

Vineline

→ Connecting the Vineyard Churches in Canada

To Be Transformed

Interacting with God and Culture





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A KINGDOM ANNOUNCEMENT

by Gary Best

“The Church is not the Kingdom of God; however, the Church is the instrument of that Kingdom.” This phrase was a central building block in the early teaching on the Kingdom of God that John Wimber instilled into our church family. He was trying to help us see that God’s activity was much bigger than the sum total of church programs. John was also trying to call

us into a wholehearted pursuit of partnering with God to see his Kingdom rule extended in the world around us.

In what way can that partnership be expressed so that God’s rule does in reality advance within his creation? The early Vineyard message centered around the concept of

Kingdom Announcement: a proclamation of word and deed that confronts opposing, evil rule and demands that it make way for God’s sovereign intention. The central illustration for this has been the story of the Exodus event where Moses repeats the LORD’s command, “Let my people go!” This foreshadowed, we would teach (as indeed we continue to teach),

the ministry of Jesus as he confronted the power of Satan and freed his captives.¹

As a result of our belief that we have all been given this same ministry of announcing the Kingdom, we have called one another to live in constant expectation of Kingdom power breaking through into our prayers and acts of obedience. Holding on to that perspective and sense of anticipation remains one of our most significant challenges today.

Since this early expression of the Bible's Kingdom message, we have also been exposed to the study and writing of others that have further shaped and broadened our understanding. N T Wright among others has helped us to see that while God's intention as Sovereign King has included rescuing humans, his ultimate purpose goes far beyond that: he intends to work with and through us to ultimately reclaim and remake the entire world (or as Wright puts it, for the "whole world to be put to rights."²) If we believe this invitation to enter life in God's Kingdom now and truly let our lives be formed by it, we are partnering with the "secret" plan of God to revolutionize the entire world.³

How will God's rule advance through our obedience? Jesus made it clear that his was an upside down Kingdom, that it would advance through weakness and suffering rather than through power and success. It would not succeed by dominating cultures; it would triumph by subversively winning people's hearts through sacrificial love and service, incarnationally being and bringing Good News in ways that they could hear and receive it. In this way, the Kingdom working through us would operate less like a hammer and more like leaven. This being true, what is needed is not an aggressive, systematic plan of action but instead a humble, listening posture that constantly looks for what God is doing in his world and how we can submit to his purpose and activity.

How is this acted out? Knowing that God's heart is also for unity, we make every effort to pay the price exacted by broken relationships so that peace may come. Knowing that God's intention is to restore justice to all, we advocate for the marginalized as he has done for us. Aware of his commission to us at creation, we take our stewardship of his creation very seriously. And, of course, seeing God's desire to bring freedom and release to those bound by oppression, we reach for every opportunity

to see God's supernatural power break through for healing and salvation.

If we have embraced all of this, then one question remains, "How are we doing?" Presently, I see some very positive signs both in the Vineyard and in the Canadian church at large that we as followers of Jesus are taking this message more and more seriously. There is a hunger to escape our Christian "ghettos" of isolation and begin to actively engage our surrounding culture. One of the commitment statements of our National Gathering was that we would search for a fresh and new, yet biblical understanding of how to engage with our culture. We also expressed a desire to listen to those around us, to learn from them by seeing what God is already doing in them. And we committed to stir one another to intentional action, believing that God's Kingdom would actually be extended through our love and service.

These lofty goals, however, may prove to be more difficult than we expect for at least three reasons. First, arriving at a "biblical" understanding of culture and how we are to relate to it is not a simple task. The cultures of the Bible (both Old Testament and New) were radically different from our culture today and the debate surrounding Christianity and culture has been discussed for many years by theologians, philosophers and biblical scholars without consensus.

Second, actively engaging in our surrounding culture can be like sailing in treacherous waters. It is not without reason that the scriptures encourage us to some separation. Of course, one might argue that this simply is a call to a difference of values and practices, not relationship. Yet, at the same time, the sad pattern of the church has seemed to show that when the church and culture come close, the former seems to be more impacted than the latter (as Gallup polls regularly indicate).

A third difficulty lies in our apparent lack of discernment as to which issues to make a stand against and which to embrace. We do tend to "strain out gnats and swallow camels." On many issues which appear to be significantly important to the New Testament, the church today seems indistinguishable from its surrounding culture – even while we are voicing strong opposition to other things that seem as much symbolic as they are substantive. We are barring the gates without noticing that much of our protective walls have long since eroded and collapsed.

The purpose of this issue of the *Vineline* is to help us along this journey of understanding and constructive partnership with God's Kingdom, particularly as it relates to engaging our culture in the spirit of Jesus. Peter Davids and Casey Toews will help us grapple with the biblical issues involved. Peter will examine how Israel and the early church interacted with their various cultures. Casey will look at the apostle Paul's seemingly confrontational approach to culture and help us grapple with an appropriate application today.

Dan Wilt will challenge us toward a posture of engaging with our surrounding culture and Paul Johnston will challenge our paradigm of how different cultures put the gospel, the Good News of Jesus, into practice. We will also have practical articles that outline how we can be intentional about living our lives (both as individuals and as groups) in real, authentic relationship with those around us as well as other examples to inspire and encourage our efforts.

When all is said and done, we will not have conclusively answered all the questions. We do hope, though, that we will have made a difference in continuing the conversation. We also pray that this discussion will provoke us to action so that we become in greater measure the answer to our prayer, "May your Kingdom come, may your will be done here as it is in heaven." ○

Gary and Joy Best are the National Team Leaders of Vineyard Churches Canada and Gary is the Resource Director for Vineyard Resource Canada. You can buy Gary's book, [Naturally Supernatural](#), at www.naturallysupernatural.ca.

(Endnotes)

¹ See Derek Morpheu, *Breakthrough*, (Capetown: VIP, 1991)

² See N T Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, p.36)

³ This emphasis on the powerful potential of living our lives formed by the rule of God is an important theme in the emergent church movement. See Brian McClaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006) and Rick McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess: Practicing the Presence of the Kingdom of God*, (Portland: Multnomah Press, 2006)



PENNIES

by Steve Fix

Late in the winter of 2004, my daughter went with our youth pastor to Africa. She hung out with the kids in the Zimpeto Children's Centre in Maputo, Mozambique. They don't use "Orphanage" because all their children have a father in heaven. She was there about three weeks and it changed her life – she was fourteen. When she came home she was determined to go again. I thought I should go to see what had captured my little girl's heart, so preparations were made for us to go again, this time with a larger contingent from our church and others. We were to leave Aug 1, 2005, and would be gone one month.

As that date drew nearer I began to ponder what was in store for me, how this would impact me, what it was that God wanted to show me. Mozambique, I was told, was one of the poorest countries in world. I was not sure where Canada sat, but I knew if it was not the richest country it was certainly in the top five. As I pondered this dichotomy it was revealed to me that this was in no way a condemnation of Canada – we are blessed because God chooses to bless us – but it made me wonder what responsibility that blessing bestows on us. As part of this process it occurred to me that we (Canadians) are so wealthy that we actually have money that is of no value!

I speak of course of the penny. We have all seen the sign at the corner store above the little cup, "Have a penny leave a penny, need a penny take a penny." I asked myself when had I last stopped to pick up a penny

off the ground (...bad back you know). How often would cashiers make change so as not to charge me the one or two pennies needed to make a purchase? How often would they round up my sum to the nearest nickel assuming I did not want the pennies back? Nobody really cares about pennies; you can't even buy penny candy anymore.

It was at that moment that God revealed to me that he could do miracles with my castoffs. Not only could he do wonders with the exchange rate, but he would do miracles with what we don't want. I was resolved thereafter to collect my pennies. If I found a penny on the sidewalk I would pick it up, despite my back. If I made a purchase and I had the exact change in my pocket I would use bills so that I got change. If the clerk gave me change such that they did not charge me the pennies I would put a nickel to the pennies. That was my resolve and how I got started. I started about two months before we left for Mozambique and I had no idea what it would grow into.

Instantly I began finding all manner of coins everywhere. It didn't take long to begin dedicating all the change in my pocket at the end of the day to the pot. Then it hit me: imagine if we all did it. I was so excited. What if we all collected our castoff money for the Third World? I thought I would put a jar on the counter at my shop. This would be great. Almost as quickly as these thoughts came it was impressed upon me that I was not to put a jar in the office; this was for the church. The church was

to collect their “unwanted” money for the Third World. My vision was forming and it looked like this: I would speak to as many people as I could about collecting their pennies. I started with permission from my pastor to speak to our body, Harvest Vineyard.

With their blessing I prepared a small announcement which clarified some of the beauty of God’s plan. This plan included everyone from the age of three to one hundred and three, if they were on social assistance or making six figures, *everyone* could collect pennies. The first week brought a raft of children with bags of pennies they had been saving and provided wonderful teaching opportunities for the rest of us. One Sunday shortly after my pitch a young man in my Sunday school class expressed horror – he could not be seen to pick up pennies, people would think he was poor! But after explaining God’s purpose he thought he could endure picking up pennies.

I then was blessed to be able to make my pitch at two other vineyards in Edmonton. It was in essence, “I don’t care where you send your pennies. You collect them and I will commit to rolling them and converting them into usable currency. God wants you to give them to the poor and I think it should be in the Third World.” Both of those congregations warmly accepted the idea and began to collect coins, and I began to see the vision spread and the beauty of God’s plan unfold.

In the few short weeks before we left, those three congregations collected 97,500 pennies. I know because I rolled them,



1,950 rolls of pennies, \$975 Canadian. What a delight. I bought a case of soccer balls to take and the remaining cash I would distribute were I saw need. That was the beginning of the odyssey.

