment
and some real cost.” He spells out what that cost will be: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” What are these three demands Jesus makes on his disciples?

**Let him deny himself**
The word we translate “deny” has a specific meaning as it is used in the New Testament. Along with the word “acknowledge,” it speaks of a particular kind of relationship. The meaning can be seen in Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus says, “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

In other words, when a disciple is brought before authorities who are hostile to Jesus, he has to say either, “Yes, I belong to this man,” or, as Peter would do during Jesus’ trial, “No, I don’t know him.” He either acknowledges or denies having a relationship with Jesus. In the same way in heaven when we stand before the judge of all, Jesus will either acknowledge or deny us. He will say, “Yes, he belongs to me,” or, “No, I don’t know this one.”

To deny one’s self, in this context, means more than what we sometimes talk about as works of self-denial – fasting or other kinds of personal sacrifice. It means to deny a certain relationship with one’s self. It’s saying, “I’m not my own man or my own woman. I don’t belong to myself; I’m not my own master. I belong to the Lord Jesus.”

**Take up his cross**
When we read the words “take up his cross,” we understand them in terms of centuries of Christian spirituality that focuses on the cross of Jesus. A cross has come to mean for many any kind of suffering that we bear in union with the Lord. The disciples, to whom Jesus was speaking, however, did not yet attach any spiritual significance to the cross. They were familiar with it in only one context – as a common instrument of execution, like the gallows or electric chair today.

In fact the cross would have represented something far worse to them than what the electric chair represents to us. Crucifixion was a particularly painful, degrading kind of execution. The Romans reserved it as a punishment for the most serious crimes, especially the crime of rebellion against the government. When there was a rebellion in any part of the Roman Empire, the Romans would seize the people involved and hang them on crosses along the roads outside the cities of the region to make of them a warning. Usually they would have the upright pieces in place and make each prisoner carry the crossbar with him to the place of execution.

The Palestine of Jesus’ day was the scene of many uprisings, and we can easily imagine that Jesus and his disciples had walked along roads lined with crosses. And now Jesus tells them, “Take up your cross.” It is like saying, “If you are going to be my disciple, you might as well get ready for execution. You have to be ready to die for my cause, and to die a painful, degrading death. Go ahead and get your piece of wood and start carrying it, because that is what we are headed for.”

**Following the master**
The disciples have already responded once to an invitation to follow Jesus. As disciples, they had walked behind their master in his journeys, as was the Jewish custom for disciples. But now they know how the journey will end. To follow Jesus means to share his fate, to die as he will die. This is no pleasant stroll or business trip. It is an all-or-nothing proposition. In saying, “Follow me,” Jesus is demanding of his disciples total dedication, total commitment, and an almost reckless disregard for their own lives.

It is the type of dedication expressed in the following letter, written not by a Christian but by a young man in Mexico.
who had recently become a Communist. He is explaining to his fiancée why he is breaking their engagement.

“We Communists have a high casualty rate. We’re the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered and ridiculed, fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive.

“We Communists don’t have the time or the money for many movies or concerts or T-bone steaks or decent homes or new cars. We’ve been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one overshadowing factor: the struggle for world Communism.

“We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves to a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos seem to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing something new and true and better for mankind.

“There’s one thing about which I am in dead earnest, and that is the Communist cause.”

This young man followed his cause, Communism, with the dedication and seriousness which Jesus demanded of his disciples. The Christian cause, however, often lacks such disciples. There are not nearly enough people willing to leave the crowd and follow Jesus with total dedication.

The reward

Even in Jesus’ time, there were people for whom the price of discipleship was too high. One was the rich young man who asked Jesus the way to eternal life. Jesus said, “Sell all that you have and... come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). The rich man says, intelligently enough, that is a steep price; and he turns away.

Then Jesus’ disciples say, “Lord, we have given up everything. We are really on your side.” And Jesus says to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).

The Book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the fulfillment of this promise (see Revelation 14:1-5). It speaks in picture language of a company of 144,000 who have the name of the Lamb and his Father written on their foreheads. One hundred forty-four thousand is a symbolic number, representing a vast multitude of God’s people. The name written on their heads is a seal, the sign of God’s protection. It is the way God says, “These belong to me.”

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. In other words, they are the disciples, and they follow Jesus on his path. They are in the middle of the great final conflict, about to suffer persecution, but Jesus is with them.

This great company of disciples sings a new song, a heavenly song that they alone can learn. In the midst of the persecution they are able to sing the song of heaven. That is, they are able to experience the very life of heaven.

Only those who are truly disciples of Jesus can live the life of heaven here on earth. Only they can experience the protection of God and the Lamb in the midst of them as they deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.
Steve Clark is president emeritus of the Sword of the Spirit. This article was originally published in New Covenant Magazine, June Issue, 1991.
Empowering a Generation in Mission

an interview with Sam Geleyn

Intro: Kairos in Europe and the Middle East is an ecumenical missionary network of students and young people. Its main mission is to support young men and women leading Christian communities of students and young people within Europe and the Middle East. Kairos does this by facilitating a network, organising international gatherings, and providing supervision and leadership training. Kairos EME Newsletter recently interviewed Sam Gelyn, program director. Here are some of the highlights of that interview.

What was your background before joining Kairos in Europe and the Middle East (Kairos EME)?
I majored in commercial engineering, with a degree in economics from the University of Leuven in Belgium.

What motivated you to switch from commercial engineering to working for Kairos EME and for Pharos, the university student outreach in Leuven, Belgium?
Well, Jamie Treadwell, one of the Kairos leaders at the time, invited me to do a Kairos GAP year of service
and training in London. I prayed and thought about it – and it made sense to take a year out to do this. That year of training and service was hard but also exciting, and I didn’t just want to have a one-year experience and then go on with the rest of my life. I came back to Belgium with a desire to develop our student outreach at the University of Leuven, an outreach we now call Pharos (which means Lighthouse). So that’s what I did when I returned from London.

**Why does this work matter to you? Why do you keep doing it?**
Ultimately I think it really matters when you see individual lives changed by the power of God. Since beginning this mission work I have had a few really tangible experiences where I can see how I’ve been cooperating with the Lord and with his grace. I can also see that this is the right place for me to serve and use my gifts. It’s an exciting thing to realise.

**How would you describe your role in Kairos?**
I am the program director for Kairos EME. I’m responsible for designing and organizing our different programs and events, mainly our annual Kairos Weekend and our annual summer programs. [see full description of programs and events at Kairos EME website]

**How do you build an outreach program from scratch?**
I don’t know! [laughs] I have to really depend on individuals being generous with their time and saying “yes, I want to serve in Kairos where I’m needed.” We often have to change locations and set up different bases throughout Europe for each of our regional programs. I think that’s part of the strength of what we do: there’s high local ownership of Kairos and our programs. So how do we actually organize our programs? We look for
people who are willing to serve and we try to give them vision for how Lord is calling them serve in our Kairos mission.

**What do you love about your job?**
I love working with individuals and seeing them take on new responsibilities. Seeing them do things and take on responsibilities which they didn’t think they were capable of doing before is for me the most rewarding part of my job.

**How do you train someone to serve in Kairos?**
Training on the local level can vary a lot, depending on available resources. Our key training program is done regionally. Over the last few years we’ve introduced the Student Worker Outreach Training (SWOT) weekends. SWOT program involves 6 weekends of intensive training spread over a two year period – 3 weekends per year. Getting all of our leaders and student workers together three times a year gives us face-to-face contact points. That allows for stronger relationships and friendships to develop in the region. The weekends are designed to help win people to the vision of Kairos, and it also helps people gain a stronger sense of being in this mission work together.

