## Forming Disciples – Building Communities

“Make disciples of all nations – teaching them all I have commanded you”  
--- Matthew 28:19,20

### In This Issue:
- **Communities of Disciples on Mission**
- **“Stand at the Crossroads and Look” - Wisdom from the Past**, by Roger Foley
- **A New Identity and Culture as God’s People**, by Steve Clark
- **Renew, Reform, Restore? What’s Needed Today?**, by Bob Tedesco
- **Building a Bulwark that Serves God’s Purposes**, by Carlos Mantica
- **In the Shadow of the Almighty** – Dave Hughes interview after after terrorist attack
- **Pick and Choose Disciple or Total Surrender?**, by Tom Caballes
- **Embracing the True Light**, by Dr. Martin Steinbereithner
- **What Jesus Means to Me**, by Dr. Johannes Hartl
- **The Growth of the Charismatic Renewal: Communities**, by Steve Clark
- **On Community and Growth**, reflections from Jean Vanier, founder of L’Arche
- **Listening to God**, by Clare Bick
- **What Is Mercy?**, by Paul Jordan
- **Families for Christ Community - in Vancouver**, interview with Bernard De Mesa
- **God Alone – Life without Attachments**, by Tom Caballes
- **Spiritual Judo – Hope for Our Suffering**, by Sam Williamson
- **Markers of Adulthood and Its Delays**, by Michael Shaughnessy
- **Sit At My Right Hand” – Royal and Messianic Psalms**, by Jeanne Kun
- **Freedom through Service and Trust: YouthWorks-Detroit**, by Michael Davis
- **The Glory of Who We Are** by Sandy Cahalan & **Kairos Weekend** by Elisa Turner
- **The House of God**, worship song by Ed Conlin

---

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.
Forming Disciples – Building Communities

In this issue
This issue focuses on the gift of Christian communities and the call to form radical disciples who freely choose to follow the Lord Jesus with all of their lives for the rest of their lives. We are witnessing today a new grace and movement of the Holy Spirit. Thousands of lay renewal communities flourish today and multiply because a new fire of the Holy Spirit has ignited the hearts of many young people who yearn and thirst for a community of disciples who want to follow Jesus and who want to be a source of light, love, and leaven in a world engulfed in conflict, division, anarchy, and chaos. God in his mercy is raising up new generations of young men and women to join forces with veteran disciples who have been laboring for decades in forming disciples and building communities.

Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche community, which has now spread to hundreds of communities around the world, expresses this new movement and work of the Holy Spirit in his book, Community and Growth:

Community is the place of meeting with God; it is the place of belonging; it is the place of love and acceptance; it is the place of caring; it is the place of growth in love.

Today many young people are seeking communities - not ones that are closed up and inward-looking but communities that are open to the universal, the international world; that are not limited to their own culture, that are not frightened ghettos but are open to the pain and injustices of the world. That is why so many flock to Taize or join groups that are international. That is why so many new communities feel called to found sister communities in developing countries. It is as if a community cannot continue to exist in its own culture if it is not linked to similar communities in other cultures. This arises not just from the desire to 'do good' in the Third World, but also from the discovery and acceptance of the gifts of these countries, which may be less developed econ-omically but which frequently possess a deep and true sense of humanity.

May this issue inspire you to thirst for a deeper love of Christ, and a deeper desire to follow Jesus as his disciple with all of your life for the rest of your life - until he calls you home to his everlasting kingdom.

Sincerely in Christ,
‘Stand at the Crossroads and Look…’

Wisdom from 37 Years Ago…

by Roger Foley

This life, this radical community living we seek to engage, is a call of God. The importance of this particular call gets clearer as the environment in which we live our Christianity gets more and more secular and at times blatantly aggressive against things Christian. Traditional family values are under attack, and generations are growing up with a built in rejection of the very Biblical basis of marriage as held by their parents. Societal slide is evident worldwide. What will this mean to our communities into the future? What will this mean in attracting new people or adding our children in what will clearly be counter-cultural living? What will this mean in our relationship into wider society, the wider structures of law and society?

Jeremiah 6:16 has some wisdom: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ I love this Scripture which speaks to me of a ‘path well walked.’ And so I want to walk with you a short path of just 37 years to the journey of a man named Jean Vanier.

I first heard of Vanier when I managed a large agency with responsibility for men, women and children with
developmental delay and those with moderate to severe physical disability. In 1964 Jean a Canadian Catholic philosopher, theologian and humanitarian, established an international movement named ‘L'Arche’. From humble beginnings with one integrated living household near Paris, L’Arche’ is now established with 147 ‘ecumenical’ household communities in 35 countries. They have two groups here in New Zealand, one in Wellington, and one in Christchurch -indeed they used to purchase our lamington cakes in volume as a fundraiser. Great people. In 1979, the year the Lamb of God was established, Vanier wrote a very challenging book entitled ‘Community and Growth’ [Society of St Paul]. The book is readily available today for just a few dollars and it is entirely suitable for personal or group reflection. Veronica and I are re-reading ‘Community and Growth’ and even in the first few pages I am coming across my notations and underlining of 36 years ago, as relevant today as it was to me back then. I share with you some extracts in the first 36 pages of 252:

- ‘A community is only a community when the majority of its members transition from “the community for myself” to “myself for the community,” when each person’s heart is opening to all the others, without any exception.’
- ‘The mutual trust at the heart of community is born of each day’s forgiveness and the acceptance of our frailty and poverty. But this trust is not developed overnight. That is why it takes time to form a real community’.  
- A community is not simply a group of people who live together and love each another. It is a current of life, a heart, a soul, and a spirit. It is people who love each other a great deal and who are all reaching towards the same hope'
- ‘I am more and more struck by people in community who are dissatisfied. When they live in small communities they want to be in large ones… when they are in large communities they dream of small ones. Don’t we all dream of the perfect community where we will be at peace, in perfect harmony? The ideal doesn’t exist. Stop looking, give yourself where you are. Stop looking at yourself and look instead at your brothers and sisters…”

We are blind indeed if we cannot learn from those outside of our own community who have ‘walked the talk’ and ‘lived the life.’ To Vanier I am grateful because his example has I believe strengthened, not weakened, my appreciation and engagement of this call in God - the building of a Covenant Community.

Roger Foley is senior coordinator of the Lamb of God Community. He and his wife Veronica live in Christchurch, New Zealand.
Called to a New Identity and Culture as God’s People

“You are a chose race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people”

– 1 Peter 2:9

by Steve Clark

Remarking on the sudden popularity of the word “culture” in the mid-1940’s, T.S. Elliot made the following observation: “The use of the word ‘culture’ by those who have not, as it seems to me, pondered very deeply on the meaning of the word before employing it, might be illustrated by countless examples.” This comment strikes me as being just as true today as it was 70 years ago. “Culture” is still a favorite topic, but its meaning is often unclear.

Some people, for example, equate culture with art, literature, or music – what is sometimes called higher culture. Others equate culture with the development of human life and speak of the “advancement of culture,” having in mind the general improvement of the quality of life (attaining a “higher level”). By contrast, anthropologists view culture as being a people’s whole way of life. It is this third concept of culture that I would like to use here.

A distinctly Christian way of life

Although the modern anthropological notion of culture is not, strictly speaking, a biblical or traditional Christian concept, it can be valuable because it highlights a central thrust of New Testament teaching. Christians ought to have, as the natural consequence of their Christian beliefs and values, a distinctively
Living Bulwark

Christian way of life that reflects and supports those beliefs and values. In scriptural terms, Christians, because of their new birth in Christ, are to be a new people, God’s people, with a new way of life which is in harmony with God’s nature and purposes. Paul puts it simply: “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

Paul also describes the concrete change in behavior involved in the transfer of kingdoms: "You must no longer live as the gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness" (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Spiritual ignorance, stemming from a rejection of the truth, alienates people from the life of God and issues in a corrupted way of life (see also Romans 1:8-32). This is not, of course, to say that non-Christians or non-Christian cultures lack all goodness or that Christians cannot learn from them. But there is an important spiritual principle here: the form a human culture takes depends on its spiritual relationship with God. If a culture does not explicitly acknowledge and obey the one true God, it will contain distortions of true righteousness and sometimes immoral practices.

Peter emphasizes the new identity of Christians in these words: "You are a chose race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people...I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:9-11). God's people are to live in the midst of other peoples, and hence are "aliens and exiles" whose way of life is different from that of the peoples around them.

As followers of the one who said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58), the early Christians understood that "our common-wealth is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20), that "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Their new identity was a matter of practical, everyday life in that they had their own laws (the scriptural laws), courts (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 6:1-6), and governors, and formed communities which had distinctive social customs and expressions.

Beliefs and values

All cultures are built on beliefs and values. Beliefs are ideas a person, group, or society holds as true and on which life is based, whether consciously or unconsciously. These include, for example, the assertions that Jesus is Lord or that there is life after death. Values are principles or qualities which a person, group, or society considers valuable or desirable in themselves and around which life is oriented, for example, loyalty, beauty, or comfort.

Based on beliefs and values are the two primary elements of culture: social structures and patterns of life. Social structures include institutions and principles (for example, the institutions of family and government, and the principles by which conflicts ought to be resolved). Patterns of life are the particular forms in which beliefs, values, and social structures are realized in action. Patterns of life include customs and expressions (for example, courtship customs and artistic expressions).

In order to have a Christian culture or way of life, all we do must proceed from Christian beliefs and values. But what of the relation between Christian culture and the natural human culture with which we identify ourselves? For example, we see ourselves as Americans or Mexicans or Indians. If we find that our actual way of life does not, in fact, differ much from that of non-Christians in our particular cultural group, then we may conclude that our Christian beliefs and values are not as important in shaping our lives as they ought to
be and that we run the risk of being assimilated into a non-Christian American or Mexican or Indian culture.

But the fact that Christianity forms its own culture does not mean we have to cease being Americans or Mexicans or Indians. It does not mean that Christianity must look exactly the same everywhere in the world. That part of American culture which is incompatible with Christianity should drop out of American Christians' lives, but that part of it which is compatible can be retained and transformed. Although the core beliefs and values, many elements of social structure, and some patterns of life have to be the same for an American Christian and an Indian Christian, some of the elements of their social structures and many of their patterns of life will differ a great deal.

Another way of putting all this is to say, on the one hand, that the Christian culture of an American will be distinctively American, and the Christian culture of an Indian will be distinctively Indian; at the same time, both the American's and the Indian's natural heritages will be transformed so that they will be distinctively Christian.

Cultural relativism is thus unable to distinguish those things which are fundamental to God's purposes from those things which are simply expressions that vary from culture to culture. Cultural relativism also misses the actual significance of the various expressions.

Far from being unimportant because they are "just cultural", that is, because they vary from culture to culture and hence are not normative, customs and expressions can be significant for Christians because of what those customs and expressions represent. For example, taking one's hat off or putting it on when worshiping God are obviously different expressions. But they both can represent the same value of reverence, honor and respect. To give another example, although American Christians might not bow before their elders as Ethiopian Christians might do, American Christians might be reminded by the custom of bowing that respect is an important Christian value, for which a suitable, culturally American expression should be found.

At the same time as Christianity is translated into a variety of human cultures its essential beliefs, social structures, and patterns of life must remain intact. Otherwise the result is not a translation but a new message. Human cultures can be christianized, but to do so requires a transformation as striking as the contrast of darkness and light. They must become cultures that are founded on God’s revealed truth and that support those who desire to live it out.