At the Children’s Centre I saw God’s love in a most spectacular way. Hundreds of orphans, from newborn to eighteen years of age, all caring for one another as God’s family with God’s love, but without parents. You could see that God’s love was apparent in their relationships. His healing was apparent in their lives in such a way that whatever they had suffered would be healed in that generation: they would know how to parent and how to love. I could only imagine how many generations of desolation they would have faced without God’s love and that place. It was incredible to see scores of boys and girls of all ages prostrate before the lord in worship, completely immersed in God’s love and full of faith in him as their father and provider, the kind of faith that comes from truly having nothing but God. ...but that is another story; this story is about the pennies...

Quickly, God showed us what he could do simply with the exchange rate. We were invited to see the Benjamin Project, which was an offshoot of the Children’s Centre. The Centre does not have room to keep adults, so once the children reach eighteen they must move on unless they are

kept on as staff. The difficult with this is that many still need parenting and skill training (the unemployment rate in Maputo is staggering). The Benjamin Project enabled about twelve young men to be housed, parented, loved, and trained. They had started two businesses so the participants could have employment at the end of their training. But about the pennies... We learned that the Project ran a church service for the neighbouring village and needed to build a sanctuary. They thought it would cost about \$2,500 to build their sanctuary. A few weeks of our pennies could supply a measurable percentage of the funds necessary to build their church. Wow!

We ended up dispersing those funds to a couple of areas of need in Mozambique, with the bulk going to the Benjamin Project. But God was just getting started. After seeing the need and how much of a difference we could make I was thrilled on my return to encourage our congregation to continue their efforts, and delighted to see God’s vision spreading.

A pastor of one of the congregations that adopted our cause weekly walked the streets in his neighborhood to pray for prostitutes and was seen picking up pennies off the sidewalk by one of the girls. She asked what the deal was, and he explained. She was delighted by the idea and said she would collect pennies, and have the other girls collect them as well. It seems that those girls come across great numbers of pennies because they are routinely pelted with them by people as they drive by.

A young man named Casey, who is the son of close family friends, needed to do community service hours for his grade six religion class. My wife told his mom about the pennies and he wondered if he could roll pennies for his hours. He got approval from his teacher and got started. Well, he started asking questions and he got the vision. First, he had several class mates rolling coins and before long had his whole school collecting coins.

When we were at Zimpeto, we met Pastor Domingos. He was in charge of the hospital ministry, assisted with the street ministry and routinely lead worship when ministry teams went to the dump. I got to know Domingos when I went with him to the hospital. We ministered in two wards, one with sick children who had a parent or guardian present, and the other with ill adults. After we had prayed for them all he took us to another



building on the hospital grounds. We climbed several flights of stairs to the top floor and when we arrived Domingos explained that we would now meet his children. He had adopted two children, both of whom had been abandoned in dumpsters, and both of whom had encephalitis, a disease that causes the brain to swell. Alfredo, a boy of three years, had a body the size of a one year old infant at best. His head was swollen the size of a large watermelon. It was so big he could not lift it; he was completely bed ridden, without speech or the ability to move very much. Lillie was an infant of about six months. Her condition had been caught much sooner, so her head was not swollen it just had a surgical intervention that allowed the swelling or pressure to drain off.

I was heartbroken by the sight of these two babies. They stayed together on a single bed, not a crib, in a room with five other beds with infants similarly afflicted. They were the only two sharing a bed and the other infants had their mothers. These two only had Domingos. I learned that Domingos attended to them every day, regardless of what his other duties were, stopping on his way to the hospital buying food, diapers and whatever else he could afford for the children. They slept on the same bed and were diapered in rags. Every time I saw them at the hospital they were soaked and their bed was soaked. Domingos would change them and change their bed. He would feed them – usually a little yogurt or banana – and leave disposable diapers if he had them. When I was there the second time, Lillie was quite fussy and we discovered the bottle he was using feed her had a nipple with a hole far too big for an infant. She couldn't cope and it was making her mad. Domingos didn't know the hole was too big for Lillie; he had never looked after an infant. He was only nineteen! ...Oh yes, the pennies...

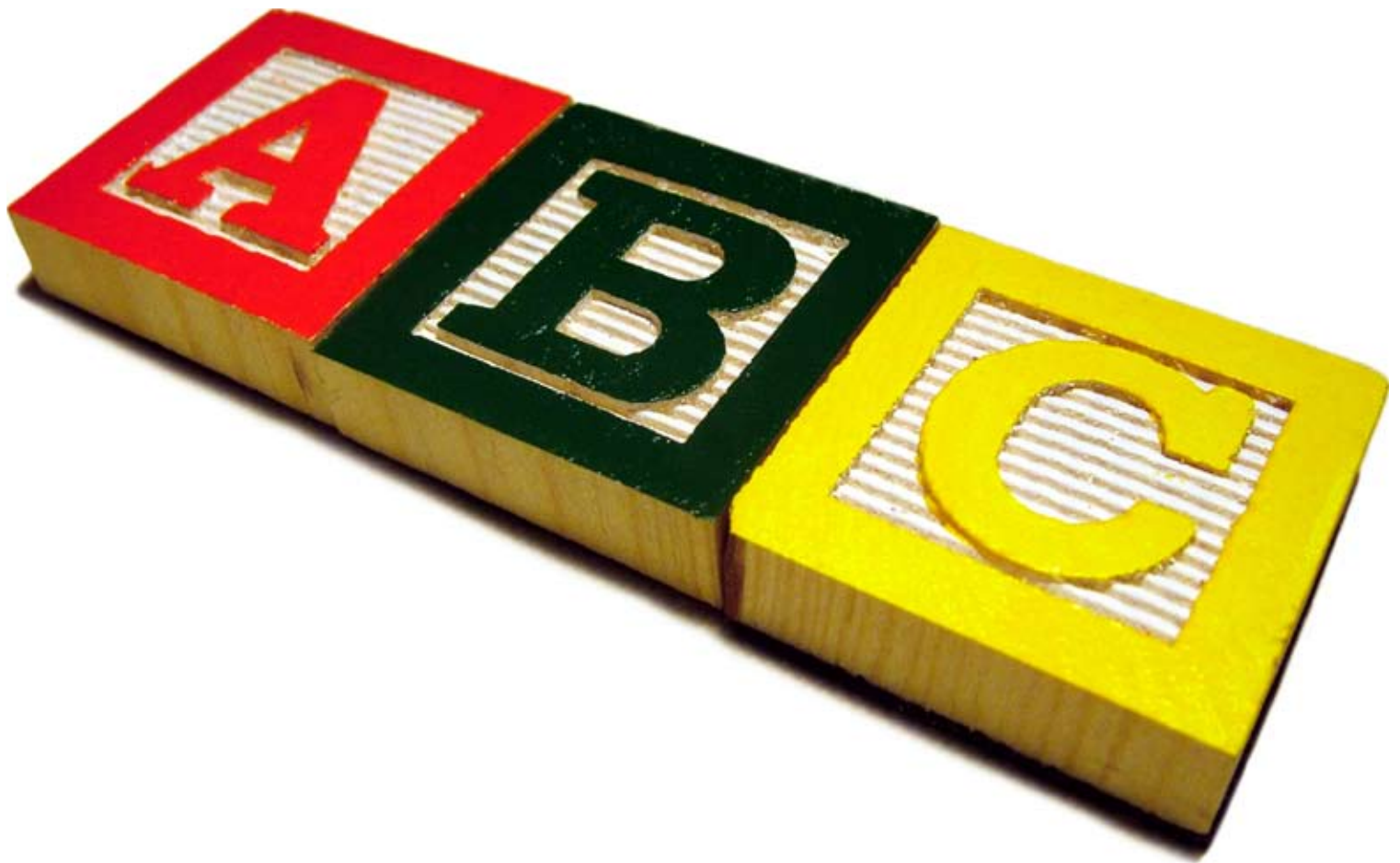
Before I left Africa, I told Dimingos I would do whatever I could for him and the babies. Not long after I arrived home Domingos emailed me and then called to say that he needed somewhere to live and raise the other children he had adopted. He had adopted three other boys – healthy boys – and they all needed a place to live. I was a little taken aback, but I serve an awesome God and I had said I would do whatever I could. I told him to give me a quote on the amount he thought it would cost to build a house for him and his children. He got back to me with a quote; I think it was about \$55,000,000 Medicals which is about \$2,200 Canadian, and in short order God provided enough coins to send that much money. I

suspected that his estimate, like most construction estimates, would be low... and it was. He purchased building materials and got started, but soon the money ran out. He thought he would need about double his original estimate. By this time we were in full swing and Casey told his teachers we were short of funds to finish the house. The school made a decision to divert their entire benevolence budget to the project. The house is now nearly complete. We have some dated pictures of the construction, framed copies of which hang in Casey's school. We were able to send funds so Domingos could also build a small store on his lot and are now sending money so he can stock it. He has a house with three bedrooms, a sitting room, a kitchen and a bathroom, where he can live and raise his children. He will soon have a store so he will have a source of income for his family.

I am not an accountant but I think we have sent a little over \$6,000 Canadian to Domingos for his house and his store. Costs to stock the store will add another \$1,000. That is a total of \$7,000 (not including the money we sent before Domingos' request, about another \$2,000) which isn't really a lot of money, but enough to change lives... enough to be a miracle. But the real miracle is the sense of joy and inclusion that the children of our congregations feel in making a difference in someone's life. The real miracle is Pastor Domingos' Sunday school class praying for Casey and his family and his school, and for me and my family and my church. The real miracle is in prostitutes catching the heart of Jesus to care for the poor. The miracle is how God changes so many lives.

I gave Casey a ride to hockey today. His dad passed away three years ago from leukemia and I like to help his mom with the load when I can. We talked about Africa. Casey wants to go. We decided we'd go next summer when he finishes grade eight. It is such a privilege to be a part of God's purpose in people's lives. ☉

Steve Fix lives in St. Albert, Alberta with his wife and four children. He is a member of Harvest Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Edmonton, has led a kinship there for 15 years and taught Sunday School for longer. Along with his family, Steve is involved with Mercy Ministries and particularly has a heart for Africa and it's people. He has a law practice in Edmonton and has been a criminal lawyer for over 15 years.