**What are some of your hopes for the future of Kairos in Europe and the Middle East?**
I’m hoping that more and more individuals take on greater responsibility for our mission. In place of the regional level taking most of the initiative, it would be good to see more local outreaches and individuals that drive and shape our mission as well.

**Any final reflections on Kairos?**
I believe that here in Europe especially, the international dynamic of our mission work plays a key role in keeping us going – both locally and regionally. It certainly has been a motivating force for me – for keeping me going forward. The fact that we are part of an international network – a real bulwark of outreaches and communities – is a tremendous source of strength for us, especially here in Europe.

Watch Kairos Video on YouTube
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What's your background? Did you study or work before Kairos?
I’m from Dublin, Ireland. I studied Business and Spanish at University College Dublin, with a year of studies in Madrid. I worked various jobs over the years, mostly in retail, and after graduation in the Irish Tourist Office.

Why did you choose that field of study?
I loved accounting and wanted to study a language and live abroad – a qualification in business seemed to
make sense. At that time I didn’t plan to do Christian missionary work!

**How did you start working with Kairos?**
It was really through being given the chance to serve on various Kairos programs, like Adelante 2011, that the desire to do this kind of work grew in me. At the same time I realised what an impact Kairos programs had had on my life and faith journey.

**How so?**
It was really the Bible Week back in 2007 that was my first significant Kairos moment. Receiving prayer at that time really had a big impact on my life. After that, it was annual Kairos Weekends, a mission trip to Uganda and serving the programme at Adelante.

**What did you do in Uganda?**
We were running a conference for university students who were trying to set up Christian groups on three different campuses. Our job was to give them the tools to do that. It was all new to us. For me it went beyond what I thought I was capable of – but as I stepped into it and worked together with more experienced people I was able to see God using me.

**Why do you do this work? Why say yes to Kairos when you had so many options?**
Part of it was recognizing I had received a lot through the Kairos mission, and especially through others investing in me. As I saw that, I appreciated more fully how important Kairos is for the next generation. The Community of Nazareth in Dublin, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit, has a lot of young people coming up, but growing up in a Christian community doesn’t make you a Christian! It helps a lot, but at least for me there was a deeper and more personal decision to be made… There are many paths to choose from. I think the work of Kairos is crucial. I want our young people to have the same input and help as I had.

**What’s your main role within Kairos?**
Fundraising is the main thing right now – both with individuals and with foundations and government organizations like the European Union. I’m also looking at our communication network and trying to build relationships with other Christian groups.

**What is it that you love about your job?**
The people that I work with, the Christian environment. I also like the nature of the work - it’s not all simply results driven, though we have a lot of goals. There is a greater purpose to what we are doing.

**What is that purpose and how do you see it fulfilled?**
Essentially it’s helping people make decisions – the Kairos decisions. Supporting and enabling people to make good kingdom decisions at this time of their lives is crucial. I see us building people up and equipping them to make good decisions that will bless others. I see us training people to be able to lead and help others make those decisions. I see examples of this all the time. Just the other day I was talking to someone who seems to have changed through a Kairos Household programme in Glasgow last month. The Bible has come alive for him.

**Your hopes for the future?**
Seeing people take ownership at local levels. Seeing young people make sacrificial decisions. Seeing a Kairos generation ready to serve. And I think, beyond our Kairos world, seeing the greater contribution we are supposed to make to the kingdom of God.
Coming into this year’s Detroit Summer Outreach Program (DSO) I thought my Christian life was going well. I didn’t feel like I needed to change my heart in any way. I regularly read God’s Word, I had dedicated my life to God, and I spent time every morning in devotions and prayer. I didn’t feel like my spiritual life was dry, and it certainly didn’t look like that to other people. I knew I was having some trust issues, and I knew there were areas in my life in which I needed to fully surrender to God’s will – but I thought I could deal with them alone.

From day one of DSO I was challenged to examine my heart more thoroughly than ever before. During prayer times I looked into my life and I saw myself – my experiences, my talents, things I’d accomplished. I saw what God had done in my life and the gifts he’d given me, but that was all.

One morning during my prayer time as I sat quietly, I heard a word from the Lord. “Do you believe that I can do a great work in your life? I said, “Sure. You can do anything.” But then God revealed one huge area in which I had not trusted him – my future. I realised that I was holding on to my own desires for my future, I was taking it out of God’s hands and saying, “Thanks, I’ll handle this.” I can now see that I was experiencing fear – the fear of failure. I was failing to trust that God had a perfect plan for my life. My lack of trust and constant worrying about my future was hindering me from fully giving myself to the service God had called me to do here in Detroit.

So in pray I told God I would trust him, no matter what. I told him that I thought it would be very hard for me to trust him sometimes, and I asked him to be at my side to encourage and strengthen me when I felt weak or
unable to trust him, and when I felt the enemy attack me with doubts. I asked God to make his presence and love first and foremost in my mind so I’d never forget him.

I have grown in many ways this past summer through learning to trust more fully in God. The first way has been through the work that I have been privileged to do with the youth of Detroit. Detroit is in many ways not the nicest place in America, but God is definitely at work here. I believe that God has put in my heart – and in the hearts of those involved in DSO – a real love for this city and a commitment to serve and care for the people here for as long as God calls us here. We have to dream bold dreams on its behalf and be praying impossible prayers knowing confidently that ‘nothing is impossible for God’ because Jesus loves Detroit … and so we love it as well.

When I walk down the streets and talk to the people, it’s impossible not to recognize that God is here with his people. He is a merciful God who throughout all the pain, hurt, and misery, never abandons his children and continually loves them – a God who uses the poor and the outcasts as examples of what life is truly about – looking to God and relying on him for our lives. Serving the kids here is really worth it – after all, they are God’s children. And I want to do anything I can to see that they have the chance to grow in a safe, positive environment. God has given me a passion for serving in Detroit – especially for the young children and impacting young adults. I know that God called me to Detroit and he has equipped me to do his will serving in this city. I am blessed to be here. God willing, I will continue to serve in this city in the future. Detroit and its people are very close to my heart.
The way I came to find myself in Detroit this summer is a story of how Jesus Christ opened a door for me, me walking past the open door, and Christ kicking me through the door.

I grew up in what I’ve come to believe is the most privileged of homes – my parents have been married 32 years, and even more steadfast in their relationship than their love for one another is their love for the Lord. Their number one goal in raising their 8 children is for the children to live for Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

As is customary with most teenage boys, I took for granted the blessed upbringing and God-given talents I have received. I began to use the gifts I had been given for self-serving purposes. Like the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, I fled from the embrace of my heavenly father to indulge in the lies of Satan.

However, despite my choice to go my own rebellious way – I didn’t take into account the power and relentless perseverance of my mother’s prayers for me. Through countless events, retreats, living situations with other Christian men, and the example of solid men of God – these were all the doors I had been getting kicked through – the Lord Jesus was showing me how seriously he seeks me out – each moment of my life.

such as light, love, and service – and then twists them until they become the opposite of what God intended for us – darkness, lust, and selfishness.

In my return to Jesus Christ over the past few years, I have had to combat my own selfishness with selfless-service. Through that change from serving self to serving others, the Lord has begun to reveal more of himself to me and has given me vision for the life I now want to live – one of complete surrender to his will.

My time with YouthWorks-Detroit this past summer has given me not only the opportunity to serve, but to rely completely on Jesus Christ. It has also changed my attitude towards the things I desire, and refocused my energy and plans for the coming year. The experience of living and serving in such a broken city has helped me to focus on my Savior and to keep my mind on him. He has shown me the need I have for him in my life, and he has humbled me through the witness of the poor in this city and their total trust in him.