This article was originally published in New Covenant Magazine and Pastoral Renewal Magazine, April 1984, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Copyright © 1984 by Stephen B. Clark. Used with permission.

Steve Clark is past president of the Sword of the Spirit and founder of The Servants of the Word.
Renew, Reform, Restore – What's Needed Today?

by Bob Tedesco

What are the greatest needs of the Christian people and churches today? 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. For example, in chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation, the churches are addressed to "return to the love they had at first" (Revelation 2:3).

The following short list 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)

For many decades 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: *conversion is the key task of evangelism.*

### 2. Discipleship and 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 forty 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.”

- Pope John Paul II

Notes
1. 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.
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

[This article is adapted from *Essays on Christian Community*, copyright © Bob Tedesco 2010, published by Tabor House. Used with permission.]
Our community in Managua, the **City of God** (*Cuidad de Dios*), finds its meaning in the mission the Lord has entrusted to it – to be part of a bulwark. We believe the Lord raised up the community to move that mission forward. That is its reason for existence.

The word “bulwark” is uncommon for most of us, but in various ways the Lord has shown us that this concept of being a “bulwark” is part of his call to the whole Sword of the Spirit. The idea of the medieval castle or the fort with a surrounding village in the early European settlement of North America might help us better understand what a bulwark is. We tend to consider castles and forts as defensive, and they do have to be solid and unassailable to protect their inhabitants and the many others who rely on them. But they were essentially advanced positions to help establish a new culture in the territory they were placed in.

We as a community consider ourselves to be something like a fort [not a physical structure but a community living a distinctive way of life], planted in a territory that is not yet the Lord’s, and we have discovered that the mission in foreign territory requires that we live a radical life in Christ. As Jesus pointed out in the Gospels, to be a disciple, to be effective in the mission he calls us to, we need to give our whole life – even to death – to accomplish it. The Lord hasn’t invited us to a quiet stroll in the countryside. Rather, he has asked us to build and maintain a “fort” for him, influencing the people around us on the Lord’s behalf, sometimes providing help in their need, winning some to the Lord by our words and actions and by our very presence. To build a Christian community as part of the bulwark which he is establishing is a work of great magnitude and – according to what he has shown us – one that has eternal consequences for many others as well. Therefore we need to be serious disciples of the Lord to carry it out.

I was deeply encouraged in reading the documents of the 1979 Latin American Catholic bishops, when they gathered with Paul John Paul II in Puebla, Mexico, to discuss evangelism in our region. I want to quote two short sections from the document:

---

The Medieval walled community of Carcassone, France, was a center of trade and Christian renewal for the surrounding region. It was originally built in the 5th century A.D.
“The Church evangelizes in the first place through the global testimony of its life. (By its manner, and not only by what it does). Thus in its faithfulness as sacrament, it tries to become a sign or living model of the communion of love in Christ which it announces and tries to bring about.

“The pedagogy of the Incarnation teaches us that people need clear models to guide them. It was said that the greatest political relevance in the Middle Ages was the foundations of the Benedictine monks, because their form of community life became the great model for the social organization of fledgling Europe; Latin America also needs such models” (Puebla, ch. 171).

**A society with Gospel values**

This is not an easy way to live, and in our community we are far from perfect at it, but we can already see signs of God’s kingdom breaking forth in it. For example, we aim to exercise authority as a service, not as an excuse to lord it over others. In the area of possessions, the level of sharing in the community is much more ambitious than in any communist society. We don’t do this by negating the right to private property, nor by imposing some law, but simply through the generous sharing of goods and resources, inspired by the Holy Spirit working within each of our members. Our community life is founded on genuine love, expressed in a total commitment involving every area of our lives and possessions.

Learning to live as members of this new society is not an easy business. It is a high calling and entails a very deep level of commitment, both to God and to our brothers and sisters. It entails a death to self and a renunciation of the values of our current secular society.

- In a secular society which values absolute personal freedom as an inalienable right, our way of life calls us to move from independence to interdependence and on to brotherhood and sisterhood.
- In a secular society centered on competition as the key to personal success, our way of life proclaims collaboration, mutual help and service for the growth and well being of all.
- In a society that applauds rebels, whatever their cause, our way of life insists on relationships of authority and subordination that do not diminish the dignity of the person.
- In a society that has stopped believing in the sanctity and importance of marriage, our way of life fosters an ever-increasing affection, kindness and commitment between husband and wife.
- In a society in which emotions are the absolute criterion for action, our way of life builds its relationships on people’s given word and solemn commitment.
- In a secular society that no longer proclaims freedom of worship or religion but freedom from any religion or worship, our community way of life presents a people who value their relationship with God above all other values.
- In a society that disregards all morality or introduces a supposedly human morality, we insist on obeying the law of God with all its implications.
- In a society in which people pride themselves on doing whatever they want, our way of life proclaims that doing the will of God is the absolute criterion for action.
- In a society that demands justice, we proclaim mercy.
- In a society full of violence, our life upholds the wisdom of self-sacrificing love.
- In a society full of anxiety, where mental disorders and depression are quite common, the new society in Christ testifies that people can live today in harmony, joy and peace.

Our community, a small “fort”, is distinct from the society in which we live – distinct in its economics, laws and manner of governing, in its lifestyle and values. Despite the barrage from the media offering an often twisted and superficial philosophy about how to live, we are doing what we can as a people to establish the
Living Bulwark

Lord’s kingdom on earth.

**A distinctive people**

The strategy of being a distinct people who influence the people around them is really God’s own strategy. In the New Testament the Apostle Peter in his first letter gives one of the earliest definitions of the church, and in so doing echoes the Lord’s call to the people of Israel in Old Testament times. To the Christians, Peter writes, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9). God’s plan was and still is to establish his church, this people set apart for him, as a city on a mountain top, a sign planted in the midst of the nations, light and salt of the earth, leaven in the dough – an instrument for the extension of the kingdom of God. But disgracefully, many Christians today have lost their sense of being a nation.

The example of Israel could help us understand our call to community, our call to become a holy people. Speaking through Moses, God told his people Israel that they should have nothing whatever to do with the wicked ways of the nations around them, for, he said, “You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

His people were supposed to be different from the other nations. In addition to the Ten Commandments, the Lord gave them many other regulations for their daily life, as detailed in the book of Leviticus and elsewhere. For example, they were to consecrate their first-born sons to God and circumcise all their sons. They were to avoid eating the meat of certain animals and were to offer to him the first fruits of their crops, the first-born of their animals, and a tithe of their earnings. These concrete norms constituted a whole way of living, a distinct culture. The importance of these for the survival of a people was made particularly clear when the people of Israel were exiled from their land, sometimes for long periods of time and in various countries. By virtue of their common and distinctive way of life, they have continued even to this day to be one people, one nation, set apart by their culture.

I believe the Lord has also called us as the Sword of the Spirit, this community of communities, to be his people, a distinctive grouping within the whole Christian people – not better, but distinctive – to whom he has given a particular mission. From the very beginning he has addressed the City of God and many other communities as “my people” and continues to speak to the whole Sword of the Spirit in this way. Like the People of Israel, we find ourselves dispersed all over the world, made up of people of different races and languages. What gives us an identity in such a diversity is our culture. We are supposed to be a distinct environment, a distinct people with its own culture, even though formed from people of diverse races, languages and cultures around the world.

We are on the way to being brothers and sisters in a very deep way, as we more and more share a common way of life. Our unity, although still imperfect, is already a reality, a kind of utopia before our eyes. The Lord has chosen us and is in the process of forming us into one people. We have the same God, have all been called to follow the Lord and have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He has made a covenant with us and joined us all into one people, and we in turn have made a covenant with one another, even with those we might never see. He chose us and gave us a new name and a new identity. And among us there is a real confidence that what we are involved in is something that was his initiative and not merely human.

**A distinctive way of life**

As a community of communities we have our own way of praising and worshiping the Lord. Our music – strong and at times martial – is fitting for a people who are in a spiritual battle, a people at war, and differs
noticeably from the sweet, almost lyrical music of other groups. Our common form of praying reflects the vision we have of the Lord – the Lord of heaven and earth – and focuses on giving him the glory and praise that is his due, rather than primarily on asking for his help, although we do depend on him for even the smallest things and are open to seeing him work wonders, large and small, on our behalf. We have our distinctive way of honoring him by celebrating the Lord’s Day and relaxing together.

We have a distinctive way of exercising authority, with subordinates being encouraged to take initiative and bear responsibility. We have a distinctive way of relating to secular authority. A way to share our material goods and money. A distinct way of relating as husband and wife, with the husband serving as the head of his wife, and she the suitable helper and necessary complement for him. A distinct way of speaking, in which the words “brother” or “sister” flow naturally and in which we work to eradicate from our speech all negative humor, name-calling, sarcasm, slander, vulgarity and rudeness. And we try to live our lives in the light, not in secretiveness or darkness. Brotherly correction is given and received in humility; exhortation and counsel are received gracefully. If there is an argument or a difficulty in a relationship, we know how to heal it, asking and giving forgiveness and owning up to our faults. And we don’t harbor anger or bitterness in our hearts.

We have an approach to sexuality that is different from the world’s but at the same time joyful and full of thanksgiving. There is a clarity about our identity – the men dressing and acting as men, and the women dressing as women. We have a distinct process of dating and courtship among the young people, with the young men showing signs of respect to young women.

We have forms of giving and receiving respect between children and adults, men and women, and between members of the community and their leaders. When we have guests, the children give their seats to the older brothers and sisters, whom they treat with respect, calling them “uncle” or “aunt”. But the children are also taken into account and treated with respect: they are not only our children or our nieces and nephews, they are also our young brothers and sisters in the Lord. Among themselves the children treat one another with affection, as brothers and sisters or cousins. We also have a distinct way to form our children so they will grow up as confident people, loving God and loving those around them.

We have a distinctive way of viewing the world around us and what is happening in it. A distinct attitude toward life and death. Toward sickness and suffering and trial. Toward success, riches, friendship and happiness. In our homes we live a life that is quite similar from one family to the next, and distinct from the world’s way. Each of us takes time for personal prayer and we all read the scriptures. We offer prayers of thanksgiving before meals and have times of family prayer. We have family nights and celebrate the Lord’s Day. We pray over one another very naturally for various needs. The use of TV is limited. Hospitality is very much a part of our daily lives, and in many cases, single brothers and sisters make their home with families, sharing a common life. We know how to value and administer our time and we try to schedule it wisely so that we can be faithful to commitments and punctual at meetings.

These are all elements of a culture that we consciously try to live out. We should feel proud to be part of this people and proud of our way of life.

We feel that the Lord has called us to live a way of life that is radically distinct from the world around us and opposed to many of its ideals, values and customs, and this is not an easy task. The world may not applaud us for it. In fact, the Lord warns us in scripture that if people persecuted him, they would also persecute us, his disciples.

The Lord has always asked his disciples to love one another as he loved them. Today he is raising up disciples in communities, called in a special way to radically live out that love as brothers and sisters in Christ, committed to one another in a way that touches every area of life, and every moment of every day. Christians
have always been called to be in the world without being of it, to be salt and light. In this particular moment in history, in which the values of the world threaten large segments of the church, the Lord is calling some Christians to form communities, “forts”, that are joined together as a bulwark to strengthen and protect his church and foster the spread of his good news – to be a people set apart for him, living according to his ways.

> See other Living Bulwark articles by Carlos Mantica

This article is adapted from The Mission of the City of God, by Carlos Mantic, (c) copyright 2004 The Sword of the Spirit.

Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Cuidad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the Sword of the Spirit. He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.
In the Shadow of the Almighty

- an interview with Dave Hughes in the recent aftermath of a Terrorist Attack in Brussels

The following audio clip is an interview with Dave Hughes, President of the Association of Ecumenical Communities in the Sword of the Spirit. The interview was conducted by Spirit Radio presenter Steve Johnson along with Dominic Perrem as host presenter (both from Nazareth Community in Dublin) a day after the recent terrorist attack in Brussels, Belgium on March 26, 2016. [Used with courtesy of © Spirit Radio, Dublin, Ireland]

> Click here for mp3 audio clip of the radio interview (length 10 minutes)

An Interview Afterword

by Dave Hughes

It’s been a little over week since the interview and the tragic events in Brussels. My initial reactions as captured in the interview were centered on two things: a sense of the profound evil as we experienced the attacks first hand balanced by a sense of God’s sovereignty, protection and overall control of our lives. In the week that has passed, these two points continue to resonate and deepen within me: there is great evil abroad in the land yet the love of our God dwarfs and ultimately will conquer this evil. We need not fear.

Psalm 91 has taken on a very profound and intimate meaning for me:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
3 Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.
4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,
6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.
7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.
8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.
9 If you say, “The Lord is my refuge,” and you make the Most High your dwelling,
10 no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.
11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;
12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.
14 “Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.
16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Seen from this perspective, the events we experienced can be seen as a very simple message from the Lord: you are mine, you are loved, go out and serve without fear for I am with you. This message is not simply for the Hughes family, it is for all of us.

Thank you.
Dave Hughes

> See other articles in Living Bulwark by Dave Hughes

Dave Hughes is President of the Sword of the Spirit's Association of Ecumenical Communities and is the senior coordinator of Word of Life Community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Dave and his wife Jane have five children and a growing number of grandchildren. They are members of Knox Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor.
Around 30 years ago a friend told me what his dad said to him about following Jesus: he either follows Jesus completely or not follow Him at all. This struck me deeply – because it also applies to all of us. Sometimes we treat discipleship to Jesus as having many options – we can pick and choose what we want to do or not do. If it is too hard, then we compromise or sugar-coat things. Jesus made it very clear that He decides the terms of discipleship, not us. Why? He knows what is best for us.

Pick and choose discipleship does not work! Living a double life makes us lose our personal integrity. Being lukewarm Christians prevent us from growing in maturity in Christ. So are you ready to confront yourself – are you ready to follow Jesus completely, or do not follow Him at all? I’m afraid those are the real choices you have.

So How Do You Live a Life Truly Surrendered to God?
1. When you decided to follow Jesus, do you have any “ifs” and “butts”? If you have them, know that you are the one determining the terms of you following Jesus, and it will not work. You are not really following Jesus on His terms. In the Scripture, Jesus denied knowing people who called Him “Lord” but were evildoers. Discipleship with ifs and buts is an exercise of futility.

2. Do you live a double life? Do you behave one way at your school, university or workplace and another way with your brothers and sisters? If yes, you need to admit it and resolve to change. You are the only one who knows this – and can make changes. Ask for pastoral wisdom with a brother or a sister close to you.

3. We all have both strengths and weaknesses, and each one of us are different. All of us have particular weaknesses that we struggle with. To some of us, the battle with some of our particular weaknesses may last a lifetime. We need patience with ourselves as we continue to surrender our lives to God.

4. Ask yourself: are there areas in your Christian walk that you are lukewarm with? Do the words that come out of your mouth pleasing to God? Is there any area in your life you compromise with the world and the flesh? Do you justify or sugar-coat things so they look acceptable to you and to others?

5. Is your life on fire for God? Are you wanting to see God’s will be done and His Kingdom come - daily? Are you faithful to daily commitments to pray and read God’s word? Are you willing to die for your faith?

6. Lastly, are you wanting all your families and friends to follow Jesus too? Are you praying for their conversion? Are you the living Word of God, the fifth gospel walking around wherever you may be?

**Other Scripture passages:**

1. *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* [Galatians 2:20 ESV translation]

2. *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* [Galatians 5:16 ESV]

3. *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* [Revelation 3:15-17 ESV]


**For personal reflection or group sharing**

1. Are there areas in your life you are not surrendering to God? What are your personal weaknesses?

2. Are you patient with yourself as God is patient with you?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Embracing the True Light

by Martin Steinbereithner

We have seen the True Light! We have received the Heavenly Spirit! We have found the True Faith! Worshiping the Undivided Trinity, Who has saved us.

Every Sunday there is a line we sing in the liturgy in my church, the words of which are above. Many readers will twitch when they see them, they seem so arrogant, so self-assured, so politically incorrect. How can anybody claim to have found the true faith, to have embraced the true way to live? This smacks of certainty, monolithic belief, black and white thinking which many of us thought we had left behind. Isn’t it exactly this kind of thinking which leads to intolerance, fundamentalism, paternalism and other kinds of evil and dark philosophies?

Ever since the past century plunged the world into totalitarian regimes we have shied away from anything that smells of certainty, that seems to claim for itself to be true. The writings of Jacques Derrida, Lyotard and others have helped to articulate our instinctual feelings that what is true for you should not necessarily be true for me; if it were, then some of us would be right and others wrong, and that is only a step away from oppressing those who err. Enlightened souls have left such dogmatism behind, allowing each other to believe what we think best.

What that raises, however, are not only theological or philosophical questions. It puts to us very bluntly the question how long a society can survive that has as a logo the question mark of uncertainty? Martin Luther King said, “If a man hasn’t found something he will die for, he isn’t fit to live.” It captures the insight that convictions, values held dear, are what motivates people to sacrifice. If such values evaporate, then so does the ability and willingness to sacrifice.
I am struck how many people admire the heroes of World War II who stood up to Nazi ideology, both within Germany (such as Bonhoeffer) and outside, such as Winston Churchill. But those acts of heroism were dependent on those people thinking there was right and wrong, and wrong had to be opposed.

I now live in a country where it is considered evil to voice opinions about the value of life, the boundaries of marriage and the God-given purpose of sexuality. Even if one has no intention to legislate that such views need to be upheld by the government, let alone to try to change the minds of those who think differently, such certainty is considered pernicious and opposed to democratic values. Even in Christian circles the greatest evil (according to a recent Barna study) is no longer murder or adultery, but the failure to recycle.

If confronted with the question whether there is anything worth fighting and dying for, many Westerners would say “only our comfort and ease”. This lack of conviction makes our societies very easy prey to those who are on the other end of the spectrum, such as fundamentalist Muslims. But even without those external threats, I believe that it is impossible to pass on any kind of value to a next generation, if it is no longer politically correct to believe in anything; and maybe that is why we prefer having dogs to children.

If we look at history, it was always those forces that shaped a culture which had convictions and confidence; at its best, Christianity was such a force that changed empires, not by power, but by martyrdom. At its worst, it abused of political power to shut down those who believed differently. So I shall dare to continue singing that line on Sundays, hoping that some of us maintain our convictions and are ready to die for them.

Dr. Martin Steinbereithner is from Vienna, Austria. He is a life-long member of the Servants of the Word, an international ecumenical missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He currently resides in Chelsea, Michigan (USA). He is the director of Communications and Development for the Servants of the Word. Previously he worked for twenty years in campus ministry in North America, Lebanon and England and for over the last ten years with Christian communities in the Middle East, Poland, Russia, Belgium, Germany, Austria, France, the UK and Africa.

Martin holds a doctorate in organizational behavior and non-profit management. He is a research associate of the Nonprofit Research Group at the Vienna University of Business and Economics and consults with various faith-based non-profit organizations.

Personal Website: http://tinostein.blogspot.com/
Uncompromising, Straight-forward and Humble

What Jesus means to me

by Johannes Hartl

Bold, plain, and sharp as a razor

These aren’t mere words. Socrates’ speech in his own defense at his trial in Athens remains an unforgettable document in favor of freedom of conscience – even after almost 2,500 years. Unforgotten also is Churchill’s “blood sweat and tears” speech, which infused new confidence into the demoralised English nation and focused them on victory over Hitler Germany – a victory they only gained five years later. Great orators don’t just utter fine words. Their words create something. Great orators have always fascinated me.

And actually it was the first thing that fascinated me about Jesus, when I was a teenager and had first started to read biblical texts for myself. Even though I had heard many parables or sayings of Jesus, this was my first experience with a whole book of the New Testament (it was Luke’s Gospel) and something struck me that I’d never seen in other great speakers. Really, the first thing that fascinated me about Jesus was his powerful use of words.

This observation may seem at first almost trite. To proclaim great words – any ad writer can do that. But everybody who knows about the power of language will start to listen for nuances. And with Jesus every nuance rings true. It begins with his parables and figures of speech. Even two thousand years later, everyone can understand what it means to build a house on sand or can imagine a debtor who would choke and threaten somebody who owes him much less, even though he himself has just been forgiven his own debt.

The greatness of a speaker is often revealed by the greatness of the images he uses – intuitive, vivid, stirring, and profound. And Jesus can also be poetic and full of deepest wisdom. Like when he speaks about the lilies...
of the field and the birds of the sky in a language whose simplicity is full of beauty and whose beauty is full of simplicity. And then again, his words are incredibly bold like the Beatitudes. In a few sentences – eight in all – Jesus can outline a complete reorientation of the whole world. Who else has ever dared to do this and still avoid inaccurate trivialities?

And Jesus can be razor sharp. Mercilessly he unmasks the hypocrisy of the scribes. Even his enemies were left speechless: “And no one was able to answer him a word, and from that day onward no one dared to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46). Even bleeding and bound he reveals that there is no real power behind Pilate’s official power – the same Pilate who will sentence him to death. That’s fearlessness. The ones who were sent to arrest him came back empty-handed. And what did they report? The same as somebody who opens the New Testament expecting someone who ranks between ancient orators and modern politicians: “No one ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46).

Harmony and Balance
Of course, there are lots of people who can utter great words. It’s said that the philosopher Max Scheler was once accused of not practicing what he preached. He replied by saying, roughly, that a finger that points at the moon, does not travel to the moon. The meaning? That you can speak the truth even if you yourself are not attesting it with your own life. And then there is the other extreme – those who let their actions speak louder than their words. They would prefer to do the good than talk about it. That also has greatness, but there is poverty when the spoken word is missing. And there is something compelling when there is resonance, balance, between words and life.

It’s exactly this balance which is so striking with Jesus. Which is more impressive, his words or his life? We could go even further. Was he focused more on God or on people? Did he live more actively toward the external or was he more internal and reflective? Wherever we look at Jesus’ life as the scripture recounts it, we encounter this captivating balance. Jesus the Jew. Jesus the revolutionary. Jesus the friend of the poor. That’s what he was called. Researchers found Pharisaic theology in him. They found Greek philosophy. They found apocalyptic thinking of the time. And they discovered secular practice.

Again and again there has been this attempt to limit Jesus to one of these aspects. But in Jesus there are all these – in such a way that from an inner integrity there is no belabored attempt to make sense of contradictions but instead a manifestation of an unfolding of spectrum of colors, a restful abundance. Not only is this true of his words and deeds, but also the person of Jesus himself is maintained by a symphony of proportions, a remarkable balance. Harmony, symmetry and integrity are essential traits of beauty. The nature of Jesus is beauty.