JUST BEGINNERS

by Walter Thiessen

A well-known Chinese proverb states: “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.” This expresses the crucial need to move beyond simple mercy or charity and incorporate a more developmental and educational approach to healing poverty and injustice.

Unfortunately education in itself is still not enough. We have to go beyond this and add another phrase: “Ensure that this man (or woman) is allowed to fish in peace where healthy fish are plentiful and he will truly thrive.” You may have noticed that it’s not as catchy. Adding the complexity of justice, peace and care for the environment to the equation can overwhelm us quite quickly, but without paying attention to these life or death matters, we may not be bearers of good news.

The Hebrew word, *shalom*, is the Old Testament way to bring all of these ideas together. *Shalom* summed up the holistic and integrated ideal of peace and prosperity among humanity, among all creation, and between the

created and the Creator. In the New Testament the vision of *shalom* becomes a part of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. The good news is that impossible as it may be to bring about *shalom* through our human efforts we can see the fruit of true *shalom*, in all of its aspects, enter our experience when we come together submitted to God’s kingship. This means that care for justice, peace and the environment are not optional parts of our mandate.

Integrating these concepts into our worship and life together is not easy, though. Voicing these concerns can quickly seem like wandering into vague abstractions on the one hand or like wading into political minefields on the other. And the frustrating part is that both of these are probably necessary. Understanding complex ideas are necessary in order to realize the indirect ways that we participate in oppressing the poor both near and far, and acting on some of these concerns will sometimes mean acting individually or corporately in controversial political affairs.

In a letter to American Christians, former United Methodist president and bishop in South Africa, Peter Storey, writes a challenging call that rings true for all of us in the Western world to act in spite of this complexity:

You have to expose, and confront, the great disconnect between the kindness, compassion and caring of most American people, and the ruthless way American power is experienced, directly and indirectly, by the poor of the earth. You have to help good people see how they have let their institutions do their sinning for them. This is not easy among people who really believe that their country does nothing but good, but it is necessary, not only for their future, but for us all.

But where do we start on this task of helping people to see that “they have let their institutions do their sinning for them”?

For a few years, I learned what does not work. Whether from a pulpit or with friends over

coffee, it doesn't work to toss out random complaints about what we're all doing wrong, seasoned with occasional invitations to consider buying fair trade or visiting websites that send food to the hungry simply by clicking on a banner. This kind of unfocused and scattered approach just makes it easier to slip into the cynicism and discouragement that are the easy temptations for most Christians who try to pay attention to the larger questions of social justice.

When I finally let my interest in these areas lead to forming a small group that focused on social justice, I began to see some things that do work. For most of a year a group of us met together, shared ideas and good books, studied Bible passages, watched films, wrote letters and planned activities.

The culmination of the year was planning a Sunday morning focusing on justice with a special communion service. After a brief introductory teaching we shared a communion meal that was reminiscent of the agape feast in 1 Corinthians 11, complete with inequalities. As a congregation we "feasted" in a way that was proportional to the way the wealth of the world is spread out. Two volunteers came up to the stage where they ate a restaurant-quality meal served by a waiter. Another small group of ten volunteers ate around a table at the front eating like typical middle class North Americans. A third of the remaining congregation were then given cups of rice and beans with a bit of tasty sauce – an adequate, sustaining diet. The rest were given cups with a small scoop of plain cooked rice. One young woman (intentionally) was overlooked completely. When everyone had their food, those who had full meals paused to join with all of us to share whatever they had as a communion remembering our unity in remembrance of Christ.

Following the communion prayer, various representatives of the different populations (planted in advance with short scripts and in some cases costumes) came up to give a short picture of their lives. Among them were a coffee bean grower, an African woman rescued by a relief organization, Cambodian children scrounging on a dump and finally my daughter, Cara – the young woman who received no food that morning and came up to tell us that as a result, like many young people around the globe, she died that day. We closed the service by sharing a page of ideas for how people could positively respond to the things they had heard and experienced that morning.

There is a natural resistance to becoming fully aware of justice issues. We don't want to be overwhelmed and discouraged. We don't want to feel guilty. We don't want to be confused by ideas we can't quite make sense of. We don't want to bring political conflicts into the church. In spite of this resistance that exists in most of us, that morning service seemed to initiate some real change. Here are some of the things that I learned in the process about addressing the complex issues of social justice:

Be systematic and sustained. Complex new ideas need to be built up piece by piece and repeated over time. The small group process allowed for a bunch of us to keep these issues in focus over a long period of time. Questions were raised and discussed. In a different way, the service also represented a more sustained and systematic presentation than most in the congregation had previously heard.

Speak as a group. When we're at all resistant to becoming conscious of a different way of thinking about things, we can easily write off the words of one person, even if that person is a pastor. When a whole group presents a different perspective, it becomes easier for us to be drawn into considering a new vantage point.

Speak to the senses. Especially for some personalities, ideas themselves are abstract and relatively powerless to move us toward action. Our service literally involved all of the senses, and different people referred to many different aspects of the service in terms of what touched them or stayed on their minds. I doubt that many people who were there that morning would forget what the main points of the day were.

Be positive and practical. While some of the facts and stories that we shared that morning were painful, we also shared success stories and gave out a page to take home of very practical ideas that were as simple as clicking on the internet or buying fair trade to simplifying one's life and donating the saved dollars to justice-related causes. Months later, we still are seeing the results of practical changes people began that day.

Integrate with other Kingdom activity. Integration happens in different ways. That Sunday, ideas related to justice and poverty were integrated throughout the worship service, but we also integrated the practical responses with more traditional missions work. Empty bottles were passed out that encouraged

people to collect change to buy livestock for families in northern Mozambique. A couple that we already supported in the area set this up for us, and the whole effort also helped fuel a surge of interest in missions among us. If such integration is not intentional, we will so easily end up where the larger church is at – with different factions representing different Kingdom emphases and few communities embodying a full and rich expression. Concerns for social justice need to remain woven together with concerns for personal faith and the healing of body and soul.

Astute readers may notice that the focus of our Sunday service was still centred more in mercy and development than in more complex matters of justice, peace and the environment. This is true. I see it as a small but significant step toward a holistic Biblical view of responding to poverty and injustice. The small group went a little deeper into justice concerns, but even there we were just beginners trying to see with slightly different lenses. But I think some of the things that we learned about the process will help us to continue the journey.

At present, I'm plotting next steps. I'm a lot more optimistic than the slightly cynical man I was before starting the justice group. I think the Vineyard, especially in Canada, has a foundation and a history that leaves us uniquely positioned to develop a truly integrated Kingdom approach. I also believe that the timing is right as the whole evangelical church seems to be growing in its awareness of social justice issues in ways that have integrity and depth. If we stay positive, integrated, practically relevant and avoid shallow political dichotomies, there could be exciting days ahead. ○

Walter lives in St. Stephen, NB where he teaches counselling and psychology courses at St. Stephen's University and maintains a private practice in marriage and family counselling. He and his wife, Carol, are associate pastors of the St. Croix Vineyard.

(Recommended Reading and Viewing)

The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical, Shane Claiborne (Zondervan)
The Upside-Down Kingdom, Donald B. Kraybill (Herald Press)
The Powers That Be, Walter Wink (Galilee Trade)
The Politics of Jesus, John Howard Yoder (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company)
The Corporation, directed by Mark Achbar (www.thecorporation.com)



HISTORICAL PAUL AND OUR EMERGING CULTURE

by Casey Toews

A portion of Canadian Vineyard's 2005–2006 National Gathering Commitment Statement focuses on the importance of the church's dynamic interaction with surrounding culture. There one finds the challenge to "purposefully initiate a fresh and biblical way of thinking about and relating to the culture(s) around us." Let's consider what a "biblical way of thinking" from a Pauline perspective might look like as it pertains to the cultural interaction of making disciples and sharing the good news.

Post-modernism has witnessed the birth of a whole new set of values, or perhaps this new set of values has birthed post-modernism. Either way, the Evangelical church and its mandate to make disciples and share the good news has not been impervious to the impact of this "ism" or its values. Only fifteen years ago, in my formal training for "the ministry" I was taught to be a power-dressing, sinless high priest offering seats in heaven like club memberships; sign on the dotted line and your in. The church building, I was told, was the "sanctuary," God's exclusive shrine, a holy of holies shielding the pure church from the unclean world outside

its walls. Fading is this presumptuous, misguided paradigm, shaped by some of the most regretful aspects of modern values. In its place is the emergence of a church which values the journey, which spreads the priesthood among the people, and releases God's presence out of the shrine into the coffee shops and school gymnasiums (the latter on a contractual basis only, with or without heat, holidays exclusive, and no black shoes please; they leave scuff marks).

This emerging church places value on journeying with a person and attaching importance to one's identity and life situation, rather than "saving" someone into a denominational creed, plan or agenda. Today, an initiate into Christianity is not just a convert, a statistic, or a sinner who is getting saved, but a spirit on a spiritual journey. I think it is fair to say that the Vineyard has heartedly embraced these emerging values and become a movement that hopes to respect each and every individual on equal terms, and welcome everyone regardless of their stage in the journey. Everybody gets to play, the un-churched included! So, in considering the church's relationship to surrounding culture, we

should first recognize that the Vineyard is already culturally relevant in its embracing of many of the post-modern tendencies so attractive to the emerging church. In contrast, what might a fresh, biblical, Pauline perspective look like?

If we hope to gain a biblical understanding of Paul's approach to his culture with regards to making disciples and sharing the good news, we must at the outset consider the first century world of sectarian Judaism from which he emerged. There were, in Paul's day, numerous sects. Just as Christianity today knows, for example, Baptist, Reformed, Pentecostal and Vineyard "expressions" (a subtle way of saying denominations), so too in Paul's day existed various expressions of Judaism. Pharisaic and Sadducean Judaism were likely the two largest, but we know also of other forms such as the Essenes, the Herodians and the Zealots, to name a few. In fact, in its initial phase, Christianity too was simply one more form of Judaism.