I know that God will continue to bless my time of service in Detroit. Here’s to walking through the doors rather than being booted through.

[Aaron grew up in the Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan, USA, and is the son of Craig and Jen Galer. He is a junior at Michigan State University (MSU), studying Business and Economics. Aaron is also actively involved in the University Christian Outreach (UCO) chapter at Michigan State University. He currently lives with the Servants of the Word in Lansing, and has been blessed over the past few years to do a bit of traveling to visit the UCO chapters in the United Kingdom and Canada.]
I came to Detroit looking for a change of scenery – spiritually speaking. Almost all of my Christian walk in the past few years has been spent in the university setting. I was ready to see what it might mean for me to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ in a radically different kind of environment. Detroit seemed to me to be that different environment I was looking for.

Since arriving in Detroit this past summer I have been refreshed with the honesty and brokenness of the people living here. This realization came to fruition during a conversation I had with a man shortly after one of his Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He told me how he had finally hit rock bottom trying to control his addiction, family, and troubled life – and now all he has to go on is God’s abundant grace. I have been finding this story repeated over and over again in this city – where individuals, churches, and the very infrastructure of the city have crumbled, and now none of them can stand on their own without God’s grace.

The “first-world” problems which I have seen in my university student environment, and all the intellectual arguments that I have heard from students as to why God does not exist – now seem dim and distant when I stand and look at this city suffering from the deeply rooted brokenness of sin. There is a certain humility that I have found in Christians here that comes from knowing how desperately we all are in need of God’s grace and mercy no matter how prosperous our own local city or circumstances may be. People in this broken city have
seen that everything humans have tried to do on their own strength leads ultimately to failure. If we can learn to put our hope in God and patiently trust in his help, then his perfect plan and provision will come through.

God has been showing me over and over again that I am incapable of doing what God wants me to do – on my own without him. The work that God gave me to do with these kids this past summer could only be accomplished by God’s grace and power – working in and through me. This is a key lesson I have learned through my involvement with Detroit Summer Outreach and Street Team this past summer. Time after time when I experienced my own plans failing, I discovered that God had a greater plan then I had foreseen.

I am very thankful for receiving this lesson from God, because I was so used to relying on myself for getting good at “doing” school for the past sixteen-or-so years. Working with these high school kids was unlike any exam I had to take in the past or any project that was assigned to me. The work God was calling me to do in Detroit required me to fall back entirely on God’s plan and grace – only in that way could I hope to show Christ to these kids. Glory be to God that he can use an ordinary guy like myself to have some impact with these kids’ lives!

[Will Cannon is a musician, engineer, disciple, and son. He is on staff for the University Christian Outreach (UCO) mission team in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, and is an affiliate with the Servants of the Word learning what it means to be a shepard and servant in the body of Christ.]
Our most recent women’s retreat in the People of God community in Pittsburgh had as its theme Fully Engaged in Heart and Mind. As I mused on the theme I began to think about it in terms of an approaching marriage. What does it mean to be fully engaged to be married?

Many of us probably know at least one person – in our family, a friend, or an acquaintance – who has been in a perpetual state of engagement. They are in a holding pattern of sorts, waiting. For some there may be a legitimate reason for waiting to marry, for instance, an unexpected job loss or a sudden, serious illness. But, for others it is often an ambiguous waiting; there is no wedding date set, no clear direction and no vision for the future. It would seem these folks are less than fully engaged. To be fully engaged means that you are working toward something. There is a destination in mind, a building of the relationship and much thought and preparation given to the life that follows after the wedding day.

There are number of Scripture passages that refer to the church as the Bride of Christ. Given the magnitude of that reality, surely there are some serious implications to consider. Shouldn’t we be “fully engaged” right now? What should that look like? It seems to me that this realization should be having a significant impact on how we live our lives and how we spend our time and resources. Shouldn’t the realization of this key relationship be changing our thinking about what is really important?

The Bible does not mention the word engagement. However, in Scripture there are many references to the very common Jewish practice of betrothal, the custom that relates most closely to our modern engagement period. I believe the history of the Jewish custom of betrothal, in the Old and New Testaments, has something to teach us...
about what it means for the church to live as the Bride of Christ.

**The Jewish custom of betrothal**

Before entering into the actual betrothal period, a man would leave his home to go and select his bride. Although it was not unusual for this process to be initiated by the bridegroom’s father, by Jesus’ day it was usually initiated by the bridegroom himself. However certain a young man was of his choice, it was for the intended bride to say “yes” to a proposal of marriage. She was not required to enter into a betrothal against her will.

We can see from the Scriptures that families in biblical times often formed clans and tribes who lived in the same areas and stayed in close relationship with one another. They often married distant relatives within those clans and tribes, as we can see in the Old Testament examples of Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and many others. So to say “yes” to the proposal was to do so with some knowledge of the person you were committing yourself to.

If both were in agreement, the bride and bridegroom would be required separately to go through a ceremonial washing, symbolic of spiritual cleansing signifying that they were entering into this time of betrothal in purity, having agreed to give themselves exclusively to one another. In Hebrew, the word *kiddushim* means “sanctification” or “being set apart” and is often, even today among Jews, used interchangeably for betrothal. Interestingly, that same word is used to describe a dedicated temple. Through this washing the bride is now considered to be a temple set apart for her husband.

The bridegroom was required to negotiate a “bride price” with the bride’s father. The bride price was whatever the groom was required to pay in order to gain his bride’s hand in marriage. It could be a monetary gift or a type of service or some other agreed upon arrangement. Although the bride price was paid to the father of the bride it eventually would become the bride’s as part of her dowry, the property the bride takes with her when she leaves her home and she brings it with her into her marriage. Its purpose was to provide her with some security for her future. We can see an illustration of this practice in the example of Jacob who had to work for his uncle Laban for 14 years to win Rachel, the couple taking with them the flocks Jacob produced and watched over during that period.

After coming to an agreement on the price, a covenant would be drawn up and signed sealing the betrothal. As we see in the example of Joseph and Mary in the Gospel, a couple was considered to be married from the time of the signing of the betrothal covenant. Once a betrothed couple’s signatures were on the parchment it became a legally binding contract that could only be broken for reasons of infidelity, adultery, and then only by the intended groom. The reason for that was to avoid what is called "defrauding" or backing out of the betrothal. It was a way of holding the groom to his word and to the covenant, and providing the bride with a sense of security. After signing the covenant the bride and bridegroom would drink from a shared cup of wine over which a betrothal blessing had been pronounced.

The betrothal period lasted for an undetermined length of time, set by the groom’s father. Generally it lasted about a year. Since the couple was to live apart from each other during that time it was common for the bridegroom to give the bride a ring or other symbol as a promise of his love and as a pledge of his return.

After the giving of the gift, the groom would return to his father’s house to begin preparing the new living accommodations for the bride and himself, frequently in the father’s own home or by building an addition onto it. It was the responsibility of the rabbis to determine that the bride’s new dwelling would be a more suitable and acceptable place to live than where she had lived previously.

The groom’s father was the one who ultimately determined when the new living accommodations were ready and only then would he give his son permission to bring his new bride home.
The bride and the bridal party were usually given seven days advance notice of the groom’s coming, but the exact day and time were not known. Thus, the bride had to be in a continual state of readiness. With the permission of the groom’s father, one of the groom’s friends would give a shout alerting the bride and the wedding party of the groom’s coming. Then the wedding celebration would begin. The groomsmen would carry the bride on their shoulders to the new dwelling where the ceremony would take place. The marriage ceremony was finally sealed and completed with the bride and bridegroom sharing another cup of wine. And from there the union would be consummated, the celebration lasting a full seven days.