Not from others …
And in the end it was just a small sentence in John’s Gospel that brought me to be in awe of Jesus – how he made me horrified about my own heart. It was the simple sentence: “I do not receive my honor from men” (John 5:41). This sentence has a totality. It is so fundamental. For Jesus, the question does not arise about whether people agree with him, or how they evaluate him or whether they acknowledge him. Those are not an issue.

It’s interesting that Jesus does not claim that honor and appreciation are unnecessary. Everybody needs them. But Jesus has a different origin. How very different we are from him! We could fill books with all the activities we engage in just for the sake of receiving more appreciation from others. Whole markets evolve around products whose value derives solely from making the owner “seen,” praised, and acknowledged. What would life look like if a person took the radical approach of just doing what was right – what God approves of – and was completely unconcerned with what others thought of it?
Jesus led such a life – straightforward and uncompromising, but also humble. Because only the person who knows that he is seen and honored by God gains the inner freedom to serve. He gains the freedom to be humble and to serve without inner strain and without cheapening yourself. “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (John 13:3-5).

It’s Jesus’ gifted use of words which delighted me from early on. It was his balance which put me in awe of him. But it is his humility which brings me to my knees, and it’s the gift of his love even to the death, which brings me to tears.

About the author
Dr Johannes Hartl is a German Catholic theologian, author, and leader of the ecumenical House of Prayer in Augsburg, Germany, which he established in 2005. Johannes and his wife Jutta have four children. The House of Prayer in Augsburg currently has 20 full-time volunteer missionary intercessors and 70 part-time volunteers, mostly young people, who devote four hours each day to intercessory prayer and worship. This past January they organized a European House of Prayer conference, called MEHR, for 7,000 mostly young people from across Europe.

The Growth of the Renewal: Communities

by Steve Clark

A number of years ago, while I was visiting one of our communities, the Ligaya community, I was walking down a major street in Manila. I heard some music being broadcast to all who were nearby and recognized a song often sung in the charismatic renewal. I went to find out where it was coming from and found what looked like a storefront church that was evangelizing on the street. When I got closer, I could read that they were advertising a Life in the Spirit Seminar that would begin that weekend. When I got closer I found out that the “storefront church” was a covenant community.

To me this was a surprise. I thought I was familiar with the communities in Manila, and here was one I had never heard of. My surprise increased when I turned onto the next major cross street and came across another “storefront church” meeting in an old movie theater and found that it too was a covenant community. I gradually learned that in Manila and many countries in the world, there were hundreds of Christian communities, covenant communities and others, that had grown out of the charismatic renewal.

In 1998 and then again in 2004 Pope John Paul II held a rally on the eve of Pentecost for the new movements like the charismatic renewal and the new communities like the charismatic communities at which an estimated 500,000 people gathered. On the latter occasion he said, “I energetically repeat what I said on that occasion (Pentecost 1998): the ecclesial movements and the new communities are a ‘providential answer’, ‘inspired by the Holy Spirit’ given the present need of new evangelization, for which ‘mature Christian personalities’ and ‘strong Christian communities’ are needed.”

Charismatic communities go back to the very beginning of the Renewal. The date normally given for the beginning of the renewal is 1967. As the Renewal began to spread, communities began to form, two of the first being at Notre Dame and in Ann Arbor. By 1970 when the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee (CCRSC) was established, (forerunner of the current National Service Committee of the Catholic...
Charismatic Renewal), the communities had provided significant endeavors for promoting the Renewal. They had developed the international conference, the national communications office, the magazine that later became New Covenant, and Charismatic Renewal Tapes and Literature, all of which worked under the CCRSC to feed the early explosive growth.

Since then, both the broader renewal, mainly found in prayer groups, and the charismatic communities have spread to almost every country in the world and have touched millions of people. The community of communities I belong to, the Sword of the Spirit can be found in over 40 countries and adds new communities every year. We do not just develop communities, but we also sponsor many outreaches. We are perhaps most known for our outreaches to young people. But there are many other charismatic communities that begin new communities and sponsor outreaches – like the ones I discovered in Manila.

Steve Clark is past president of the Sword of the Spirit and founder of The Servants of the Word.
On Community and Growth

Quotes from the writings of Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche Community

Community - a place of belonging, and growth in love

Today many young people are seeking communities - not ones that are closed up and inward-looking but communities that are open to the universal, the international world; that are not limited to their own culture, that are not frightened ghettos but are open to the pain and injustices of the world. That is why so many flock to Taize or join groups that are international. That is why so many new communities feel called to found sister communities in developing countries. It is as if a community cannot continue to exist in its own culture if it is not linked to similar communities in other cultures. This arises not just from the desire to 'do good' in the Third World, but also from the discovery and acceptance of the gifts of these countries, which may be less developed economically but which frequently possess a deep and true sense of humanity.

For many centuries, communities were linked to institutional churches, but today in many places the influence of these churches is waning. Many young people see them as irrelevant, cut off from the reality of the world. But at the same time, with the break-down of the family or in the face of injustices - particularly in Third World countries - there is a new cry for togetherness and community within the Church. This is very evident in the basic communities in Latin America, but it is also evident all over the world. The Synod of the Roman Catholic Church, when considering the Laity in 1987, described the parish, for the first time in an official document of the Roman Catholic Church, as 'a community of communities'. Yes, there is a new realisation that community is the place of meeting with God or, as Martin Buber says, 'the place of theophany'. It is the place of belonging; it is the place of love and acceptance; it is the place of caring; it is a place of growth in love. Individualism and materialism lead to rivalry, competition and the rejection of the weak. Community leads to openness and acceptance of others. Without community people's hearts close up...
Community as Caring
If community is belonging and openness, it is also loving concern for each person. In other words we could say it is caring, bonding and mission. These three elements define it.

In community people care for each other and not just for the community in the abstract, as a whole, as an institution or as an ideal way of life. It is people that matter; to love and care for the people that are there, just as they are. It is to care for them in such a way that they may grow according to the plan of God and thus give much life. And it is not just caring in a passing way, but in a permanent way.

Because people are bonded one to another, they make up one family, one people, one flock. And this people has been called together to be a sign and a witness, to accomplish a particular mission which is their charism, their gift.

So many people enter groups in order to develop a certain form of spirituality or to acquire knowledge about the things of God and of humanity. But that is not community; it is a school. It becomes community only when people start truly caring for each other and for each other's growth.

Esther de Waal writing about the rule of St Benedict says:

It is noticeable how both the abbot and the cellarer are constantly concerned about the brethren, caring for each singly in all their uniqueness rather than with the community en bloc, that ideal which seems to haunt so much contemporary ideology. The common life never becomes a piece of abstract idealisation or idealism. St Benedict would probably have appreciated Dietrich Bonhoeffer's aphorism: 'He who loves community, destroys community; he who loves the brethren, builds community.'

I began L'Arche in 1964, in the desire to live the Gospel and to follow Jesus Christ more closely. Each day brings me new lessons on how much Christian life must grow in commitment to life in community, and how much that life needs faith, the love of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit if it is to deepen.

Note
1 "We expect a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and the place is called community" (Martin Buber, quoted by Parker J. Palmer).
2 Esther de Waal, Seeking God (Collins/Fount, London, 1984, p. 139.)
Listening to God's Voice
by Clare Bick

There was a story in New Covenant magazine in 1981 that I read as a young Christian and which has stayed with me. It describes a time at the end of a conference on a hot day in Rome in 1975 when God spoke through a prophecy: ‘Because I love you, I want to show you what I am doing in the world today. I want to prepare you for what is to come. Days of darkness are coming on the world, days of tribulation....’ The writer of the article describes the different reactions of the people around her when this word was given:

People to my left didn’t even seem to hear the word. They chattered through the prophecy, wondering what time it was, where they would eat, how they would ever get out of the crowd. I sympathized and understood. Then to my right I noticed an elderly French man. His face was wet with tears and he was struggling in the tight crowd to kneel down. There he stayed with his head bowed to the end of the service. I saw clearly in a matter of moments how all the trivial understandable things can distract us from hearing God’s word...

The response of that elderly French man has stayed in my heart for years and continues to speak to me about not missing God’s word when it comes, but heeding and revering it.
My sheep hear my voice

Today God continues to speak his word powerfully to all who will listen to his call – to be his friend, his disciple, a follower of Jesus, the good Shepherd who said: ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life...’ John 10: 27 This is Jesus’ promise to his disciples and if we are to have a relationship with God that is in any sense personal, we are open to the possibility that God sometimes will speak to us directly.

Listening to God’s voice is not reserved for the elite, for leaders or missionaries, for people more holy or spiritual than you. John Ortberg in a book about the spiritual disciplines called ‘The Life You’ve Always Wanted,’ remembers a line in a play called The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the universe when one of the characters says: ‘Why is it that when we speak to God we are said to be praying, but when God speaks to us we are said to be schizophrenic?’ John Ortberg then asks: why does God’s end of the line only have a receiver and no mouth-piece?

Christians throughout the centuries have given different names to how we hear from God. In his journal, George Fox wrote about how the Lord ‘opened’ a truth to his mind. John Calvin spoke of the ‘inner testimony’ of the Holy Spirit. And Ignatius of Loyola described ‘movements’ of the soul, thoughts, feelings, desires given by God to move us closer to him.

These promptings may take different forms: convictions of sin, assurance of God’s love, a call to a service or to mission, but they are part of a Spirit-led life. God is always speaking, but we’re not always listening. When the disciples had their glory moment on a mountain when they saw Jesus transfigured, what did the voice from heaven say? “This is my Son, whom I love...Listen to him.” Matthew 17: 5 We must learn to listen to God’s voice.

Take a minute or two and reflect... think back over the last week, month, even year. When was the last time when you heard God’s voice? How did it come to you? Have a think...

How do we hear God’s voice?
I’m sure God has spoken to us in various ways... for some of us it was very clear, perhaps a word of direction; for others it was a peace about a way forward, a word through Scripture or though another Christian, a word through God’s creation, a door opening (or closing) or something more unusual like a dream. If we are open to him and eager for his word, God will sometimes surprise us and speak to us at unlikely times as well as during a personal prayer time.

A personal example of God speaking to me
I want to share one way in which he has spoken to me. When I was around 21, I did a GAP year traveling around different communities with a rucksack on my back and little money, and traveling by bus. When I came back to the UK, I was planning to go to Liverpool to do a post graduate teacher's degree. I decided to spend the weekend in London with the Antioch community (which was just beginning at that time).

During that weekend God spoke very clearly to me about giving up my plans for Liverpool. His word to me was very clear and direct. God spoke to my heart and he spoke through other people as well. When I went to church on Sunday God spoke to me through the Gospel reading about not looking back when Jesus calls. I heard that word as a direct confirmation that I should not delay my response to the Lord's call for me. So in place of Liverpool God opened up for me a place to live in community with Antioch in London. And that is where I have remained to this day.

That decision was a very strong experience and took place over the space of a weekend when I was young and
flexible with my plans. But I find now-a-days, that I'm not easily open to making drastic changes like that. But the Lord is still teaching me, often through discipline, to listen to his word and to trust him when he speaks to me. As we journey with the Lord, we can be confident that the Good Shepherd will help us grow in listening to his word for us.