Paul emerged from this religious context. He converted out of Pharisaic Judaism into Christian Judaism (Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:5), a conversion which transformed Paul into the Apostle to the Gentile world (Galatians 2:9). The book of Acts details the unparalleled passion and enthusiasm Paul employed in his mandate to share the good news with the Gentiles. Over the course of three missionary journeys Paul evangelized many parts of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and Greece, hitting the major urban areas and sea ports along the way. Through the various letters Paul wrote, and Luke's accounts in Acts, we can abstract a picture of Paul's activity as apostle.

Paul would enter a city and set up his leather working business so that he would not be a financial burden to anyone (Acts 18:3; I Thessalonians 2:9). He would initially share the good news of his Christian Judaism at the local synagogue, sometimes with success (Acts 18:8), but typically with opposition, triggering a quick transition to his Gentile audiences in the market place (Acts 16:13-15). Paul would confront his audiences, and challenge them to repent and make a decision to believe in the Lord. Those willing to repent and believe were immediately initiated into the church through water baptism (Acts 16:33; I Corinthians 12:13).

This portrait of Paul's religious interaction with his culture fits nicely within the historical picture we have of first century Judaism: it was sectarian, and it was exclusive. Individuals existed outside the confines of a clearly defined sect, and could only enter that sect through formal initiation. Christian Judaism was no different, and Paul's brand required that candidates enter the church through faith in the Gospel message. Paul held the keys to the churches he planted. And though he carefully pointed out that his churches were Christ's churches and not Paul's churches (I Corinthians 1:12-13), he unashamedly confronted and challenged his audiences to convert to his brand of Christianity. His approach at times resulted in grief for him. He could describe his time with the Corinthian church as "painful" (II Corinthians 2:1), even threatening to discipline them without leniency (II Corinthians 13:2). Paul was provocative, resolved and confrontational.

Perhaps Paul's most consistent confrontation with his culture was his battle with the Judaizers, Jews who like Paul had become Christians, but unlike Paul believed that Gentile converts should follow all of the Jewish laws such as circumcision and purity regulations. We see in Galatians that Paul vehemently opposed this teaching (Galatians 5:2-6), and did not reserve his criticism for the Judaizers alone, but forwarded equally harsh admonishments to the Galatian believers who were so easily

duped into believing the Judaizing tendencies (Galatians 3:1). Paul was breaking new ground and despite the objections of his culture, he did not relent.

The controversy resulting in Paul's inclusion of Gentiles into his Christian brand of Judaism without enforcing stringent policies of legal traditions lead to him being called before the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 15). There he pleaded his case that the exclusive religion of Judaism was no longer exclusive, and was now open to Gentiles. The Christian apostles and elders of the council did not minimize the controversy Paul had stirred, but agreed with him that Gentiles should be permitted into Christian Judaism, only adding the stipulation that they must abstain from certain meat impurities and sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). Paul did not back down from cultural pressures, nor from the intimidation of the Jerusalem leaders who more closely associated with the original twelve disciples.

Because Paul was not one of the original disciples of Jesus the credibility of his apostolic authority was sometimes called into question. Paul would forcefully defend his apostolicity and his authority by pointing out that his ordination came from the risen Jesus himself, in reference to his conversion on the road to Damascus (Galatians 1:1). That encounter served for Paul as the basis for his apostleship, and he would not back down from opponents who attempted to undermine that status. He argued for his voice to be heard when those around him were trying to silence him, and even boldly cursed those who would proclaim a gospel contrary to his own (Galatians 1:8-9).

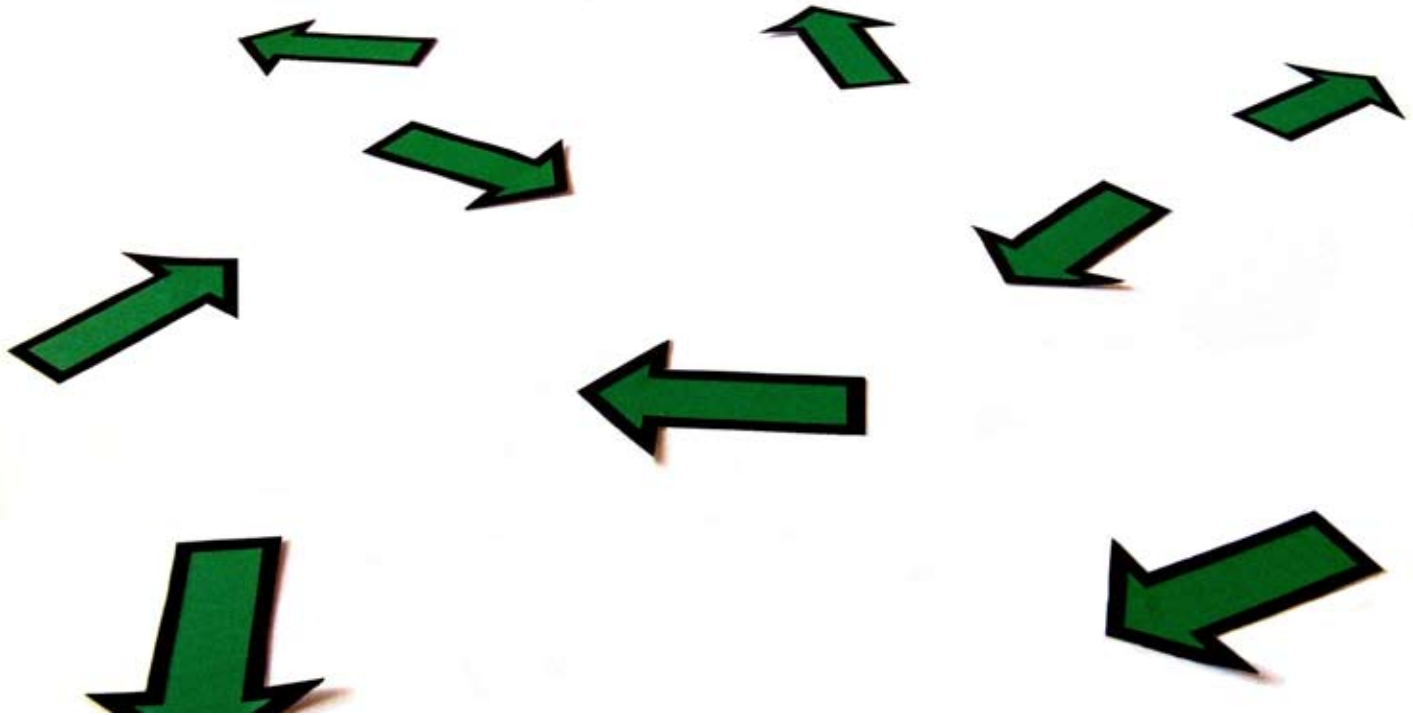
A striking observation of Paul's bold interaction with his culture is that despite always being confident, convincing and sure of his opinion, he was not always right. We see this in the extreme nature of his eschatological teaching, where his enthusiasm for the Lord's soon return resulted in some shortsightedness. It appears that the occasion for the writing of I Thessalonians, what may be Paul's earliest letter, was to reassure the church in Thessalonica that, despite the fact some from their community had died, they had not inadvertently missed the return of the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:13-14). Their fear likely arose from Paul teaching them that Christ was going to return so quickly that it would surely transpire in their lifetime, before they died.

We see a similar shortsightedness in Paul's instructions regarding marriage in I Corinthians chapter seven. There, Paul instructs that it is preferable for a man not to marry (I Corinthians 7:1), for the unmarried and widows to remain single (I Corinthians 7:8), as well as the virgins (I Corinthians 7:25-26), each a direct contradiction of God's Genesis mandate to procreate. Why would Paul so radically modify his Judaism? Because, according to Paul, the "time is short," so it would hardly make sense to devote one's attention to procreation when the Lord was going to return any moment (I Corinthians 7:29). In hindsight we can see how Paul's enthusiasm forced his eschatology slightly off course. We can not know for certain how, in the latter part of his life, he felt about these oversights, but there is no evidence to suggest this caused him to second-guess his calling. To the contrary, we see in Romans, perhaps one of the last letters he wrote near the end of his ministry, a Paul still passionately enthusiastic about his calling, and longing to expand his work even further.

A fact often overlooked by readers of Romans is its occasion. Paul wanted to share the good news with the Spaniards. Because Spain was so much further west than any of his previous journeys, and so very

far from his headquarters in Antioch, he needed a strategy. So, Paul concocts a plan that involves using the church in Rome as his base of operations. However, Paul did not plant the church in Rome, so he had no guarantee that the Romans would receive him or support his plan. His doubt would be due, in no small part, to the controversy surrounding him and its marring of his reputation. So rather than merely asking Rome for help (Romans 15:23-24), he crafted a long letter to the Romans

to the Lord's return. Jesus is preparing to come back with blessings and curses in hand, and we really do not know when that is. We have to ask ourselves in the meantime whether some of our emerging tendencies are too passive, too pluralistic, and too polite, lacking courage and conviction. Have we become too afraid to assert our faith, that the path to Jesus is called "the Way," and that we have a pretty good idea where it is?



as a greeting that served to set the record straight regarding who he was and what he believed. We do not know whether Paul ever made it to Spain, but we see here, near the end of his race, that Paul was still very passionate and still dreaming for more, despite the controversy, struggles, pains and opposition characteristic of his confrontation with the world he tried so desperately to share the good news with.

These examples from Paul's interaction with his culture reveal that Paul, far from humbly walking alongside individuals at various stages of their journey into the church, was very focused, driven and passionate about instantaneously converting outsiders into the church, and admonishing conformity among those already in the church. Against this context of confrontation and challenge we recall the current emerging church, and the widespread appeal it enjoys today for all the opposite reasons; it respects one's journey, comes alongside, listens, and waits. How then can Paul contribute to our challenge to "purposefully initiate a fresh and biblical way of thinking about and relating to the culture(s) around us" when his approach appears so abrasive against the context of the emerging culture around us?