The betrothal fulfilled in Jesus

When we look at the betrothal customs of the Jewish culture, many of which are still in place today in that culture, we begin to see some parallels to Jesus and his bride, the church.

In the Scriptures we can see an overlapping of the betrothal initiation process. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that he (the Father) “chose us in him (in Christ) before the creation of the world.” In John 15:16 Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last.” He has chosen us to be his holy, pure and spotless bride. Jesus, with his Father’s blessing, has left his father’s house to come to earth to seek his bride. He makes himself known to us through his word, teaching us about himself and offering us the chance to accept his proposal. Our repentance and the giving of our lives to Jesus is our saying “yes” to that proposal.

We see in the Scriptures that Jesus enters into his time of public ministry by being baptized. He goes through his ceremonial washing, as Jesus says to the Baptist, “…in order to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15); in order to be set apart, to be sanctified for the work of winning his bride, the church. And from Ephesians, we see that the church, too, has been declared to be sanctified and set apart exclusively for Christ. He “makes us holy through the washing of the word so that we might be presented to him a radiant church, holy and blameless” (Ephesians 25-27). For Christians, our baptism also stands as the symbol of our sanctification, our being set apart for the Lord exclusively. We, too, are seen as a temple, set apart for the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit.

Jesus fulfills his obligation as the bridegroom by establishing a new covenant, written in his blood, giving his very life as the payment required to gain his bride, the church. “You are not your own, you have been bought with a price” (1Corinthians 6:19b-20).

The Father loved us so much that he gave (granted, offered, indicating that he was not resigned to the idea, but he actually initiated it) his own Son to be slain in order that we might not perish but rather be “won” for the Son, as his perfect, spotless bride to enter into an eternal relationship of union with him! He initiated the giving of his own Son as the purchase price for his bride. His blood is the dowry that we take with us into our new home with Christ in heaven. It secures our future with our bridegroom.

Our sharing in the communion cup serves as the symbol through which Christ has obtained the church as his bride. Through his blood he makes a new covenant with us, and as we share in the cup we are agreeing to participate in the betrothal with him.

A broken relationship with God is often described in both the Old and New Testament as spiritual adultery. This is especially true when an individual or the people as a whole break covenant with God through idolatry – going after false gods and worshipping them instead of the one true God. God takes his relationship with his covenanted people very seriously – as seriously as one would a marriage relationship. Any serious breech in a covenant relationship with God is tantamount to adultery since it breaks the promise one has made to give one’s whole life to God – to
follow and obey him now and to the end of one’s life. God saw his people’s worship of pagan gods as his betrothed having an affair with another man. These pagan gods are most generally referred to in Scripture as the ba’als or simply, Ba’al. In Hebrew, the word ba’al has the same root as the word “husband.” God took his relationship with Israel and he takes his relationship with us as seriously as one takes a marriage relationship. From God’s perspective, his people were unfaithful adulterers. And although he reserved the right to “divorce” them, he rather showed amazing patience with them, as he does with us, wanting them to repent of their unfaithful ways and embrace the way of life he offered them.

As the chosen people of Israel make their way to the Promised Land God speaks clearly to them saying, “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31: 6). The writer of Hebrews reminds his hearers of these same words as he addresses marital faithfulness and keeping oneself free from the love of money, two key concerns for most individuals looking toward marriage. Jesus repeatedly told his disciples that although he was going to the Father he would indeed come back for them. He could be counted on not to defraud them. He would be faithful; he would provide for them. And “He proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). He paid the ‘bride-price’ even though we were, and still are, often unfaithful spiritual adulterers. “If we are faithless, he will remain faithful because he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:12).

Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit as the pledge and promise of his return. “You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Ephesians1:13-14). Many times in the New Testament we see the word “gift” in connection with the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew word for “gift” in Greek is charisma or charismata which we understand to be referring to the Holy Spirit and also the Holy Spirit’s working in individuals. The gift of his Spirit is Jesus’ pledge and promise to us of his returning to take us home to his Father’s house.

Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away and that they cannot come with him. But he says, “Do not be troubled. In my Father’s house there are many mansions, many rooms…I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am” (John 14:1-3). I think this is one of the clearest references indicating that Jesus has entered into a betrothal period with his bride, the church. After the betrothal, he has now left the home of his bride and has gone back to his Father’s house to prepare a place for us. It will indeed be better than the place we are currently living. “For no eye has seen and no ear has hear and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1Corinthians 2:9).

The Bridegroom, Jesus, doesn’t indicate the day or time when he will be coming back for his bride, the people he has redeemed with the price of his blood. He tells his disciples plainly that he doesn’t know when the Father will give his permission for the Son to come gather us up and take us home. “Only the Father knows that day and that hour” (Matthew 24:36). But during this time between his first and second coming, the Lord Jesus is busy in the house of his Father making living accommodations for us that will only be completed when the Father says so.

Finally, when the Father decides that all is ready, there will be a trumpet blast and a shout to announce Jesus’ coming. The whole people of God will be taken up into heaven and brought into the kingdom of the Father where we will be fully united with our Bridegroom for all eternity. Jesus said to the disciples at the Last Supper, “I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26: 29). Perhaps this Scripture is a reference to the conclusion of the wedding ceremony of the Lamb, to the beginning of our new life in a new kingdom with our Bridegroom, Jesus the Lord!

**How the Church Prepares**
Preparing our wedding garment

For the bride, the betrothal period was a time of preparation. Her primary duty was to prepare her wedding garments. If the betrothal period could last for a year or more, it must have been quite an undertaking to make this garment! She would have to be paying extraordinary attention to detail, putting her whole heart and soul into it, wanting to look her absolute best for her bridegroom, pleasing him being her main concern.

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder, shouting, Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given to her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints) [Revelations 19:6].

Scripture states that the spiritual wedding garments which we will wear at the marriage feast of the Lamb will be adorned with the good deeds and acts of service which we have done for the Lord and for his people, especially those we have lived with and have daily contact with. In 1 Timothy 5:10, which is primarily addressed to women, Paul specifically mentions some of the key jewels and qualities of service which the Lord takes special delight in, such as “bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble, and being devoted (given to) doing all sorts of good deeds.” Scripture tells us to put on Jesus Christ, to clothe ourselves with Jesus’ character, his virtue, no longer considering how to gratify the desires of our sinful flesh. Our concern should be gratifying our God – making him happy, and clothing ourselves with the spiritual garments of righteousness and holiness – these are what truly please our Lord.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:1).2

These are the fruits of the Spirit that are born in us as we prepare our bridal garment by living our lives in service to one another and to the Lord, and yielding our wills more and more to accomplishing his purposes.

Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:13-14).

In the Old Testament God spoke of being careful to make the tabernacle exactly like the pattern he had given to Moses. He was also detailed and extremely specific about the making of the priestly garments. So too, he gave us a pattern for our spiritual wedding garment. The explanation of the self-sacrificing love in 1 Corinthians 13 is the pattern Jesus gives us. Through the Apostle Paul he tells us what love is and what it is not. If we have not love we are as worthless as a noisy gong or clanging symbols, or as unfinished or tarnished wedding garments!

Spiritual and emotional preparation for marriage

For a woman, the betrothal period was a time for learning to love the man she was now going to marry; learning to trust him, growing in respect and honor for him, being willing to let him make decisions for their life together. She had to trust his word to her, the promise he made that he would come back for her. She had his gift to remind her of that promise. The gift gave her reassurance and comfort as she waited and looked forward to his return.