Learning to listen to God

Jesus says: *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.* And if we want to speak God’s word; we have to learn to listen to it. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert and offered bread, his response was to quote the words of Moses: *Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.* Matthew 4: 4. In a book called ‘the Rest of God’, the author Mark Buchanon writes: *We have to be people who listen day and night to God. Our utterances ought to be as Jesus’ were: an echoing of the Father, an imitation of him… a holy ventriloquism*

Making space to hear God

But he goes on to note that there are so many voices and so little time to truly listen. A biographer of Abraham Lincoln wrote this about his childhood: *In wilderness loneliness he companioned with trees, with the faces of open sky….Silence found him for her own. In the making of him, the element of silence was immense…*

What makes and shapes us? Most of us have little silence in our lives and live connected to noise. This can make it harder to hear God’s voice. We need to make space in our lives to make sure that the Voice that speaks truth in love, that wounds to heal, that gives clear guidance amidst life’s enticements, can be truly heard and heeded.
The sword of God’s word

In Hebrews 4: 12-13, God’s word is described as a sword that can cut finely and uncover and reveal the secret emotions and thoughts of our hearts: it can wound to heal. A few years ago I took a time of sabbatical from my normal life and service and there was space and silence for God to speak in this way, to uncover my heart and prune me of unhelpful attitudes. It was very freeing. Lent or the 40 days before Easter is a great time to try and make space to listen to God, to perhaps take some retreat time, even part of a day, or to carve some space and silence in our daily routine.

This all the more important to do when our lives are are full and busy, even if they are busy in Christian service. I want to reflect on the story of the prophet Samuel in the Old Testament and the story of Mary and Martha in Luke’s gospel to illustrate this.

Samuel

In the Old Testament a thousand years before Jesus there was a man called Samuel who became very famous for his leadership and prophetic gifting, but first he had to learn to hear from the Lord and there is an important incident where he did this as a young man. He was the son of Hannah, who had been barren and had promised to dedicate her firstborn to priestly service if God answered her prayer to conceive. God honored Hannah’s
Living Bulwark

request and Hannah honored her promise and as soon as Samuel was weaned, he was presented to the priest Eli to be brought up for priestly duties. So he grew up studying all that was required, very busy in God’s service, growing in stature and favor with God and men,...but he didn’t yet know God. Eli hadn’t tutored him in hearing God’s voice.

But God intended to remedy this and Samuel hears God’s voice for the first time in a story that many of us grow up hearing in Sunday school (brief recounting). Finally Eli figures out what’s happening... it is the Lord coming to the house of the Lord (surprise!) and Eli teaches Samuel how to respond when he next hears the voice: ‘Speak Lord, your servant is listening’ 1 Samuel 3: 9

Speak Lord, your servant is listening....

And God speaks and speaks and speaks... Samuel has had all that training in priestly duties, but now has knowledge of God and his word, which continues. We read at the end of 1 Samuel 3 (v 19): The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground... and Samuel’s word came to all Israel 1 Samuel 4:1

God protects preserves and empowers Samuel’s words because Samuel hears, heeds and obeys God's word. It is the same for us too: we can be very busy in the service of God, but like Samuel need to always be saying: ‘Speak Lord, your servant is listening’ and to hear and heed the God that we are serving.

Mary and Martha

This is a story about listening too:

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

Poor Martha gets a bad press in this story and many of us would sympathize with her. There she is doing all the work to welcome Jesus, while Mary just gets to sit there with Jesus... and then gets all the brownie points. It seems hardly fair!!

Notice where Mary sat: she sat at Jesus’ feet, the ancient postures of a disciple. To sit at the feet of your teacher is to sit in a humble place. In Acts we read that Paul sits at the feet of the rabbi Gamaliel to be trained in the Jewish Torah and here Mary sits at Jesus’ feet as his disciple, signifying her readiness to hear his word and submission to its guidance. The Message translation describes Mary hanging on every word he said.

**Martha distracted by the preparations...**

Now Martha was driven by wanting to be a good hostess to Jesus, *distracted by all the preparations that had to be made*. The Greek word translated as distracted, *penispato*, literally means “to draw from around’. Martha’s attention, instead of being centered on Jesus, was drawn from around him in many different directions. She was anxious to give Jesus a hospitable reception, and was upset by her sister’s contemplative humility which looked to her like laziness. She came to Jesus not to join Mary in listening to him, but to complain about her and to demand that Jesus make her do her bit to help out. In the end it was Mary rather than Martha who truly hosted Christ in her home.

I’m Martha a lot of the time. In theory I should be like Mary as my main work is Christian work and my children aren’t little, so I really could be sitting at Jesus’ feet. Instead I am often distracted by the preparations, by the busyness of my work. I come to Jesus not to linger and listen but to beg Him to help me with my agenda and to deal with someone who I might find trying.

**Martha, Martha...one things is needed...**

Look at what the Lord says to Martha after her frustrated outburst:

> **Martha, Martha... you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.**


Notice the way Jesus repeats Martha’s name here, adding tenderness to the rebuke. The only other time this happens is with Peter and Saul on the way to Damascus. Jesus knew Martha’s heart to do the right thing and loved her.

I know that when I get weary and burdened, it is because I have my focus and pre-occupation on the many things, rather than the one thing needed, listening to Jesus, which will sustain me for all the other things.

Mary chose what is better, to sit at his feet as a disciple and listen to Jesus. To choose to stay close to Jesus and listen is a choice that we make: it is up to us. It is not to do with how much time we have available but what we choose to do with the time we have. We will make time for the things that we want to do.

In our busy lives we are too often balancing many things, but for us who love Jesus, one thing is needed, to come to him, to sit at his feet as his disciples and to listen to what he says. *One thing I ask of the Lord*, says David, *this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4*

Even in the midst of being engaged with the demands of life, we can remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If we have a significant decision to make, we can stop and ask for wisdom; if we have some unexpected free time, we can pause and ask God if there is anything he would have us do with it; as we interact and listen to people, we can listen also to anything the Holy Spirit might say to them through us.
Some questions to ponder...

- ‘My sheep listen to my voice...’ When did you last hear the voice of the Shepherd? What is he saying to you today?

- What is making and shaping you at this time? How can you make space to hear God’s voice?

- In the midst of your busyness, what will help you choose the better portion and sit at the feet of Jesus to listen to him?

Let’s be like that old French man and not miss God’s word, but revere it and heed it in our lives. Speak Lord, your servant is listening!

Clare Bick is senior women leader in Antioch Community, London, UK. She and her husband Tom are the parents of 3 children.

See previous article by Clare > Surpassing Love: Sabbatical Reflections

(c) copyright 2016 The Sword of the Spirit
publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
What Is Mercy?
by Paul Jordan

It seems that everyone’s talking about mercy – me included - but do I really know what it means?

For some months I have been pondering the idea of mercy. I have to confess there was something about the word that bothered me. It all just sounds a bit too nice. And let’s face it nice is not a word that comes to mind when you read the Gospel through.

So I had another look in the Bible to try to find out more. I came up with three main things.

**How God is merciful**
The first thing you see is the way in which God is merciful. Mercy in this way is the kind of love that God shows his people Israel despite their grumbling in the wilderness. He doesn’t give up on them. He is faithful. He is steadfast. Mercy here is like the way that God makes clothes for Adam and Eve at the gates of the Garden. Or closer to home, mercy in this case is like when one of my kids again spills his milk at the table. There’s a bit of a groan but we clean it up and move on. We don’t give up on them. We decide to keep on loving. This is mercy. In Hebrew they call it *hesed* a kind of faithful love. And in fact, it’s one of the main words that God uses to reveal himself to us (see Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8; Psalm 145:8; Lamentations 3:22-23).

The second definition is probably best translated as *kindness*. It’s the good Samaritan thing. “Which one of the three passers-by showed him mercy” asks the Lord Jesus rhetorically (Luke 10:36-37). Here it has something to do with going out of your way to help someone else. This kind of mercy is best friends with *compassion.*

The Germanic languages translate compassion as ‘suffering with.’ As such it’s a necessary precursor of this breed of *kindness-mercy* since without any recognition of the suffering of the other, the action of kindness probably won’t occur. And so it tends to have to do with helping someone out. The Lord seems to be
upholding this to us as an example of love of neighbor in need. So that’s also important.

**The ‘Gospel of Mercy’**

Number Three may be the one that evades most of us these days and yet this is probably the main reason the Gospel is a ‘Gospel of Mercy’. It has to do with the sparing of a just punishment. One of the best illustrations of this is ‘The Prodigal Son’. Another name for that story could well be ‘The Merciful Father’. The son seriously messes up. He throws away his relationship with his own father and squanders his inheritance losing his right to sonship. The father, by virtue of the fact that he is father, has authority over his son. When the son returns, he would be well within his rights to condemn him, or ‘judge him away’ as some languages put it. And yet he doesn’t. He does the opposite. He reinstates him as his son. This is mercy.

**His mercy sets us free**

Grace is giving someone what they don’t deserve. A kind of personal favor. Mercy is *not* giving someone what they *do* deserve. But this mercy can only be given by he who has authority to judge. It is his justice that serves his mercy and his mercy that sets us free.

The gospel is rich but becomes tasteless if we dilute away this third and most powerful form of mercy. But we so often do! Perhaps we just don’t get it. Perhaps we don’t like the idea of anyone having the authority to make judgments over us, even though parents and judges do it all the time. Perhaps we’ve psychologized our sin away to some kind of form of personal weakness we “just need to work on”.

The problem is this: when you reduce the *Gospel of Mercy* to only Hesed and Kindness you don’t really get set free. You sell yourself short and end up…well, just nice.

Yes. It’s really this third definition that’s the savior. It makes the *Gospel of Mercy* personal, real and worth selling your field for. When you truly meet this kind of mercy it changes your life. Forever. Ask the prodigal. Ask the woman caught in adultery.

Of course, I must remember God is faithful and I should be kind to my neighbor. But for me to avail of the kind of freedom Christianity offers I need to know Mercy No. 3. But here’s the trick: for that to happen I have to name my sin. There’s no other way. If I don’t then my walk through the door of mercy opens up into just another nice day instead of into a great hall filled with a great feast.

“For it was for our sake that he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

---

Paul Jordan grew up in Glasgow, Scotland. In the late 1990’s as part of the Servants of the Word missionary brotherhood he helped lead the university outreach in London. Thereafter working for *Kairos Europe and the Middle East* he lived in Munich, Germany for three years and since 2007 with his wife Noemi and now four children in Leuven, Belgium. He helps lead the Sword of the Spirit *Jerusalem Community* in Belgium and directs the work of *Kairos in the EME region*. He can be reached at paul.jordan@kairos-eme.org.

(c) copyright 2016 *The Sword of the Spirit*

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

e-mail: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
Families for Christ Community – Vancouver, Canada

– An interview with Bernard De Mesa, senior coordinator of the community

When was your community started? – What inspired you?
In the early 1990s, a few couples who had moved to Canada from the Philippines came together to form an informal prayer group. Sensing the need for a more formal direction, in September 1993, the group went on a pilgrimage to a Catholic pilgrimage site in Portland, Oregon, for a whole day of prayer and spiritual discernment. Having been soaked in the Spirit, a prophecy surfaced, “Before you bring the good news of salvation to others, start with your own families. You are my family in Vancouver. You are families for Christ.” It was then that they decided to adopt the name “Families for Christ Community.”

Where are you located? What kind of area is it?
Between the alpine attractions of the resort town of Whistler to the north, the farms and vineyards of the Fraser Valley to the East, the Pacific Ocean to the West and the border leading to Washington State to the South – you will find our metropolis known as the Greater Vancouver area. It is composed of several cities and municipalities with Vancouver being the focal point. Our members are spread out over this Greater Vancouver area with the widest distance nearly 60 kilometers between some of our members. The area is largely residential (single detached houses and townhomes) with a few highly urbanized pockets (high rise condos and offices). There are also several green spaces (parks, lakes, forests, farmlands) easily accessible from all directions.