Perhaps Paul's contribution can be his example, an Apostle who, despite all forms of challenges, pains, opposition and misgivings, did not compromise his message for the sake of cultural values. He passionately confronted his culture of Judaism and even transformed it. He valued his calling to share good news, make converts and build churches as a way of life, and nothing held him back. Perhaps we can continue to value our emergent tendencies while being reminded through Paul that there is an element of immediacy and confrontation in God's Kingdom. I refer here

Paul is one who prioritized Kingdom life in all aspects that resulted in a relentless passion to forcefully challenge people into Christian conversion and Christ-centered spirituality. Perhaps today we can combine the attractiveness of the emergent church with the passions of Paul. Perhaps we can confront for change while valuing and respecting the unique life situation and journey each individual brings to the table. The Vineyard, with a heritage of "partnering with Jesus," is ideally suited for a kind of Kingdom Ministry that is both confrontational yet sensitive, one which demonstrates a passion to challenge the global community to Christian conversion and discipleship while manifesting in power a clairvoyant and supernatural sensitivity and respect for each person's life journey. ○

Casey Toews teaches in the Religious Studies department at Trinity Western University and conducts research for a Bible software company. He and his wife Karen, along with their three boys attend North Langley Vineyard where Casey is involved with teaching the Bible on Sunday mornings and in focus groups. His passion is to equip himself and others with the skills and knowledge necessary to read and understand what the biblical authors originally intended to communicate.

(Recommended Reading)

The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, Bart D. Ehrman (Oxford University Press)



BUILDING BRIDGES

by Judi Pottage

Being 55 certainly has some benefits! I grew up in a time when (and a family in which) it seemed like everyone knew their neighbours and it wasn't too big of a deal. In fact, people even made conversation with (you may be shocked by this) the store clerk and found that he or she was interesting to talk to.

When I was a child, I thought like a child – I thought every day was an adventure, that every neighbour had the most interesting family and that laughter came easily at everyone's house. Cousins would try anything ... once!! Grandparents were always there. No matter where you lived, grandparents would come and make it a fun place, even if we were living in a tent. Everyone I knew lived with their mom AND dad. Everyone I knew shared their house with relatives, missionaries and sometimes strangers – especially when we lived on Indian reserves. Aboriginal people shared even more than we did, and my family respected and learned from them. Small towns, northern reserves, big city life... everything was an adventure and every neighbour had a story.

Likely this is not a big newsflash to any of you that are near my age – most of us knew our neighbours and liked them, even if they were “messy” neighbours. We weren't afraid of many people. We just thought, “Sheesh! We simply need to help them (and figure out how to make it look like it was their idea!)” Nowadays we call that kind of thing giving people dignity.

I remember very distinctly the first time I met kids who didn't have a dad because he had died. I remember the first time I met someone who had a divorce and another with a family member in jail. And I remember being astonished about how this could happen in “normal” families.

No matter how much I read and hear and discuss...it blows my mind how much life has changed. Life just does not seem to be simple anymore. We love our fences and our call display phones. We demand privacy and boundaries. We love our holy huddles and we are a bit afraid of knowing what goes on in our neighbour's hearts and homes. I often wonder,

“What must God be thinking when he looks at this picture?” Who would he tell us is our neighbour? How do we fall in love with our neighbours and our neighbourhood?

My world has been turned upside down more than once, but I would like to tell you about an experience that blew apart my boundaries and taught me a new kind of love for my community.

I married a good man in 1969. We were ever so young, but we grew up together, had two amazing sons and had 31 years of adventure together – including discovering the Vineyard.

In 1999 my husband and I decided to move from a small town in Alberta to Edmonton. The decision took a while and had some painful ups and downs, but we pretty much knew it was God leading us so we had to trust him with the rollercoaster ride. We were attending Harvest Vineyard at the time, which was almost a two hour drive away. They were thinking about locating in Beverly (North East Edmonton), and we were pretty near beside ourselves with excitement over this. My husband, Keith, had lived in Beverly and knew first hand how tough the blue collar area could be, but loved it. He had attended Lawton Jr. High in Beverly and he had a few scars to prove it.

The church was looking for an available meeting space to rent and...you guessed it...we began meeting in Lawton Jr. High (and are still there). The very day the leadership announced the final decision to move we drove around Beverly praying, laughing, and weeping and found ourselves a condo to rent.

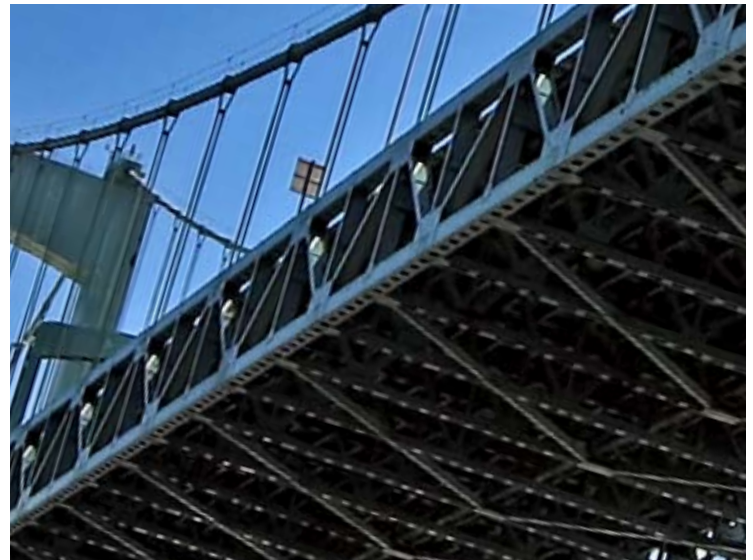
As we moved into the condo, we began to meet our neighbours. Keith fixed kid's bikes, did little puppet shows over the fence, rescued kites and drove a school bus. We both had such fun working with the kids at

and dreaming about ministry when Keith passed away very suddenly from a massive heart attack.

Some of you know may know this kind of pain; you know what I mean when I say it can't be described. The closest I could come would be to say that I felt as if someone had shot me with a cannon or like waking up not knowing who I was. I couldn't even figure out how to answer the phone or the doorbell, so for a while my sister did that for me. Somehow I walked through each day. I, my sons, our extended families and our church family grieved hard. I know that God was near, although at the time I couldn't feel him or feel *anything* – and I mean zero. I just rode on wings of other people's prayers.

Some of the children from Harvest Vineyard painted a large poster of “Mr. K” leaping into heaven. They gave it to me at my husband's funeral and it hung in my living room for months. It was a huge poster, about 7 feet high and 4 feet wide. In one corner was the earth, and in the other corner was God and heaven all full of glitter. Mr. K's face was covered in glitter and he was leaping with arms outstretched to his heavenly Father.

This poster did much more than comfort me, it became a very important bridge to our community. Children stopped by to ask for Mr. K. They needed help with this or that – but I was useless. I would look in the



Harvest Vineyard and getting to know the kids in our neighbourhood. Soon Harvest asked him to come on staff part time.

It was quite an incredible time. Keith had just been asked to join the Harvest Vineyard staff working with children, we were living close to our sons – both married – who also lived in Edmonton, and our first grandchild was born. We were still settling into our new house and city

garage for a screwdriver and the kids would end up having to help me. They would be so excited about what to me were just a bunch of stupid tools! Anyway, slowly but surely, I let kids into my life and heart. They wanted to hear every detail about how Mr. K. had died: how he looked before he died, how he looked after, how he felt, etc. They asked difficult questions, but it was very good for me to talk about it (and good for them to have someone answer their questions honestly) in spite of the emotional cost it required. I often felt ticked off inside, so after the kids left I would have a “mad hatter” talk with God – he didn't seem to take it too hard. He kept sending me kids asking questions.

These discussions became a bridge into the lives of the kids that my husband had begun investing in. They saw the poster, they really wanted to know about heaven. A lot of kids had experienced death in their families but weren't free to talk about it. In talking with them I found out that many had experienced the suicide of a family member... and I heard a lot of pain.

And in the middle of all this, Heaven came down; God came and met with us. A lot of kids asked Jesus into their hearts. I figured out that by sharing my pain and talking about hard stuff that kids would do the same with me. And then I had to figure out what to say to their parents. I began sending notes to the parents inviting them over for tea. I was welcoming these kids into my home and I didn't want them thinking I was some sort of whacko – the kind of person that parents are supposed to warn their kids about. Thinking back, I guess those notes were like little bridges into the lives of the kids families.

Three little boys used to come and pick through my garbage. They were very interested in a bug collection and they thought that my garbage was a good place to find them. At first we talked about bugs over the fence, then they suggested that maybe we should have a bug club (yikes!) ... another bridge was built.



I had a garden and some kids that came over had never seen one. It, too, became a bridge. One of my neighbours thought he was the king of composting, so I started a composting group and it became another bridge.

There were three little sisters who liked to wear high heels and have tea parties. Their clothes were as tattered as any you might see in a commercial soliciting donations for the Third World, but we put on lipstick and drank out of my china teacups (some of those cups hadn't been used since I got them as shower presents in 1969). One day I wrote a note to their parents asking if I could take them to a craft store. Their parents wrote back saying, "Yes!" and those girls were the most excited girls that I have ever seen. We drove to another part of the city where the craft store was located, and when we got to the bridge they became very still. One of them said, "We have never driven over a bridge before." That statement, that moment in time, made a lasting mark.

I started to have passion light up again, passion that I thought had died with my husband. I really had thought it couldn't happen, but it did. I absolutely loved each child that came into my yard; I was falling in love with the families and the neighbourhood. One day, Ruth and Don Rousu, the pastors of Harvest Vineyard, talked to me about coming on staff. This was unbelievable because I thought I had been riding on Keith's "calling". I didn't really think I had a whole lot to offer, but I did know that something was happening inside and it sure did feel like God. I began

to pour out my heart to the Father for the many fatherless kids in the community and, as passion for my neighbours grew, my grief began to feel sweeter.