We too, as the Bride of Christ, the people whom Jesus has cleansed and chosen for himself, should strive to grow in our love, honor, and respect for him, our true heavenly Bridegroom. We too need to trust in his word to us, in his promise that he will indeed come back for us. It is hard trusting someone you cannot see, especially for a lengthy period of time. And since the waiting can be long, we need continual reassurance. And so much more valuable than
any physical ring, the Lord Jesus has given us a spiritual sign of his pledge to reassure us in our waiting – that pledge is the gift of the Comforter, his Holy Spirit – a sure guarantee of the Lord’s return.

The bride had to trust the bridegroom to make the new house a place that would fulfill her needs. She had to lay aside her preferences, her demands, and let him arrange the dwelling the way he thought best, a difficult and challenging posture for anyone to take!

Similarly, we have no idea what our eternal dwelling will look like, but we know it will be perfect and we trust that it will fulfill our every longing (John 14:1-3). Presently however, the Lord Jesus makes his presence known to us through his Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts. Are we letting him have his way in this dwelling? Are we dictating to him where we will and will not allow him to work in and through our lives? Are we giving him the same freedom to do what he wants with his spiritual dwelling place in our hearts as he has in building our eternal dwelling place with him in heaven? Have we completely abandoned our wills to him, giving him the exclusive right to do with us as he chooses?

**Getting to know (and love) his family**

This period of physical separation during the betrothal could also be seen as a time for “falling in love.” As mentioned earlier, Jewish families in biblical times were part of close-knit clans and tribes – so having some acquaintance or knowledge of the extended family members of one’s clan and tribe was common. During the betrothal period the bride would naturally want to get to know the groom’s family more personally, more intimately. And as the bride would get to know the family, she would get to know her bridegroom through their stories of him, their sharing of life with him, their experiences of him. She would learn to love him as his family loved him. So as she learned to know the bridegroom’s family she would “fall in love” with the bridegroom himself.

Jesus told his disciples that everyone who does the will of his Father is his mother, his brother, his sister. Ephesians 2:19 says that “we are members of God’s household” his family. Jesus wants us to recognize his family (and consequently our true spiritual family) in every person who does his will. In sharing our lives together, sharing our stories of Jesus with each other, telling each other what we’ve learned about him, how we have loved him and how we have experienced his love, learning to love one another as he loved us – all of this can help us to know him and to grow in our love for him.

As the betrothed New Covenant bride, the people redeemed by Christ, we are privileged to have the Holy Spirit as our teacher and guide – to help us grow in our knowledge of our bridegroom, the Lord Jesus. The Spirit not only gives us understanding of Christ’s word, he pours Christ’s love into our hearts (Romans 5:5). In Jeremiah 31: 34 we read the prophetic word pointing to New Covenant life: “No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother (family, relatives, kinsmen, depending on the translation) saying, ‘Know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord.’” So while the bridegroom is away we spend our time learning to love him, even as we learn to love each other, and as we listen to our shared stories, and as we allow the Holy Spirit to speak his word through one another so that we may together grow in our knowledge and love for the One who has called us to be united with himself.

**We wait patiently for his return**

The bride of Christ, his church, is now patiently waiting for her groom, the Lord Jesus, to come for her. She is awaiting the shout of the groomsman, awaiting the blast from the trumpet announcing the bridegroom’s coming. She has been given up to seven days advance notice but she doesn’t know the exact day or hour of his coming. Consequently, she needs to be in a state of readiness because he could show up at any moment. The number “seven” in Scripture signifies “completion.” So when the bride is given seven days advance notice of her groom’s coming, it is a way of saying, when all is ready, “When it is completed, I will come for you.”
She hopes and trusts that when he does come she will be ready and that she will have prepared well. Every day she is hoping for what she does not yet have, hoping that today might be the day. Finally, when the groom’s father decides that all is completed he sends his son to go and bring his new bride home.

As Christ’s betrothed, both individually and corporately, we too eagerly await the Son. We are awaiting the shout and the trumpet blast announcing the groom. We need to be always at the ready. As the bride works to be ready for the coming of her groom, we too work to be ready for Jesus’ return. We trust that “he who began this good work in us will see it through to its completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). It is not for us to know the day or the hour of his return. Our job is to watch and be ready.

“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Romans 8: 24b-25). In hope the bride waits for the return of her groom, confident that he will not defraud or disappoint her because his love has been poured out into her heart by the Holy Spirit who has been given to her.

**Conclusion**
When a betrothed woman gets married, she takes three things from the betrothal with her into her new life: (1) her dowry; (2) the gift her bridegroom gave her; and (3) her wedding garment. That’s it. Likewise, when Jesus comes for each of us we won’t be taking our house, our education, our career, our accomplishments, our children’s accomplishments, our talents, our degrees, our money, or our fit bodies. All we will be taking with us is our dowry, which is his blood, the payment he made to purchase us. We will take the gift he gave us, his Holy Spirit. And we will be clothed in our wedding garment, our righteous deeds done in service for our Bridegroom. That’s it. All the rest is wood, hay and stubble. As Paul said, “…I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ… I want to know Christ…” (Philippians 3: 8, 10a). All Paul wanted was to spend his days getting to know Jesus better, to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him.

As we wait and as we live in this betrothal period, we want to be fully engaged, fully betrothed as the Bride of Christ, and committed in heart and mind to preparing for our eternal home, not distracted by lesser things but making plans for a glorious eternal life with our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus.

Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on earthly thing (Colossians 3:2).

That is having an eternal perspective. That is being “fully engaged.”

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Joanie Nath has been married for 36 years and is the mother of three grown children. She has been a member of the People of God Community in Pittsburgh for 30 years where she serves as a Senior Woman Leader and retreat speaker. She also serves in the Sword of the Spirit North American Region as a Regional Senior Woman Leader. She resides in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania, USA.
I Wonder If We're All Spiritually Insane

by Sam Williamson

A few weeks ago I met a twenty-eight-year-old woman who told me of a struggle. Growing up, she longed for a good husband, a nice family, and a moderate house.

Shortly after college, she married a really good man. They found good jobs in their fields. They bought a nice house. A year later she got pregnant and had a healthy baby.

She had all she had wanted but she still felt restless.

They bought a newer car. They repainted the house. They added granite countertops; then stainless steel appliances. They were promoted. Her husband got an MBA. She quit her job and become a full-time mother. It felt good but the satisfaction didn’t last.

Soon, again, she felt discontent and restlessness. She asked herself, “Is this all there is?” She saw the same restlessness in her friends. Then she read an Einstein quote, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over, and expecting a different result.”

She said, “I wonder if we’re all spiritually insane.”

We all know people...

We all know people who live frantic lives of restless discontent:

- The mothers who push kids into piano classes; then the travel soccer team; then the chess club; then the
school play; then A/P English. They are frenetic.

- The young man who is like a serial boyfriend, always looking for the “right” girl. None has satisfied yet, but he keeps looking, night after night. He is restless.
- The pastor who grew a congregation from 100 to 300 and now wants 500; or has 500 but wants 1,000. He can’t sleep at night.
- The addict who lights up one more joint or does another line of cocaine, but it’s never enough. Tomorrow he does it again.

It’s easy to see frenzy in others. They grasp for different things. What about you and me? How often do we think, “If only my wife would stop nagging (or my husband would start doing dishes),” or “If only she loved me,” or “If only we had a deck out back”?

**The pause**

The young woman told me that she had everything she wanted, but it wasn’t enough. Her marriage, family, and home were great, but they didn’t satisfy her soul. She said,

“This time around, I’m going to pause in my discontent and rest in my restlessness.”