What is the cultural make-up of your community, and how many members do you have?
We are an immigrant community. Most, if not all of us who are 40 years old, or older, were born and raised in the Philippines – making us a predominantly Catholic community. Our members have been arriving in Canada over the last 25 years, some even as recently as in the last five years. Most of us are now Canadian citizens.
Living Bulwark

We presently have 120 members in 11 men’s groups and 14 women’s groups. That includes our young professionals who are also assigned to men’s and women’s groups. Age-wise, we have a wide range. Some members are grandparents and a few couples are in their 30s with children. But most of our adult members are in their 40s and 50s. Our young professionals are mostly in their mid-20s. Our university-aged children serve in University Christian Outreach (UCO) and our high school children are in what we call the Young Ones (YO) Group, while the grade schoolers are in the Young Believers (YB) Group.

Being an immigrant community, our members are in a variety of professions. Many of us had to reinvent ourselves and our careers to adapt to our newly adopted country.

How often do you meet, and in what configurations?
Our regular activities include:

- Community assemblies twice a month. Simultaneous with these assemblies, our children will be having their own activities.
- Men’s groups and women’s groups meet twice a month.

Other activities are:

- Men’s breakfasts four times a year. This year, we introduced the joint breakfast for men and women.
- Acts of mercy. We visit nursing homes and work at food bank distribution
- A Lenten retreat
- A summer picnic and Christmas celebration – great family events for us.

What do you as a community feel the Lord is saying to you? What particular strength or call do you feel you as a community have been given by the Lord just now?
In recent years, especially last year and this year, we have sensed that the Lord is calling us to be bolder and to step out of our comfort zones to share his good news with others.
What areas of community life or service do you feel are a focus for the community, things you as a community are working to strengthen or take new strides in?
Our mission is to bring families into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. We envision a dynamic community of Christ-centred families across Canada. We sense the need to strengthen our efforts at bringing others to know Christ – both at the personal level and as a community. This means having a stronger conviction to share our faith with others, including family and friends outside community and co-workers. We then have to create more opportunities to support our members in bringing others to experience our way of life – such as the men’s breakfast, women’s teas, and Life in the Spirit seminars where people can hear the good news in an informal setting and ask questions. Acting with more boldness to invite people to these things is a challenge for us, considering we live in a very secular society.

Visiting the elderly – part of our Faith in Action with Seniors outreach

Why is it a help being part of the larger network of communities of the Sword of the Spirit?
First, it gives us great comfort to know that we are not alone in this spiritual battle – that we have brothers and sisters-in-arms across the world fighting the good fight of faith. This leads us to the second point – this reminds us that our community and our efforts are part of God’s greater plan. And third, this network offers a great sharing of resources – from teachings to best practices to logistics.

If people in your area wanted to contact you, what’s the best way for them to do it? Do you have a website? And which meetings would interested people be welcome to attend?

- Our website: http://familiesforchristcommunity.org/
- Our email: familiesforchristcommunity@gmail.com

We would like the men to experience the men’s breakfast as a means of being introduced to our community. Or families can join us in our summer picnic and Christmas celebration. If they are familiar with community life, they may want to attend a community assembly or one of our men’s or women’s group meetings.
Although most of us are of Filipino background, our community language is English, and we warmly welcome Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike.

[This article first appeared in The Sword of the Spirit website Features page.]

See related articles on Christian communities in the Sword of the Spirit:

- **Krist Kiran Parivar (Family of the Rays of Christ) Community** in Pune, India, by Luke Lobo
- **Disciples on Mission in the War-torn City of Aleppo**, Report by André J. Codouni
- **The Antioch Community, London, UK.**, by Andy Pettman
- **Community of Nazareth in Dublin**, Ireland, by Brendan Lynch
- **Triumph of the Cross**, by Jeff Smith
- **Thirty Years Jerusalem**: God’s call to covenant community, by Sam Geleyn, Leuven, Belgium
- **Seattle Community**
- **Word of Life**: a community of disciples on mission, by Jon Wilson, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
- **The Work of Christ Community**, by Jerry Munk, Lansing, Michigan, USA
- **Once No People, Now God’s People**: How the People of God community began 25 years ago in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, USA, by Connie Maletta
- **Called to Community**: How the Community of the Risen Christ began in Glasgow, Scotland 25 years ago
- **What is the Sword of the Spirit?** Some questions and answers, by Jerry Munk
CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY

God Alone: Life without Attachments
by Tom Caballes

And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

- Mark 10:21-22 ESV

The rich young man in this Scripture passage lived a flawless life - almost. He followed the commandments since he was young – what more can anyone ask for in a model disciple? He was sincerely wanting to follow God and inherit eternal life. Yet he had one huge and critical attachment – his possessions – which he could not let go. Abraham was different: he was willing to let go of Isaac when God tested him. Abraham fully trusted God, in spite of what he probably thought of and felt at that time. What about you? Do you have “possessions” which you cannot let go of, like the rich young man? Who or what is your “Isaac”? It maybe your career, reputation, riches, friendships, gadgets, or anything else. Check your heart – are you carrying any unnecessary baggage in life? Is God truly your rock, your hope and your salvation? Is God your only portion, true delight and real treasure? So How Do You Live a Life Without Attachments

So How Do You Live a Life Without Attachments, Living for God Alone?
1. Take a look at your life. Is your life focused on following God with your whole heart, strength mind and soul? Are you willing to follow the Lord to the end, come hell or high waters? What drives you?
2. Examine carefully what occupies your time, talent and money at the moment. Are those things your attachments? Matthew 6:21 says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
3. Try to live a simple lifestyle. At this age of consumerism, it is very easy to accumulate a lot of things that are distractions in life. New gadgets will give you momentary pleasure – until the next one comes along.
4. The critical thing here is living your life with no strings attached. You have everything you have, but at an instant you are willing to let go of them.
5. Is there anything that would make you think twice of letting go if needed? Even good things in life can become attachments. Are you willing to let go of your dearest relationships in life? Are you willing to die for your faith at any situation, anytime, anywhere?
6. Are you willing to let go of your reputation, or be willing to be identified with Jesus and be mocked or laughed at? When you share your testimony to others, this is the risk you take. Are you willing to do it?
7. Is God truly your ultimate source of happiness and contentment? Are you building up heavenly treasures that will not rust, be stolen or fade away? Are you looking forward in seeing God face to face?

Other Scripture passages:

1. *Wait calmly for God alone, my soul, because my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my saviour - my stronghold. I cannot be shaken.* [Psalms 62:5-6 GW]
2. *Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."* [Genesis 22:10-12 ESV]
3. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." [Matthew 6:19-20 ESV]

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. Is there anything in life that makes you think twice of giving up if and when you need to?
2. Have you found true joy in God and God alone?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the *Lamb of God*, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads *Kairos New Zealand*, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Spiritual Judo

Hope for our suffering

by Sam Williamson

I reached my fitness high water mark at the age of twenty-four. I ran thirty miles a week, sweated three hundred pushups a day, and I brawled each week in the local boxing club.

In the midst of my peak physical prowess (never mind its short duration), I met a man with a black belt in Judo. He was forty-ish, chubby, and he wheezed as he walked. I think his exercise routine consisted of lifting large bottles of beer rather than heavy barbells.

He was the first black belt of any kind I had ever met. He intrigued me. Could this chubby, middle-aged man really beat me in a friendly fight? The fool inside me challenged him to hand-to-hand combat.

Not since infancy have I spend so much time on the ground. The lawn and I became intimate allies. I huffed, puffed, wheezed, and groaned (and maybe cursed, but it’s still all a blur) as he repeatedly—and effortlessly—tossed me to the ground.

It didn’t matter what punch I threw. Each jab, hook, and uppercut finished with me staring at the sky, gasping for air, and wondering what had happened.
How do they do that?

After my embarrassing attempt to box a black belt, my pudgy pal explained the mechanics. He said that the secret is to get your enemy’s strength to turn traitor against him, to redirect his force so that it is working for you.

Whenever I tried to punch, my friend slipped aside and pulled. My own momentum—aided by his tiny tug—threw me off balance. My own strength became my biggest enemy. The stronger I attacked, the harder I fell.

God works the same mysterious way in our lives.

He doesn’t create the evil in this world, but he redirects it so that it battles its own architect. As Joseph said to his brothers, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”

It’s called spiritual judo.

The runt

Look at the life of David. Samuel comes to David’s father to anoint a king, but David isn’t invited to the party. The prophet asks David’s father if anyone is missing, and David’s father responds, “Everyone is here but ‘the youngest’” (1 Samuel 16:11).

But the Hebrew word translated “the youngest” (hakaton) has layers of meaning. It’s hard to translate because it combines the picture of youthfulness with a sense of insignificance. To merely translate it as “the youngest” isn’t disparaging enough.

A better translation is to say, “Everyone is here but ‘the runt.’”

David was considered so insignificant by his family that he was left in the fields. There he practiced the slingshot to perfection. If the runt David had been treated with respect—if he had trained with King Saul’s army like his brothers—David would have cowered before Goliath like the rest of them.

Instead, God turned the wounding insult—“the runt”—on its head. He used the wound to create a hero. He hired the enemy’s force to fight against the enemy.

What is our hope?

David became King of Israel through spiritual Judo; and your life and my life depend on this spiritual truth:

*God is unsatisfied with merely neutralizing evil; God employs even evil to effect its own destruction.*

God is the ultimate Black Belt. Our hope for the suffering of our lives is our Father’s spiritual redirection, our Father’s spiritual Judo.

Psalm 57 describes it this way: “They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves.”

Sam
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.
Adulthood delayed

Adulthood is not easy to define. The dictionary simply defines it as “maturity” or “the age of majority”. That definition doesn’t help a young person know, “When do I become an adult?”

It is clear, however, that the age at which one becomes an adult has been shifting higher. Delayed adulthood is a reality.

Adulthood involves reaching specific markers in life, most of which follow the end of formal education. As the years spent in formal education were extended from eight years to twelve to eighteen, the start of adulthood was delayed as well.

The nine markers of adulthood

Adulthood is easier to describe than to define. Most people are considered adults when they reach a set of markers. The markers may vary in importance and order.

The markers are:

1. The End of Formal Education – School is over, “real life” has begun.
2. Reaching Specific Ages – 18? 21? 30? No specific age makes you an adult but they all have an impact.
3. Full-time work – When work becomes the main thing you do all day.
4. Financial independence – When your parents no longer pave the way for you.
5. Living Permanently on Your Own – None of your stuff is at your parents’ home anymore.
7. Marriage – This also includes vocational celibacy.
8. Having Children – Your life is not your own anymore.
9. Self-identifying as an Adult – You are an adult when you know you are.

Are you an adult?
You probably are nearing adulthood when some or most of the following are true…

1. You are now someone’s godfather or godmother.
2. Your alma mater has sent you a fundraising letter.
3. You know how much a refrigerator costs.
4. You are no longer in most of the pictures on your cell phone.
5. You have googled the term 401.k.
6. You no longer “feel” what you believe, you believe it.
7. You know what your copay is because it just went up again.
8. Dream job???
9. You have bought wedding gifts three times in one summer.
10. You have stopped wondering whether you are an adult.
11. Your back hurts.
12. The word poop is a regular part of your vocabulary again.