Some people from Harvest Vineyard had been doing prayer walks around the community. I started too – well, it was more like a prayer crawl. The



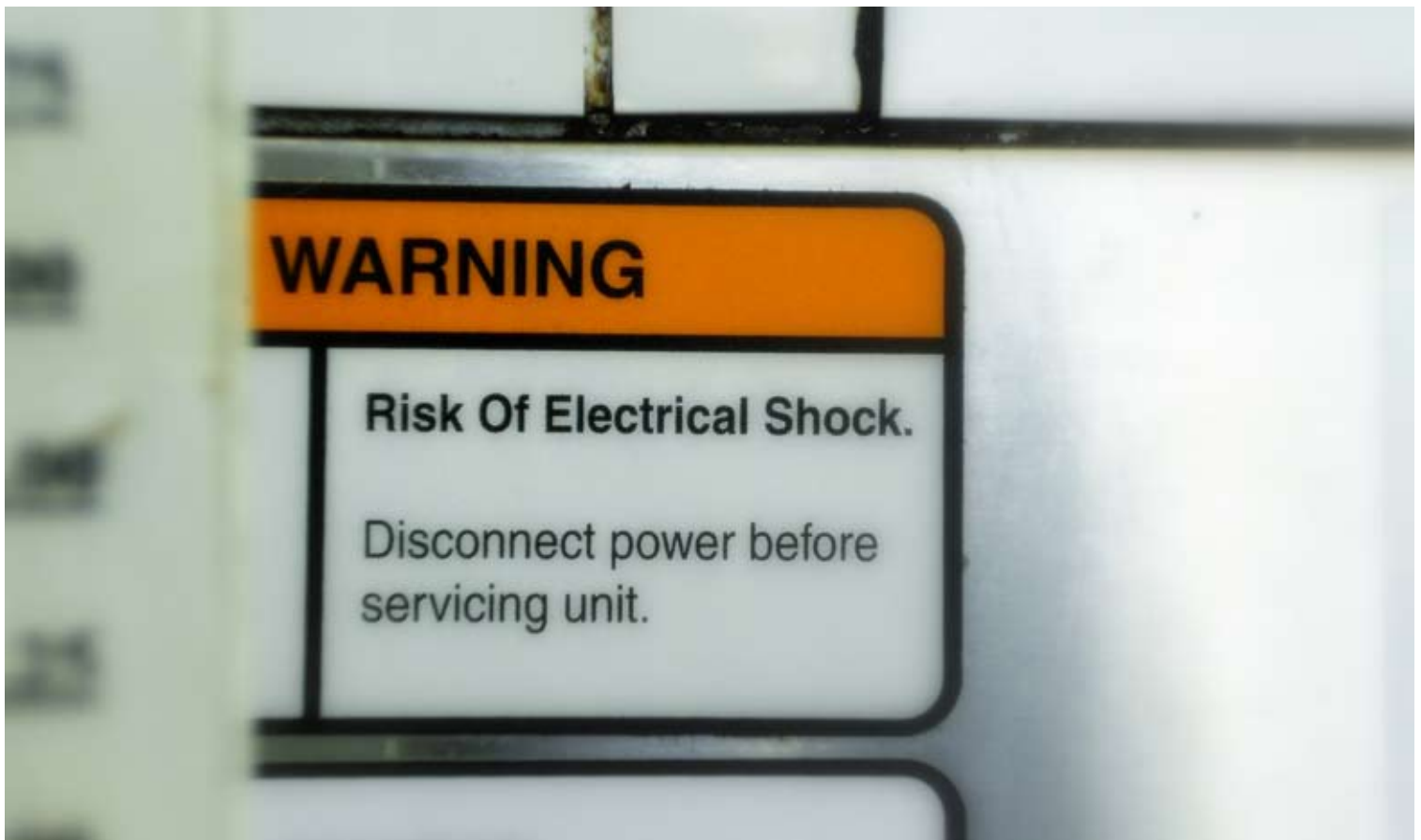
first thing I did was clean my back alley, mostly on my knees. Weeding, planting, watering, sweeping and praying. The alley seemed to be the longest one in Edmonton and when it was done it needed to be done again. Most days kids helped, but some kids ripped out the flowers. I prayed and thought about all their anger... and the passion grew.

And it still grows. Relationships at times have been good and I have seen God at work in the land of the living. Other times relationships have been hard and expensive.

It's kind of like building a bridge. The groundwork seemed to take forever. Sometimes the workers are excited, sometimes the workers are tired, grubby and sore... yet, there is that moment when the work is completed and our voices join with an amazed little girl's voice saying, "We have never driven over a bridge before."

Lord, give us the courage to build strong and lasting bridges to our neighbours, bridges where we can walk safely together and meet with you. ☉

Judy Pottage is the Children's Pastor at Harvest Vineyard Church and reaches out to the communities of Beverly and Rundle Heights through her puppet clubs and food deliveries. Each year she organizes a summer day camp for kids called "Tool Time". She is happily remarried to Wes Pottage, a realtor in Edmonton and an old friend. Judy is a grandmother to seven of the smartest and most beautiful children on the face of the earth.



A CASE OF CULTURE SHOCK

by Paul Johnston

The world is changing at a remarkable pace, so too should our understanding of what church needs to be as we seek to communicate the timeless message of hope and salvation that the gospel brings! What would a change in our understanding look like? How would we react to someone stating that they were a “Muslim follower of Jesus”? Does it make those little hairs on the back of our necks tingle with uncertainty? Does that feeling of “righteous truth” rise up within us and cry out for the long held tradition of “making a commitment” to Jesus?

In the fall of 2005, five of us from North Langley Vineyard went on a trip to Beirut, Lebanon. Our purpose was to visit and encourage one of our international workers (we’ll call her “Janet”) who has the pleasure of living each day in community with both Lebanese and Palestinian peoples in Beirut. Janet works for a non-profit organization whose mission, gleaned from the front page of their website, is as follows:

According to the United Nations, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in the worst conditions of poverty and overcrowding in the world.¹ Most Palestinians living there fled from their home country in 1948 and – unable to obtain Lebanese citizenship or work in most jobs – have lived in limbo ever since.

Our commitment is to bring glory to God as we work among the poorest of the poor in this place.

Janet and her fellow team members seek to live out their mission, by “building reconciling communities that empower the poor and oppressed.”

One of the major paradoxes we faced in Lebanon was the concept of people of the Muslim faith being followers of Jesus. “How could that be?” we asked ourselves, and to be honest some of us were more comfortable with the concept than others (It’s a topic that since has gotten me into some pretty hot water with

other Christians). OK, but when did they get saved? When did they make a “commitment”? Do they still go to the mosque? Unfortunately these were some of the more *reasonable* questions that have been asked. This kind of paradox stretches the fabric of our concepts of Christianity and salvation and, like a loose thread in a sweater, we are often afraid to tug on that thread not knowing if it will continue to unravel until there is nothing left.

The funny thing is, in the swirl of literature surrounding the whole topic of the emerging church we see how things are changing rapidly, yet paradoxically nothing has really changed at all. Think of the whole beginnings of the early church. First there was the church in Jerusalem – in simplistic terms, a bunch of Jewish Christians. How challenging was it for them to be called Jewish followers of Jesus? Then comes this guy, Paul, who has the audacity to challenge the Jewish followers of Jesus to take the Gospel to the *Gentiles* (for goodness sakes, what would be next?). Surely we must see that the predominant issue in this struggle was not

primarily one of theology (right thinking about God) but rather a clash of culture. Consider in this context a “Muslim follower of Jesus”. Is it really that different? I recognize that this issue is not as simple as I have just laid out. Just as in the days of the early church, there is much to grapple with and explore, but we must be comfortable living in the tension of the question rather than quickly jumping to answers simply based on our cultural grid (recognizing that our theology also will always be affected by that cultural grid).

Lebanon changed me; it confronted what I believed. Well, maybe not so much *what* I believed but definitely the *way* I believed it. I remember having a conversation with Janet about planting a community of faith in Beirut, “Can you imagine a Vineyard Church in the Middle East?” I was pontificating about how excited I was to see such a thing happen and just maybe to be an active part in seeing it realized. Janet looked at me as we sat in Starbucks having a coffee on one of her recent visits back. I could see the frustration on her face expressing the fact that I was obviously not getting it. “Paul, what are you talking about? ‘...excited to see a community of faith in Lebanon.’ Its already there!” Instantly I knew I had missed it completely. Just because it didn’t look like what I imagined it should, I couldn’t see what was already there. There *is* a group of multi-national people who are pioneering a unique community of faith in Southern Beirut. I, on the other hand, had visions of Palestinians and Lebanese people getting together to sing “Faithful One” and have a Caucasian North American teach and minister in a westernized format. In many ways my perspective was quite similar to that of the early Jewish Christians as they outlined their expectations to Paul as to what salvation and church for the Gentiles needed to look like: converts had to be circumcised, judaized and in every other way “ized” before being accepted into the fold.

On the whole issue of salvation, I am one of those people (as are most baby-boomer Christians, I would expect) who has a fixed date of salvation on which I said the sinners prayer (which carries with it the appropriate “fire insurance” of course). How accurate of a concept is that? With hindsight and considering my personal journey, I can see that I “get saved” each and every day I open my eyes. Dare I say that even before I knew God in the traditional sense, he knew me and I knew him. How? I don’t know; I just did. It was never as simple as making a commitment. It was, and is, process oriented – like all relationships are.

In the 1990’s I was a worship leader in a small church in Banbridge, Northern Ireland. My electric guitar player and keyboard player, both incredible musicians, were not “saved” as such but in a process of getting to know God. I got into so much trouble for using them on a team, even to the point of having the obligatory visit from the eldership team and senior pastor. Thankfully they were open enough to working with me, but wow did we push each other to the brink at times! There were others, especially worship people, who were horrified at the very thought of “tainting the worship team with the unsaved”. (Some of you may identify with those sentiments.) Let me complete the story... Simeon and Ding have changed lives and are active members of their faith communities to this day. Are they perfect? No, but then again, neither are we.