(I told her she was a genius, on par with Einstein. She said, “Thanks! That feels great.” A moment later she said, “Oh no. The feeling’s gone.”)

**I tried the pause**

I decided to try her challenge, pausing in my discontent and resting in my restlessness. I sat at my desk and made a list of my “If only’s:” writing a bestselling novel, taking a month-long Caribbean scuba vacation, or owning a 16-person retreat center on a lake.

I asked myself, “How much happier will I be if I get them?” and “How much less happy will I be if I don’t?” My answer was, “Probably not much. They won’t satisfy for long.” So why do I restlessly push for them?

I must be spiritually insane. As I reflected on my insanity, I read a C. S. Lewis quote,

> Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. We feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world (**Mere Christianity**, Chapter 10, emphasis added).

It’s right and normal to want food, love, homes, families, relationships, and careers. But satisfaction of these desires will never bring the deep soul satisfaction we crave.

Because we were made for another world.

**Leaveable and bearable**

John Newton said, “If we really knew the future glory for us, it would make the best times leaveable and the worst
times bearable.”

That is the deep spiritual longing of each heart and soul; we long for a satisfaction so rich that the very best times will be leaveable and the very worst things will be bearable.

Phew! Frankly, I’m sick and tired of repainting the house.

P.S. Try my friend’s challenge. Take a few minutes and a pen and paper, and write down the things you go to for satisfaction. Then ask, “How much happier will I be if I get them?” and “How much less happy will I be if I don’t?”

What do you think?

- In this moment of your life, what are your longings of which you say, “If only…”?
- What “satisfactions” have you had that only satisfied temporarily?
- In what ways might you be “spiritually insane?”

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish Antioch, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men’s retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. His is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
Chapter 5: My Great Revolution

To understand everything is to forgive everything.

After a year of working at the Intensive Care Unit I had a nervous breakdown. I couldn’t bear the stress at work, the excessive drinking and the deteriorating relationships with both my family and my colleagues anymore. To make things worse, I was haunted by the feeling that my life was meaningless. I travelled to Krakow and Rabka every time I had some time to spare. I just couldn’t cut the umbilical cord between me and my reliable drinking company.

The rest of my free time I devoted to planning revenge on my university mate, who was an important persona in the social elite of “my” new town, Bielsko-Bia?a (which I was growing to dislike more and more). I was angry with him for his rather disastrous attempt to introduce me to his social circles. I invited him to visit me at work and have a little chat. The initial plan was that I would welcome him with a punch, which would send him to the other side of the corridor and thus finish our get-together at the same time. However, I chose to handle it differently and that was a breakthrough decision for my life.

To explain where it came from, I need to go back to an event which took place in Che?m Lubelski during my military
During a two-month stay in the barracks, together with some other officer cadet doctors we used every opportunity we had to get drunk. The army unit was surrounded by a wall, and there was a little house leaning against it from the other side. The house, which we called a den, was a place where you could always get vodka. The guard, in exchange for “a half-litre”, would turn a blind eye on our forays to the other side of the wall. Also, when we were on a ‘pass’, we would go to a hotel bar, where we would have a drop of the hard stuff. On these occasions I was usually accompanied by my friend Marek, the only med student with whom I got on really well. He was my guardian angel. He was always there for me in the critical moments.

I can’t remember the last three days of the army training. I woke up in Marek’s car near Rzeszów, and as I found out later, he had handed over my uniform and had completed all the formalities for me.

During one of my ‘passes’, which I think was about three weeks before the end of the training, we were exhausted after a three-day drinking spree, so we decided to do something different and completely unusual for us—we went for a walk. We walked around an old, neglected and mysterious cemetery. I was trying to guess people’s life stories from the inscriptions on the tombstones. Some of them were cracked, others covered with moss. The inscriptions were in Polish, Russian, German, Yiddish… Suddenly I found myself looking at an askew tombstone, with an old inscription, which said, “Tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner” (To understand everything is to forgive everything). I remembered some French from secondary school, so I translated it into Polish, but I did not understand the message behind these words. It was the only writing on that stone. There was no name, or date, but I was taken by a strong feeling that I had not come across this grave by coincidence. The message was a puzzle for me. I had always tried to understand the world, other people, myself. But what does forgiveness have to do with reason, philosophy and knowledge? There was no connection between forgiveness and knowledge in my book. Although I didn’t understand the message, I was inspired by its mysteriousness. I decided to remember the sentence, as my intuition was telling me that it might become my personal motto one day.

A few years later, I was waiting for my friend to visit me. Just before his arrival I thought to myself, ‘Maybe now is the time to apply “my” motto to my life.’ Instead of starting a fight, I started a conversation during which I told my friend I held no grudge against him anymore. From then on I began to see things more clearly… That’s right! Hatred and lack of forgiveness make us blind and unable to comprehend the truth. To understand is to know the truth. And truth is found in humility, not only in knowledge. Astonishing… I felt like I had found a trace to solve the mystery of life. Soon after that I went to a few parties to “relax” and the noble note went down the drain…

I came to the point of my drinking spree which felt like a combination of delirium and psychosis. One night I decided to quit the Intensive Care unit. I got on my motorbike MZ 250 and went to Rabka, where my sister lived, which obviously raised my family’s concerns. The following day my brother-in-law and I got into his Fiat car. He was clearly irritated by my prolonged visit, so I decided to placate him a little. And the best thing to do in such cases is to complain about your heavy lot. Not that there was much to complain about in my lot. As a matter of fact, everything was just fine. I was still the tough guy who had life by the ‘short and curlies’. That conversation would be a make-believe of self-pity—just to get him on my side.

‘You see, Krzys, there’s so much trouble in my life right now (just some minor difficulties), things are not going well in my family (it’s nothing serious), and it’s even worse at work (it doesn’t really bother me, there are more important things in life than work).’

At some point of this fake complaining something weird started happening to me… I couldn’t stop talking and as I went on, I realized that I wasn’t just inventing stories to placate my brother-in-law, somehow I was telling the truth. I began to see that my life was nearly ruined! Tears came to my eyes. I began the confession of my life. My brother-in-law, Krzysztof, was a patient confessor and the confessional was his Fiat 126p! I felt a strange thrill moving from the top of my head to the tips of my toes. I hadn’t experienced anything like that before …It was a completely new feeling. Poor Krzysiek, he had no idea what was going on inside me. From then on, everything began to change. I felt the need to go to church and confess my
A few days later, I went to Kraków and met with Grazyna. She offered to pray with me. This time I did not object.

‘You must give your live to God!’ There was a part of me that knew she was right.

‘Do you want to invite Jesus into your heart and make him your Lord?’

‘I do, I really do…’

I repeated the prayer after Grażyna:

‘Lord Jesus, I give my life to you. Lead me according to your will; be my Lord and my King!’

Over the next few days I discovered that my faith grew astoundingly. I remember walking down Karmelicka Street, in Kraków and being utterly astonished at my previous disbelief in God. How could I think that Gospel stories were nothing but legends and that believing in them was only old ladies’ business?! Now I don’t just believe, I know that God is there! He is in me, he is around me! The Death and Resurrection of Jesus are facts. How could I have any doubts about that?!

This intense experience lasted for a few weeks. It has not come back in this form again, but my faith has grown through many years of various tests. As I was pondering all that had happened to me, I came to a district of Kraków called Bronowice. Apparently a church was being built there. I came up to a wooden building with a notice board next to it and went in through the open door. A man leant against the landing balustrade.

‘Are you looking for someone?’

‘Yes, I’m looking for a priest’

‘Has something happened?’, asked the young man on the landing. He was wearing a bathrobe and his hair was wet.