Delayed adulthood

The top of the bellcurve that describes when people achieve full adulthood is longer and flatter than it used to be. It is also significantly delayed when compared to 1970.

Financial independence has been delayed an average of six years. In 1970 most young people became responsible for their own finances when they finished high school or turned 18. Their allowance stopped. Parents may have helped with college tuition but few paid for it outright. Health-care coverage stopped when full-time education stopped. Today, many parents pay the full cost of college and must carry their children on their insurance until they turn 26.

Formal education has been extended an average of three years. The delay in finishing formal
education is even greater over the past century. In 1910 only 9% of Americans had a high school diploma; by 1940 that number had risen to 50%. In 1970 only 11% of Americans had a college degree. Today, that figure has nearly tripled.

More people are in formal education longer – thus delaying their transition into adulthood. Many also now are taking six years to complete a four year degree.

The median age for marriage is significantly delayed as well. In 1970 the median age for women was 21; for men it was 23. Today it is 27 for women and 29 for men – a delay of six years. Many factors contribute to this: prolonged education, a stronger career orientation for women, increased college debt, and the sexual revolution are a few of them.

The age at which the first child is born, one of the most definitive markers of adulthood, is now delayed nearly five years. In 1970 the average age was 21.4. Today it is over 26.

The average age of first house purchase is also delayed, but not as significantly. In 1970 it was 31. Today it is 33.

Delayed adulthood makes for a longer period of instability in life. Navigating the path to adulthood is harder than ever. The transition into adulthood is slower, less definitive when it happens, and less clear that it is complete. It is harder to become an adult than it was before.

Another consequence of delayed adulthood is the emergence of a new stage of life. The New York Times calls it emerging adulthood. The stage has its own psychological, spiritual, and social realities. Many of which have not been closely examined.

For those who work pastorally with this age group it is critical to understand how this stage of life works and how to help those in it make some of the most important decisions of their lives.

To be continued…

Michael Shaughnessy is the Kairos director for the Sword of the Spirit both in North America and Internationally. He is the editor of the Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter. Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.
“Sit At My Right Hand”
– Royal Messianic Psalms

By Jeanne Kun

Not only a king but also a priest forever; this is the surprising promise God makes to his Anointed in this messianic psalm. God’s people will be ruled by a mighty champion who will be both king and high priest.

– Mike Aquilina and Christopher Bailey

Many of the psalms of ancient Israel were composed to be recited by the king or as prayers, thanksgivings, or blessings for the king. Some of these “royal” or “kingship” psalms (among them, 18, 20, 21, 45) celebrate events in the lives of Israel’s kings, who were considered God’s representatives on earth. (Such events might be a coronation ceremony, a ritual anointing, an enthronement ceremony, a marriage, or a victory over enemies.)

Other psalms recall the promises God had made to King David – promises of an eternal dynasty and of a kingdom that would last forever. Because they were faced with the disasters and sins of the monarchy that unfolded after the reign of David, the people of Psalm 110:1-7

1 The LORD says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”

2 The LORD sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes.

3 Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you.

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

5 The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

6 He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter heads over the wide earth.

7 He will drink from the stream by the path; therefore he will lift up his head.

Understand!

1. Jesus fulfills God’s promises to ancient Israel in ways that go far beyond Jewish hopes and expectations. What light does Psalm 110 shed on your own understanding of who Jesus is?

2. Mark 14:61-62; 16:19; 1 Corinthians 15:25; and Hebrews 1:13; 10:13 amplify the visual image and setting evoked by the opening verse of Psalm 110. What do these images convey to you about Jesus?

3. Why is Psalm 110’s prophetic allusion to Jesus’ priesthood significant? How did Jesus carry out this priestly role in his life? What are some gospel incidents that
Israel came to hope that these promises would be fulfilled in a “hero-king” yet to come. This anointed leader or “Messiah” (in Hebrew, mashiah means “anointed one”) would be descended from David and would throw off the oppressor’s yoke, restore the kingdom, and carry on the glorious reign of David forever.

Thus, Jews and Christians alike consider those royal psalms referring to the idea of the anointing of the king as “messianic” psalms (among them, 2, 72, 89, 110, and 132).

Christians also recognize as messianic several psalms of lament – 22, 31, 69, and 118. These laments have overtones of hope, victory, praise, and thanksgiving in them, as they refer to a figure that is scorned and humiliated yet ultimately vindicated, prefiguring Christ. (Christos is Greek for “anointed one.”) Consequently, Christians recite and pray both groups of messianic psalms as prophecies about Jesus, God’s anointed king and Messiah, who is also the crucified Lord, risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father.

Jewish tradition interprets Psalm 110 as referring directly to the Davidic monarchy and to the Messiah-king-to-come, the son of David. Christians see in it a foreshadowing of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, true Son of God, the messianic king and eternal priest.

Originally, Psalm 110 was prayed – or delivered as an oracle by a prophet – at a new king’s coronation and enthronement ceremony. Verse 1 – “The Lord said to my lord, /’Sit at my right hand!’” – means that the Lord God is speaking to the king and installs the king at his right hand, a place of prestige and honor. The New Testament writers see this as referring to Jesus and quote Psalm 110 more often than any other psalm. In particular, its first verse alone is quoted or alluded to at least ten times in the New Testament (Matthew 26:64; Mark 12:35-37; 14:61-62; 16:19; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 10:13).

Psalm 110 begins with the declaration that it is God who establishes the new king in his authority over his people (signified by the “mighty scepter”) and brings him victory over his enemies, putting them under his feet (verses 1–2). Verse 4 speaks of the king inheriting a priestly role: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Like Melchizedek, who was both priest and king of Salem at the time of Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20), the newly enthroned king of Jerusalem is also a priest.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews cites Psalm 110:4 to explain Christ’s priesthood and connect it to Melchizedek (5:5-6;
The final verses of Psalm 110 depict a triumphant sovereign. Supported by the Lord, who has given him power and glory, the king opposes his foes, crushing his adversaries and judging the nations. Verses 5–6 prophetically point to the Christian truth that in the ongoing battle between good and evil, Christ, our true King and Priest, prevails, victorious over Satan, sin, and evil. However, the New Testament refrains from applying the ancient mentality and gruesome imagery of verse 6 to Jesus in its literal sense: Christian theology understands that Jesus did not come to “shatter heads” and “heap up corpses” but rather to overthrow Satan so that mankind might be freed from bondage to sin and the power of darkness.

Verse 7 – “He will drink from the stream by the path; / therefore he will lift up his head” – offers us an enigmatic image of the king. At a moment of respite during battle, he quenches his thirst at a stream, finding in it refreshment and fresh strength to continue on his triumphant way, holding his head high in the confidence and assurance of victory. This verse may be an allusion to a particular quasi-sacramental rite – drinking from the spring of Gihon, south of the city of Jerusalem, where the royal anointing ceremony took place (1 Kings 1:33, 8-40). It also calls to mind Gideon’s army, composed of those who had lapped water from the stream before battle with the Midianites (Judges 7:5-6).

Jesus Christ, true Son of God, is the messianic king and eternal priest, risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father.

In the Spotlight

**Shedding Light on Scripture’s Obscurities**

Countless variations exist between the many manuscripts containing portions of Scripture that were copied by hand and passed down during more than two millennia. For example, several verses in the Hebrew manuscripts from the tenth century...
A.D. differ from the Greek translation of the Hebrew found in the manuscripts of the fourth century A.D. Occasionally, parts of the original texts were lost or badly corrupted. Consequently, translations into English and other vernaculars also differ in their renderings of difficult texts. Adding to the challenging task of translation is the fact that biblical Hebrew is written only with consonants. Thus, vowels, though sometimes indicated by diacritic marks, are unclear or ambiguous, so the meaning of many ancient Hebrew words can only be surmised.

Scholars recognize Psalm 110 as one of the oldest psalms. It’s also considered one of the most difficult to understand. In the Septuagint, a Greek translation made in the third to second centuries B.C. of the available Hebrew texts, verse 3 reads (though somewhat obscurely) as a description of the divine sonship of the king and his birth or “begetting” on the part of the Lord: “Yours is princely power from the day of your birth. / In holy splendor before the daystar, like the dew I begot you” (New American Bible). This is the interpretation that the Church accepted, and this reading of Psalm 110 has had a place in Sunday Vespers in the Liturgy of the Hours from its beginning. Verse 3 has also been associated with the lucernarium (the ancient blessing of evening lights), referring as it does to the brightness of the daystar.

However, in some Hebrew texts, verse 3 seems to describe, also without much clarity, the “mustering” of an army and the nation’s people willingly responding and gathering around their sovereign on the day of his coronation. This meaning is reflected in the New Revised Standard Version: “Your people will offer themselves willingly / on the day you lead your forces /on the holy mountains. /From the womb of the morning, / like dew, your youth will come to you.”

Many uncertainties about how to best translate certain words and portions of the Hebrew Scriptures may never be resolved. Nonetheless, today’s biblical scholars and experts in the study of ancient languages continue to devote their skills and energies to shedding light on Scripture’s obscurities and bringing God’s inspired word to us as accurately as possible.

In the Spotlight

Messianic Psalms of Lament

As an observant Jew, Jesus prayed the psalms throughout his life, and words from them were on his lips during his agony on the cross. His cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) comes from the opening of Psalm 22, a lament that ends in profound trust in God. And with his dying you? What might the “total Christ,” the Church, be saying?

2. Read and meditate on these words of the prophet Nathan regarding King David’s dynasty and the Gospel texts referring to how this is fulfilled in Jesus:

The word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: . . . the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. . . . Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD; you have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come. . . . And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.” (2 Samuel 7:4-5, 11-14, 16-19, 28-29)

The angel [Gabriel] said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (Luke 1:30-35)

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had
breath, Jesus cried, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5).

Psalms 22, 31, 69, and 118 contain many images that correspond to details that the evangelists recorded about Jesus’ passion—for example, casting lots for Jesus’ garments (Psalm 22:9; Matthew 27:35) and giving vinegar to Jesus in his thirst (Psalm 69:21, John 19:29).

Psalm 118 in particular helped early Jewish believers who accepted Jesus as the Messiah understand his horrific death a part of his messianic identity and role. It serves as a link between the more purely messianic psalms about an anointed king to come, the glorious descendant of David, and psalms about a suffering figure, because it depicts one who is hard-pressed and under mortal threat (118:11-13) but then saved by God (118:14, 17).

As early Christians came to understand it, “the stone that the builders rejected,” who is Jesus, “has become the chief cornerstone” (118:22; Matthew 21:42; Mark 8:31; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7). Thus, the Church added these psalms of lament with their descriptions of suffering, shame, reproaches, mockery, and humiliation (and ultimately, deliverance as well) to the psalms they considered “messianic” in their prophecies about Jesus. As the Trappist monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton wrote:

When we recite the Psalms we must learn to recognize in them the suffering and triumphant Messiah, confessing Him with our mouth and believing in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead. Then we reap the abundant fruits of His Redemption. (Bread in the Wilderness)

**In the Spotlight**

**Vengeance and Curses in the Psalms**

How do Christians pray psalms that contain vindictive curses and calls for God to take vengeance on the enemies of the psalmists? At least thirty such outbursts are included in the Book of Psalms. Here are just a few:

*He will repay my enemies for their evil. / In your faithfulness, put an end to them.* (Psalm 54:5)

*Let death come upon them; / let them go down alive to Sheol.* (Psalm 55:15)

*So repay them for their crime; / in wrath cast down the peoples, O God!* (Psalm 56:7)

*Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; / let them not be enrolled among the righteous.* (Psalm 69:8)

Such verses, called “imprecatory prayer,” “vent the rage of saints who recognize that vengeance is exclusively God’s territory, but who at the same time feel the injustices of this world very deeply

**Act!**

Exercise your trust in Jesus, the Messiah, and his power to transform you. Look back at Question 3 in the Grow! section above. In light of your reflections on “enemies,” ask the Lord to “rescue” you. During the coming week, bring your needs before the Lord in prayer each day. Then cooperate with his work in you. Don’t forget to thank him for his saving action.