Does this idea of living with people in process have its dangers? Big time! On another occasion I had a different electric guitar player who was also in the process of getting to know God. The difficulty was that he began to hit on another married member of our team. It was scary at times, difficult to handle, and in fact resulted in the team being broken up. It isn’t necessarily easy to live with people in process, but it is right. Jesus didn’t demand that Zacchaeus change his unjust professional practices, he simply invited himself over to his place. Again, can we live in the tension of culture shock as people trade the culture of this world for a Kingdom culture, which isn’t necessarily a North American “Christian” culture? Have we got room for people in process within our churches? How do we not only invite them in to our “place,” but like Jesus invite ourselves over to be their guests as well?

For large parts of our history (including the present) we have expected culture to come to us. What if “church” were to look radically different from our present norm? How can we actively engage our culture, take church to our culture? On the one hand, it needs to be very different. Our strategic intent must be that of looking outward, seeking out places for others to experience what love does outside of the safe harbor of our meetings. On the other hand, it’s the same as it always been. The culture of the first century was widely diverse and challenging, yet the gospel thrived as the Kingdom was lived and experienced (notice I didn’t say “believed”?). How did it thrive? Could it be because the followers of Jesus actively engaged with the surrounding culture, lived in it and not apart from it and brought Jesus to their culture?

It would be easy to rationalize an excuse and simply point to either the geographical distance between Canada and Lebanon or dialogue about the distinct cultural differences between the West and the East in our story and end up doing nothing. Most of us could prolong the debate indefinitely, going back and forth on issues such as what is cultural sensitivity and what are the biblical requirements for salvation or other such issues. In my opinion this would be an exercise in “missing the point”. There is a clash of culture occurring in our own back yard. It is not an exaggeration to say that church, as *we know it*, sits on the precarious precipice of extinction. Let’s be clear: The message is still the same, Jesus is the same – yesterday, today and forever – but if we are to impact our global village we must look at how we can gain the ears of the culture in order that they might hear the message of hope and deliverance they so desperately need.

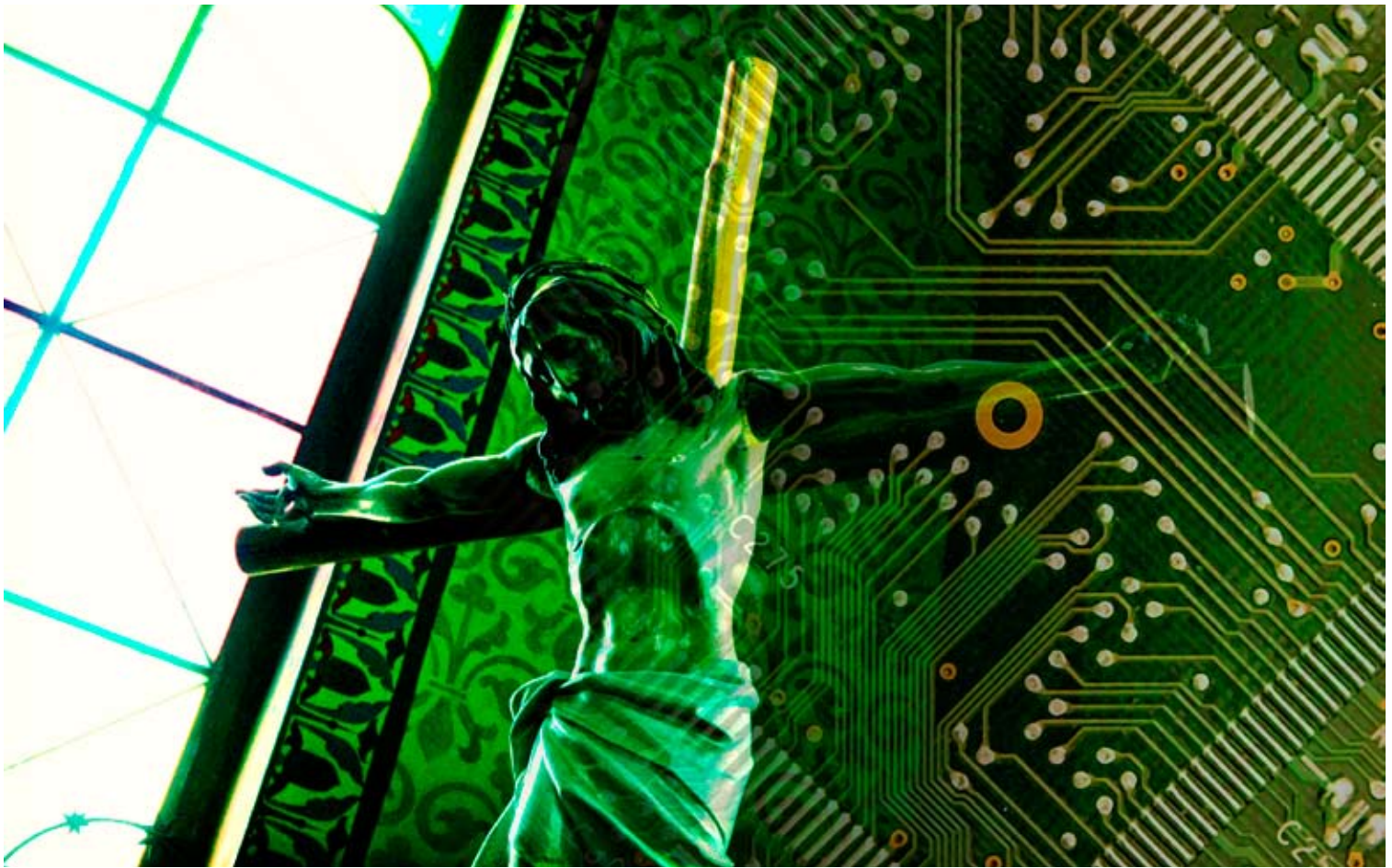
Perhaps what I have written will ruffle some feathers. This article is written not from a place of having all the answers, but rather from a place of recognizing how locked into our own cultural mindset we tend to be to the exclusion of what we could be. It is written neither from the point of biblical scholarship nor biblical theology. I have deliberately resisted the temptation to drop in Bible verses as a sort of proof text to prove any point. Sometimes I feel our movement has become an incredibly safe harbor (which is good and right in many ways), but I don’t believe we have ever been called to be “safe” where that safety impedes us from pioneering ahead, enhancing the Kingdom as we go. My encouragement to us all is to really dwell in the tension of being prepared to step out from the safety of the walls of the church and into people’s cultures, lives and homes – people who are in a process of getting to know Jesus more (as *we all are*). ☉

I would be really pleased to dialogue on any of the issues above, feel free to drop me a line at johnstons@shaw.ca.

(Endnotes)

¹ www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/lebanon.html

Paul is originally from Belfast in N. Ireland and had the pleasure of marrying a Dublin girl, Alison. Paul & Alison immigrated to Canada in 1997 and have been part of the Vineyard family since that time. Both Paul and Alison serve as part of the North Langley Vineyard leadership team, Paul also leads worship at the evening congregation at NLV.



CULTURE CONTACT: THE INTERFACE OF CHRISTIANS & CULTURE ¹

by Dan Wilt

What Is The Relationship Of Christ To Culture?

In his now famous work, *Christ And Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr timelessly captures the tensions that Christians face anytime we crack open the topic of the Christian's interface with culture.

"A many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization is being carried on in our time. Historians and theologians, statesmen and churchmen, Catholics and Protestants, Christians and anti-Christians participate in it. It is carried on publicly by opposing parties and privately in the conflicts of conscience. Sometimes it is concentrated on special issues, such as those of the place of Christian faith in general education or of Christian ethics in economic life. Sometimes it deals with broad questions of the church's responsibility for social order or of the need for a new separation of Christ's followers from the world....

Christ's answer to the problem of human culture is one thing, Christian answers are another; yet his followers are assured that he uses their various works in accomplishing his own....

...Christ as Lord is answering the question in the totality of history and life in a fashion which transcends the wisdom of all his

interpreters yet employs their partial insights and their necessary conflicts."²

In other words, as human beings we are engaged in a historical process along with the rest of humankind. We will wrestle with each other over truth and, in the end, hopefully find that we each brought something to the tussle that strengthened both parties. Niebuhr goes on to declare that neither complete rejection of culture, nor unthinking embrace of culture, will in the end suffice as tenable modes in which to live out the life of Christ in the world. Rather, it is in the arena of *engagement* with culture that we not only bring the transforming presence of Jesus to the world, but we also find our interactive home. Vibrant (and in my mind, biblical) Christianity engages culture on the levels of language, creativity, business, education, media and government – and subverts worldviews in the process.

The "homeland" of the believer is where it seemed to be for Jesus: on the borderlands of contemporary culture, where the most current questions of the human spirit are both heard and listened to, and are then met with the even more beautiful questions of faith. Questions are indeed the stuff of wonder, and if Jesus is content to be both the greatest Answer and the most profound Question at the same time, then we are at our best when his mystery is on the same playing field as the questions of

the age. In other words, the Church was built for speed, made to dwell on these borderlands – Christ and culture, heaven and earth, one hand in Kingdom community and one hand out in the broader community of culture. Culture is *our* land, shared with our human family; it does not belong to another.

To illustrate, I offer a personal story. A few years ago, I had a unique experience at the edge of a cliff in New Zealand. Our guide had taken us to see one of the highest sea cliffs in the country, on a blustery day. Seeing the possible view that awaited me, I desperately wanted to snap a picture looking straight down over the precipice. Mingled with my sense of adventure was a clear call for wisdom – windy days and sharp overhangs do not a safe combination make!

Sensing my lack of confidence, a wise friend suggested, “Why don’t you crawl to the edge?” With this advice, I could see the vista I so wanted to capture, yet do so in a way that protected me from potential harm. It was humbling, but I went to the edge tethered to my friends and grounded on the soil beneath me. I captured the view, but in the humblest of postures.