‘Nothing serious. I just need confession.’

‘Hold on a moment, I’ll just get dressed’, he replied.

A moment later he reappeared in his soutane, the hair still wet. He invited me to his room. I gave him the whole story… how I had broken all of the Ten Commandments. As part of my penance I had to read some voluminous chapters from the Bible and I promised to mend my ways. I was told that God had forgiven me my sins. Then the most amazing thing happened. The priest stood up from his chair and as I was doing the same, he stretched his arms and held me close to his heart.

He said to me ‘I’m glad you came! It’s good to have you back!’.

This very moment most of my prejudice against priests and the Catholic Church disappeared.

The following week Grazyna invited me to a prayer event at the Dominicans’. It took place in the chapter house. It started with a testimony of a young man who moonlighted as a receptionist in The Holiday Inn to earn some money for his studies. He hadn’t always worked within the borderlines of the law, but when he met Jesus, his life had changed completely and he
gave up his shady businesses. After his testimony, people started praying out loud, all at the same time and many of them lifted up their hands. Then they sang melodiously and clapped their hands rhythmically. I noticed that there was a music team who played guitars, an electric organ and a few trumpets. At some point they all started singing in a monotonous tone, without any words. It sounded a bit like an accord which was building up harmoniously as more and more voices were tuning in. I assumed that this was the song that Ewa was so keen to demonstrate to me a few years back. After a brief assessment of the situation, I realized that here, I was in my element. I even decided to join in the song—fully aware that I wasn’t competent enough, as I had not taken any course on the Holy Spirit before. I was hoping no one would notice my lack of experience and that God would forgive me, if I sang out of key. He probably did.

Some time after that prayer meeting I went to confession again. This time my penance was to recite a litany. When I left the confessional, the mass was about to begin and I really wanted to receive Holy Communion. However, I was facing a problem: Can I receive Communion in advance and then ask someone where to find litanies—in the Bible, or maybe in a prayer book (which by the way I did not possess)? I decided to ask someone competent for advice. I went straight to the sacristy. I knocked on the door and, as I was entering the room, I saw a tall, bald man with glasses who was putting on his white habit.

‘Excuse me, I’ve only got one quick question’, I started.

When I explained what my problem was, the Dominican looked at me in amazement, then he patted me on the shoulder and said:

‘Go and receive Holy Communion, and I will recite the litany for you! That’ll do.’

As I learned afterwards, it was Father Joachim Badeni who was later to become my great friend and mentor of my faith.

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Chapter 6: Bonfire, Bicycle and Freaks

After all those experiences, Grazyna became my authority on spiritual life. Everything she said was almost sacred to me and I did not dare to question it.

‘Faith is like a fire’, she explained to me, ‘and right now you are like a burning log. If you want to maintain your flame, you need to stay in the bonfire, close to the other logs. Should somebody take you away from the fire and put you on a wet grass, your flame will go out. The source of the fire is the community of the living Church’.

‘Where do I find one?’ I asked. ‘Kraków has the charismatic renewal group at the Dominicans. But what about Bielsko?’

‘We’ll think of something.’

She came back with a solution the very next day.

‘Until you find a community for yourself, you should go to the prayer meetings of a youth group, called Oasis.’

‘Oasis’... yes, there was a little pigeon hole at the back of my mind, labelled ‘the Oasis youth’. It referred to gutless young people, with no hobbies, for whom church was a kind of an asylum. I had heard them sing at mass once or twice before—they were nervous girls in white blouses and serious, pale, slightly overgrown altar boys.

BUT an order is an order.
The meetings took place in the chapel in Aleksandrowice, one of Bielsko-Biała’s districts. I was 28 years old at that time and the beard made me look even older. I listened to those young people and prayed with them quietly from the last pew. After a few meetings they got used to my presence there. They didn’t ask me to leave and they didn’t try to explain anything to me. I was grateful for that. Within a few months those girls in white blouses and pious boys became my source of fire. I started looking up to them and treating them as my teachers of faith. I absorbed their simple commentaries to Scripture passages like a sponge. I was catching up on all those years spent away from the Church.

Father Eugeniusz, who was responsible for the group, once told us about a scene that he had witnessed in the downtown of Bielsko.

‘A little boy was riding a bike through the crowded street. He was too short to sit on the saddle and he had to put his right leg under the crossbar to be able to reach the right pedal, and yet he was maneuvering skillfully among the pedestrians. A little girl was sitting on the saddle, she might have been his sister. Her left hand was resting on the boy’s shoulder and her right hand was holding an ice-cream. Her face showed ultimate relaxation, as she was licking the ice-cream and sending smiles to the passers-by. She was clearly proud of her brother’s skills.’

No extended commentary was needed. The analogy was obvious: the scene reflected the life of Christians who put their trust in the One who’s at the handlebars. Being able to trust God so much became my dream. Christian life is not just about riding a bike and having ice-cream, though, as I was soon to find out myself.

After a few months, with Grazyna’s consent, I went to the ‘Life in the Spirit’ seminar, run by a new-founded Christian community. I liked the idea of lay people being involved in its leadership. The talks were given by a young man; Lukasz, who worked as a land surveyor. At the end of the course we were supposed to pray so that we may receive the Holy Spirit. We were told to prepare for an extraordinary experience, but I was disappointed, as nothing special happened to me during my prayer. It wasn’t until later that I realized that what had happened to me in my brother-in-law’s car almost a year before was the experience of the Holy Spirit. God had probably decided that this time I didn’t necessarily need to go through anything unusual.

My wife found it difficult to keep up with all the changes that I was going through. She had just come to terms with the fact that we weren’t moving abroad and I kept giving her new things to get used to. Her husband, a doctor, started to spend long hours away from home. Even the winter weather and minus 15 degrees Celsius couldn’t stop me from grabbing my guitar and dashing off to church for a mass or a prayer meeting. One night she decided to come along. Unfortunately that was the night when two mentally unstable men also turned up, as the meetings were open for everyone. The charismatic prayer combined with the bizarre behaviour and disturbing appearance of the two men evoked her obvious reaction:

‘These people are freaks! I will never set foot in this place again!’, she declared afterwards. She probably felt sorry for me. It was only after getting to know the members of the community personally that she began to understand and accept the charismatic environment.

As for me, there was nothing that could cool my enthusiasm and zeal. One of the effects of My Great Revolution was a change in my attitude to the people around me. I used to look down on everyone and make acquaintances only with people whom I found interesting enough to be a friend, or, as exceptional as I considered myself to be. Conversion opened my eyes. I realized that every resident of our planet is a fascinating human being and a confused freak at the same time… and I’m probably the most confused of all. That’s how I became fond of ordinary people and started to enjoy talking to my patients.

At one of the meetings of my new community we were asked to talk to one person, preferably of the same sex, about whom we knew little or didn’t know anything at all. The guy I ended up talking to didn’t make a good first impression on me. Our task was to tell our partner ‘our story’, that is, how we came to renewing or discovering our faith in God. We walked along a mountain track, looking at the beautiful view of Lake Miedzybrodzkie. Krzys was the first one to tell his story. He
came from a poor family, he had always been a good student, he had wanted to study History at the Jagiellonian University ever since he was a little boy and was very keen on broadening his knowledge.

‘Dear God! What a terrible match! He is the exact opposite of me!’, I thought right after he started talking.

He had never abused (or even used) alcohol, which made it hard for him to go through the university—other students wouldn't leave him alone. He was a misfit, so they often mocked him and tried to make him drink vodka. I listened to him with growing interest. To my surprise, the more he talked, the more fond of him I became.