**In the Spotlight**

**David’s Enduring Throne**

Counted among the royal and messianic psalms, Psalm 89 joyously celebrates the unconditional promise that God made to establish King David’s dynasty. Although David and his descendants failed to keep God’s commands and were to be justly punished as a consequence (Psalm 89:31-33), God nevertheless declared,

*I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.*

*His line shall continue forever, and his throne endure before me like the sun.* (89:34-36).

However, in events that seemed to belie God’s
and who desperately want God to correct the inequities that always seem to leave the righteous/weak at the mercy (or mercilessness) of the wicked/powerful,” according to Scripture scholar Kevin J. Youngblood. “Throughout church history, Christians have wrestled with the tension created by the presence of such prayers alongside Jesus’ ethic of love and forgiveness.”

As Christians, however, our true “enemies” are sin and death. We can read these prayers with that idea in mind, recognizing that we are all involved in a spiritual battle against evil. We can also feel the same outrage as the psalmist at the evil that we see, even while retaining an attitude of forgiveness. Finally, these prayers help us to release our desire of vengeance upon ourselves, allowing us instead to be merciful to our enemies.

Psalm 89 ends with a great cry wrenched from the heart of a disappointed yet hopeful people (89:46-52). In anguish, the psalmist implores God to remember his promise and restore his people by sending a righteous king to reign over them again: “Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (89:49).

The people of Israel were mistaken in their understanding and expectation of a political ruler, yet their faith would finally be vindicated. God would answer their pleas not by restoring the ancient monarchy but by raising up, in the words of one hymn writer, “great David’s greater son.” Ultimately, Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, would rule over all as king, savior, and Messiah.
I moved to Detroit on August 31 2015, ten days after my 23rd birthday. I had graduated from college a few months prior and had spent the summer working and fundraising, with everything leading to a year of service in YouthWorks-Detroit. I was holding off on other work, grad school, the prospect of a relationship, being with friends and family, and a year of Michael in control of Michael’s life (I’ve had a lot of those). I didn’t have a lot figured out when I moved, and I still don’t have much figured out now. Actually, I take that back. I know a lot more than I did before, but my questions and moments of ignorance seem to be multiplying as well. But God is working on my heart in a particular way here, and I see God move in Detroit in ways that I’ve never seen elsewhere.

There are so many things that I’ve learned in the past few months here, but there are a couple that particularly stand out. One is that service, in the truest sense of the word, is based solely on love, and is thus extremely...
humble and understated. It’s not glamorous or self-centered, nor does it seek attention or acclaim. It’s about broken, imperfect people helping other broken, imperfect people. It’s hard work, and it requires sacrifice and dedication and being faithful to someone or something.

I’m fortunate to be able to live and work with some incredible people who know what it means to serve, and who live it out wholeheartedly. They call me on to press forward and choose for love every day. I’m so thankful that there are others here who are doing the Lord’s work and laying a foundation for something great. All I’m doing is plugging in and playing my small part, joining with them in one larger mission. Knowing that gives me an underlying peace and contentment that I know comes from God alone.

The other big thing is realizing how little you really need in life to get by. You get out of school and the whole world is in front of you, and there are so many things you can aspire to. Your perspective grows, as life becomes a melting pot of work, relationships, leisure, finances, responsibilities, time management, and everything else that comes with becoming an adult. But in all of that, I think there’s a really beautiful simplicity that has become clearer to me. I have God, the significant people in my life, and the work that I feel called to (at least for the moment). And for right now, that’s all I need.

There’s so much background noise in our lives, but at the heart of it, it comes down to whether God is enough. God’s really challenging me this year to put everything else aside and to follow Him with everything that I am. It’s an ongoing process and one that I continually struggle with, but that is ultimately what God is teaching me here in Detroit. He’s breaking me down so He can rebuild me. By giving a year to serve and putting other things on the back-burner, I experience freedom and grace to follow Him more fully than I have before. It’s a year set apart for a life set apart. I’m thankful that He’s called me to this adventure and that He continues to shape me into who He wants me to be, even though it can be hard at times. I don’t have much figured out, but I can trust that, for right now, I’m where I’m supposed to be.
The Glory of Who We Are

by Sandy Cahalan

When I think of temples, I think of grand, sweeping cathedrals - large buildings cutting into the city skyline or the countryside, their bells ringing out songs as beautiful as the structure. Images of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Westminster Abbey in London, even Heinz Chapel at my alma mater race through my mind. I can see the massive pillars, intricately carved stone, and elegant woodwork. I can feel the warmth of the sun on my face as it peeks through stained glass windows, illuminating sanctuaries with light and color. These holy places were constructed to hold the presence of the Lord, to draw people into the beauty of Him who created the heavens and earth. Reading chapters 37-39 of Exodus demonstrates the amount of detail put into constructing the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle, in which the presence of God resided.

In contrast, I look at myself, 22 years old. Blonde hair. Blue eyes. Nails picked over in creeping anxiety. Way too clumsy, oftentimes too loud. My speech could use a stronger filter and my actions hurt those around me more often that I would like. This list could go on for ages, but they point to one conclusion: I am nothing like these marvelous buildings.

And yet the presence of the Lord almighty dwells within me. I am a temple of the Holy Spirit. The God of the universe for whom those magnificent buildings were constructed chose to reside in imperfect me. The Creator to whom cascading mountains, rolling rivers, and a seemingly endless night sky point, loves me and chose me before I even existed. His incarnation, death and resurrection broke the barrier between creation and the Creator. Through His humility I am His beloved, chosen daughter. He chose me, in my faults and failures, to live within; to strengthen; to restore. How easy it is to let my shortcomings define me. I need to remind myself,
multiple times a day, to change my perspective and see myself for who I truly am: created in His image and chosen for His glory. Oh, that we would never forget the glory of whom we are in Christ.

Sisters, the Lord has chosen us. He has seen us at our worst and He still chooses to dwell within us. He chose us over any other part of creation, over any grandiose cathedral ever constructed by man. Let that sink in for a second because it's a pretty big deal.

My prayer is that we would be emboldened by this truth. Emboldened to open up to more of His presence, to recognize our worth and value in Him. Strengthened to make changes in our lives that reflect the Spirit within us. May our lives be an invitation to a world that so desperately needs it as we proclaim through our words and actions:

"I am beloved. I am chosen. I am a temple.

Come and see, for the One who has chosen me has also chosen you."

Sandy can currently be found in College Park, Maryland, USA, where she is serving on a mission year with University Christian Outreach. She was born and raised in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and is a recent graduate of the University of Pittsburgh. Some of her favorites include: Penguins hockey, real penguins, listening to records, warm hugs, warm drinks, crossword puzzles, and puns. She loves finding adventures, both big and small, in daily life, and in her own words, "Following Christ is the grandest and most worthwhile adventure I've chosen."

This article by Sandy first appeared in The Lovely Commission, a new publishing venture and brand of Kairos North America. It is is run by Molly Kilpatrick and Mary Rose Giles and a team of contributors from various Christian communities in North America and beyond. Together they are working to build a culture of radical love, femininity, modesty of heart, mind, and body amongst young women. Their aim is to inspire and equip young women to embrace and promote a culture of Godly femininity in which we live out our rich identity as daughters of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.
“The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

Going into the 2016 Kairos Weekend in Glasgow, I was feeling a bit nervous. For the first time the majority of the conference was split with the guys and girls being in separate locations and having different content. As this was the first time the weekend was formatted in such a way, I was unsure what to expect and whether or not the new style would work or whether it would descend into formulaic teaching for women that we’d all heard a hundred times before. I was also looking forward to going to Glasgow for several reasons. It presented a chance to get to know my friends and sisters in the Lord from other outreaches on a deeper level and engage with them in a freer way, separated from the men.

In spite of my nerves, I really enjoyed and got a lot from the 2016 Kairos Weekend. Heather Semple gave most of the teaching, which I really appreciated and much of it was new and fresh to me. Heather managed to pick out areas all the women could relate to. Her main talk was on the story of Leah and Rachel from the Book of Genesis and she broke it down to reveal an important underlying message which we could connect to on a personal level. I was also able to connect well with the other women at the conference and be more open due to the relaxed and intimate environment. I appreciated the space to be able to focus on the father-daughter relationship we have with God as well as the comfortable environment which allowed us to be more emotional and vulnerable.

The Holy Spirit was also moving powerfully in our worship time, confirming what the Lord had already been speaking to me previously and inspiring an incredible closing time of worship which had all the men and women together.
One of the things that really struck was quote from one of Heather’s talk: “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”

For me, to come back after a year away and see some people who I haven’t seen in two years was great and to catch up with sisters throughout the region was fantastic. Also, the women’s entertainment led by Mhairi and Eilidh was hilarious and was a particular highlight.

Overall, I had a fantastic time at the weekend and I’m definitely looking forward to the 2017 Kairos Weekend in Portugal.

[Elisa Turner is a first year of student of Social Anthropology at SOAS University in London and has been a core member of Koinonia this year. Elisa is also a member of Antioch Community in London, UK]

If you would like to know more about Koinonia, an intentional Christian community for university students in Central London, UK, you can check out their website and/or subscribe to their newsletter.

(c) copyright 2016 The Sword of the Spirit
publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com
The House of God

a worship song by Ed Conlin

> Click to listen to an audio clip

Lyrics to The House of God

Take us higher up, draw us deeper still,
Further into your heart, O Lord.
Make us living light, set us on a hill,
Shine forth through us, O radiant Son.

Take us higher up, draw us deeper still,
Further into your heart, O Lord.
Make us living light, set us on a hill,
Shine forth through us, O radiant Son.

Make my heart your throne, O Lord,
A dwelling place for the light of God.
Join me to your temple, Lord,
That all might see the light in me
And lift their hearts to your house of glory!
Take us higher up, draw us deeper still,
Further into your heart, O Lord.
Make us living light, set us on a hill,
Shine forth through us, O radiant Son.

Once we were no people, Lord,
Now we are one in the house of God.
Living stones now joined in Christ;
For we have seen your temple brings
The hopeless heart to the hope of glory!

Take us higher up, draw us deeper still,
Further into your heart, O Lord.
Make us living light, set us on a hill,
Shine forth through us, O radiant Son.

For we are a chosen race,
A shining light set upon the hill,
A holy nation, royal priests.
May we proclaim your wondrous name,
Until the day when you come in glory!

Take us higher up, draw us deeper still,
Further into your heart, O Lord.
Make us living light, set us on a hill,
Shine forth through us, O radiant Son.

[The Song *The House of God* is included in a Music CD entitled, *In Spirit and Truth*, (c) 2007 The Swords of the Spirit, and distributed by Tabor House.]

Ed Conlin is a member of the Servants of the Word, a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He lives in community in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, and works as a licensed substance abuse counselor and chaplain with the Capuchin Franciscan Ministries in Detroit.

(c) copyright 2016 The Sword of the Spirit
publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com