When it was my turn to speak; I confessed:

‘See, Krzy?, when I was studying medicine, I was exactly on that other side. I couldn’t stand people who didn’t go to parties or drink alcohol. I used to give a really hard time to the goody-goodies in the students’ halls. I would also force them to drink and make them my laughing stocks … I was such an idiot. Can you forgive me that, even though we didn’t meet back then?’

Then we sat on the grass, with a wonderful view of the lake in front of us and we prayed for each other. Two freaks…

Today Krzysiek is a professor at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. We have been friends for twenty-five years now.

Twenty-five years is a quarter of a century! When I moved from Rabka to Kraków to begin my studies, I was happy to leave the small town atmosphere behind. The first two days spent in Kraków filled me with an incredible sense of freedom. I kept walking along the streets of the city and did not see one familiar face! After My Great Revolution, I deliberately chose a life similar to the one I had in Rabka — life in a Christian community.

There are some differences between a community and a small town, though. Most importantly, you are more likely to learn the truth about yourself in the former than in the latter.

In order to explain this point, I will use a classic experience of a community in the Christian Church. It is divided into five stages: exoticism, fascination, freaks, crucifixion and faithful service. The first stage: is a stage of looking at a community of lay people or an order of, say, the Franciscans from the outside. To an atheist or a nominal Christian, it may seem exotic and strange, and therefore it’s not worth spending too much time trying to understand it. As the observer grows in their knowledge of God, it may appear to them as a fascinating environment of the living faith. The holiness and devotion to God of many people is almost tangible, the warm atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance is dominating. In the third stage we begin to see people’s true colours and the differences in personalities and lifestyles become irritating. It turns out that those wonderful, holy people are simply a bunch of sinners! Very often at that stage people become disillusioned and bored with their new brothers and sisters, and some leave “their Rabka”. The animals in Noah’s Ark must have appeared rather strange to one another, as they came from different eco-systems, and would probably never have met in their natural surroundings. A monkey could consider the other forms of nose, such as a trunk, rather surprising. Unlike in the community, there was no escape from Noah’s Ark. Some people pull through the freaks stage, but then quit at the crucifixion stage. What was it like for me? After I went through the first three stages, I started to experience distress.

The people in the community, instead of being grateful for having such a zealous brother, began to correct me!

It almost made me fall into the temptation of “leaving Rabka” again, but my humility and common sense were stronger and I stayed. Over the years of living in the community I have learned more about myself than whilst living in the outside world. People in the world often discuss the faults of others, but never in their presence.
Blaise Pascal writes about it in his *Pensees*:

Human life is thus only a perpetual illusion; men deceive and flatter each other. No one speaks of us in our presence as he does of us in our absence. Human society is founded on mutual deceit; few friendships would endure if each knew what his friend said of him in his absence, although he then spoke in sincerity and without passion. (translated by W.F. Trotter)

A healthy Christian community is like a mirror, it provides a life-giving knowledge, even though the medicine is often sour and sometimes the truth hurts like an injection. That is the stage when we crucify our ego and when our hearts and our characters are transformed. Finally, the stage of the faithful service is the one when we encourage one another to be zealous in our faith and to fulfill the community’s mission.

In the next chapter I will talk about how one of the main ministries of our community, “City on a Hill”, was developed.

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From Seed to Tree

A collaboration between writer Amin Kurani and artist Jamie Treadwell

I remember being told about a man from a certain village, who planted trees in the late season of his life. He knew that the trees would only grow fully after he died. Nevertheless, he planted because he wanted to give his children a worthy inheritance.

I was struck by the man’s foresight. He probably planted the trees with extra care because he knew their main purpose. I was also struck by the simplicity of his actions. It is not that hard to plant a tree. I have done it. A decent hole patted over with soil will often do. No one digs a mile-deep crater because they want a bigger tree.

There’s lessons here which I want to apply in my life. First of all, my actions are more significant than I can guess at present. I can help someone even though they might not appreciate it at the time. Secondly, I can realize how important “small” acts are, like spending time with another person.

The painting “Wisdom Tree” speaks to me of these lessons. If the tree is strong and its roots clench the rich red earth, it is thanks to someone who sowed a seed once upon a time.

*The Wisdom Tree* by Jamie Treadwell is available as a limited-edition print. Visit www.jamietreadwell.com
Amin Kurani completed his Masters in English Literature in 2012 from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. He is a member of the People of God community in Beirut, Lebanon.

Jamie Treadwell is a life coach, and a noted artist who works in pastels, watercolors and acrylics. He is a member of The Servants of the Word, an ecumenical lay missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord, and mission leader in the Sword of the Spirit. He is currently based in London, UK. Visit his art website to see more of his work.
The Hill

poem by Sean O'Neill

At the bottom of this hill are burrows
Where blotches of the wind cry. A cold gull,
A brittle puffin, numb with hunger, dull
With lashing, bite the green waves like furrows.

The guts that strange augury used, to guess
Which way stealthy rains turn in September,
Were more easy to read and remember
Than cross words borne by the times, not less.

We are walking, sinking with the crow’s feet
Into the land. But while our bodies die,
Our eyes - the steep, stark glass before the soul -
Are opening beyond the stiff-wound sheet.
The dirt, the dung, the stones all question why
We have not brought with us our our begging bowl.
The bottom of the hill is in my head
And turns, but not for ploughshares or the dead.

I trade mountains of mean mortality,
That billow hoops round my supple stories
For a lepton’s weight of silent glories;
The healing suns wring from calamity.

In the silence of woods, where the wind sings
We can go to loot life from the dead trees
And face down the stars to the mountains knees;
Cut limbs to see what their hidden blood brings.

We will root out the secrets from the sand,
Tear out the troubled fathoms from the sea,
Catch the running visions from the plain air,
Wrap the brown, reedy shallows in a hand,
Capturing the world in a single tree
And burning canyons with a single stare.

The body, till it learn to roll its range,
Despises exile now, until it change.

> See other poems in Living Bulwark by Sean O'Neill

With this new collection of poems Sean O'Neill explores the relationship between the child, the youth and the adult. What are the key moments that have contributed to the construction of a fully-formed human being? Here a number of poems masquerade as memoir but have a deeper message, sometimes wistful, sometimes humorous. Here, too, he draws on his Celtic upbringing and the questions of identity that it raises. Some of the nature poems are a new departure and celebrate the complexity and beauty of animals, insects and the weather. This book of poems is more playful than O’Neill’s first book “this stage of life”, and uses a more accessible idiom to convey mood, but nevertheless offers a coherent voice full of color and depth.

Book available at Amazon.
This collection of Sean O’Neill’s poems is his first. The poems cover periods when the poet lived or worked in London, England; Milan, Italy; Drummore, a small fishing village on the West Coast of Scotland; and St. Paul, USA. The subject matter of the poems therefore varies from the grittily descriptive ‘Bridges’ and ‘Sweet Thames’, which are set in London, to the pastoral ‘The Hill’ and ‘in this atlas of headland’ set in the South Rhins peninsula. The poems cover several years and a multitude of situations and yet a consistent voice emerges finding meaning in apparently insignificant details, and clothing mundane events in a tapestry of rich wordplay. Several poetic sequences are contained in this collection including the four-part ‘this stage of life’ a wry commentary on modern life and ‘Winter 2011’ which centers on the view from a window during the harsh weather conditions of that year. Some of the poems are satirical; others celebrate the joy of simple things. Some are dark while others are full of hope. Whatever the reader’s disposition he or she will find something valuable in this volume that echoes the mood of the moment or the season of life. Book available at Amazon.