In many ways, we as the Church variously respond to “the edge” as well. Some of us have heard there is a beautiful view to be seen where Christ and culture meet head on – and redemption wins the day. Others of us choose the safety of community, tradition and familiarity, over the temptation to see a fresh view. Still others of us attempt the edge with boldness and even arrogance, and have found the edge to be a precarious place of death and destruction. The challenge for the contemporary Church is to see the revelatory vista waiting for us, and yet to do so in humility, tethered to the historic Church community and the theological anchor of the scriptures. The edge is a tenuous and unforgiving place, but it seems to be the place where Jesus and his disciples lived. This edge of engagement with culture requires discernment, and is a necessary part of impacting the world with the good news of the Kingdom of God.

What Is The Church In Culture?

The Kingdom of God, according to the scriptures, transcends time, space, human culture and church subculture. The Church was born when Jesus, freshly inaugurating the inbreaking Kingdom of God among us, gave cosmic re-birth to the people of God, within culture. The eternal Kingdom of God was now proximate and within our temporal reach. An eternal Kingdom with no borders of time nor space – the everlasting, ever-present rule and reign of God the King – came among us in Jesus Christ. That inbreaking Kingdom has been eternally existent, but now, in fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures, was embodied on earth in the Messianic visitation of Christ. I interject here that Jesus was not an Anglican, Catholic or Charismatic. He was not a Baptist, Methodist or Orthodox adherent. He was not American, British, African or Asian. Jesus was a Jew, and as a Jew inaugurated the fullness of the visitation of the Kingdom of God on earth according to the Hebrew story of humanity.

While some of the Jews at the time searched for a King who was a political/spiritual revolutionary, Jesus came on the scene as a prophetic/spiritual revolutionary.³ In his coming, he was declaring that Israel’s exile was finished, and that God was fulfilling the great Jewish hope of God’s rule and reign being established once and for all on earth.⁴ Thrust into the very heart of the culture of his day, having been raised in its environs, Jesus secured the freedom of the human heart from rebellion, sin and

death. He engaged the cultural images, idioms and stories of his day in order to enlist both the hearts and minds of his hearers. Then, having engaged the whole person and the whole community, he powerfully subverted their misguided value system.⁵ Piercing the soul of both Jewish culture and Roman culture, he became our bridge, our living reconnection with the Father. His work by his Holy Spirit is to redeem the human person to his glory and ultimate honor.

We as the Church are the community of his empowered followers. The Church is his redemptive agent in human culture – his Kingdom “virus” in the world. We are co-missioned with him to transform every person we touch by the power of Christ living within us – through all the creative means he has given to us. Jesus is the Mighty Leader of the Church Triumphant. Such truths should lead us, even as they are leading me now, to pause in ecstatic thanksgiving and adoring worship.

Who Are Christians In Culture?

As Kingdom people within culture, we are part of both a human family (culture) and a covenant family (the Church).⁶ From a Genesis point of view, all human beings are the flower of creation, the ImageBearers⁷ and lead worshipers of the created order.⁸ The human family’s intended role was to reflect God’s love, justice and good government into the created order, and then to reflect the praise of all creation back to God. Created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*, we were designed to be a vessel of beauty like no other.⁹ Reflecting the very nature and character of God into the world, we had the privileged place of children given a glorious inheritance. When Adam and Eve decided to breach their relationship with God in their quest to be more than Earth’s “stewards,” the world fell into shadow.¹⁰ In that moment, the *imago Dei* within us became shattered, blemished, stained and polluted – words akin to the Old Testament concepts of clean and unclean, holy and common.¹¹ When the new Adam stepped onto terra firma, he invited those who had “ears to hear,” to enter back into covenant relationship with God. Jesus sealed this covenant with his own blood, breaking the powers of sin and death in the process. As C.S. Lewis put it in his Chronicles of Narnia series, “time began to work backward.”

As Christians, we are simply those human beings who have decided to become apprentices to Jesus, reborn in nature and being renewed day by day by his Spirit living within. Christians are those who have heard the restored Eden’s song, are responding to its call, and are joining with the Holy Spirit in awakening others to the sound. Part of both a broken human family and a transcendent Kingdom family, we are being renewed day by day – moving from “image to likeness.”¹²

Human culture, like its parentage, is then a strange mix of beauty (we all weep when a baby is born before us, or a firefighter courageously risks his own life to save another), and of brokenness (we are indisputably bent toward all manners of self-absorption, self-fulfillment and diverted worship).¹³ In God’s economy, there is but *one* world, now blemished, stained and corrupted unto decay, which provides a home for a polluted culture born of blemished ImageBearers. There are not two worlds in the biblical economy, called sacred and secular.¹⁴ The one world we call our present home is – by the choice of mankind in Eden – a broken and shattered version of its original self.

If our cultural anthropology is even remotely correct, the Church has a few high liberties in this sacred, yet fallen world:

We may be fully human, and embrace our glory and our brokenness.

We may (and must) participate in culture and take our place at the roundtable of cultural discussion.

We may enjoy beauty no matter where it's been born (and yet do so in Pauline spirit as he addressed the "food sacrificed to idols issue" for the Corinthian church).¹⁵

We may discerningly use the ideas and art of culture in our most heartfelt truth renderings celebrating God's glory, redemptions, justice, social formation, friendship, love, the authority of the scriptures, the mysteries of faith, wonder and even human experience; in all forums of life on planet earth.

We may joyfully live within culture, yet without ultimately finding our citizenship within it.¹⁶

We may (and should) participate in culture and express God's heart in all spheres of cultural formation.

We may stand against the tides of distorted human culture,¹⁷ and we may rejoice in the elements of love, truth and beauty still residual within it.

Our songs, our music, our art, our work, our play and our love, must point through humankind to God.

Where Do The Church And Culture Intersect?

If the biblical story tells us that the Kingdom of God has been eternally existent, and exists both within time and space, and beyond time and space, then we come to another conclusion. *Culture unwittingly exists within the same Story.* In other words, human culture was born into an already existing atmosphere – in which God was, is, and will be King. God is sovereign in ultimate rule and authority over culture. John Stott in his great work *The Contemporary Christian*, states it this way:

"There is a sense in which to confess 'Jesus is Lord' is to acknowledge him as Lord of society, even of those societies or segments of society which do not explicitly acknowledge his lordship."¹⁸

In other words:

A) The Church Is Part Of Culture.

The people of God, celebrating the victory of God, do so within culture. The Church is truly an integral component of human culture, and human culture is an integral component of what it means to be the Church. Just as we cannot ultimately "separate" oxygen from the molecules that make up water without changing the water to something other than it is, we cannot utterly separate the Church and culture.

Though there are Kingdoms in conflict, we cannot utterly dismiss the fact that *all* of culture is *not* evil, and not *all* of church subculture is *good*. In fact, on many levels our culture is a part of us all, and shapes much of what we find to be beautiful in life. Mind you, we have tried to make a hard split between the Church and culture, at least philosophically, and Plato and his heirs have aided us on a futile quest. Does this shrink the

Church to the size of popular culture? No. Just as the Kingdom of God is far bigger than human culture, the Church also has the capacity to transcend human culture by its connection to the larger experience of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, we must transcend human culture to be set free from its idolatries.

B) The Church Is Beyond Culture.

To worship is to live with God within, and beyond, the world we know. As believers, *we are people who are part of culture*, and are yet beyond culture. There is something about the Church that lives in culture as a fish in the ocean, yet there is also something about the Church that transcends culture and can breathe outside of its environs. Our eyes reflect the green of the sod and the blue of the sky in the same moment. Born of earthly dust and divine breath, we are becoming familiar with the terrains of both earth and heaven. Being now born of God, we remain saturated with our culture, but are not essentially born of culture any longer.¹⁹ We are *in* the world, but not fully of it.

"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you" (John 15:19).

John 17:15 reminds us that we are indeed in culture, and that he did not intend for us to be removed from the world as we know it.

"I have given them Your word. The world hated them because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world. I am not praying that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, as I am not of the world" (John 17:14-16).

Our feet touch the ground when we walk, just as Jesus' feet did. We consider where our next meal is coming from, and we do our best to make it through hard days just like everyone else. So, how are we different? We begin to understand the answer to this question from passages such as John 18:36:

"My kingdom is not of this world," said Jesus. 'If My kingdom were of this world, My helpers would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. As it is, *My kingdom does not have its origin here* (italics mine)" (John 18:36).

C) The Church Is Culture In Renewal.

We are Kingdom people within culture. Our new identity begins and ends with the Kingdom of God – not with our birth origin, national spirit or spirit of the age. We rely on God, and we focus our lives on a sacred style of living in the world that puts God at the beginning, middle and end of our every choice and action. As we live in this unique way in culture, we embody that culture as renewed by God. In other words, as the hearts of the people of God are redeemed, so are the cultural expressions of art, music, leadership, community and family that flow from us. As our wills are bent to his we are "mankind in microcosm," increasingly taking our proper place in the Grand Story. We are not the Center of that Grand Story, but we do have a majestic part to play in a sacred plot that will culminate in Edenic celebration. In this sense, the Church is invited to lead the way in various aspects of human culture, and Christians should sharpen their skills to credibly celebrate and challenge the culture of our day.²⁰ ○

(Endnotes)

¹This article is excerpted from a chapter Dan has written for Broadman Holman Publishers for their forthcoming book, *Perspectives On Worship: Five Views*. Dan notes that this article is written in a far more left-brained way than he would prefer to write, but trusts you will be forgiving.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ And Culture* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1951), 1-2.

³N.T. Wright, *Jesus And The Victory Of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 150.

⁴Ibid., 172.

⁵Ibid., 369.

⁶Dr. Peter Davids, Personal Interview, Fall 2004.

⁷Genesis 1:26-27. The term “ImageBearers” is my own, formulated for a chapel presentation on the nature of the artist called “Quest For Eden” to convene the Arts Festival of Heritage Baptist College and Seminary (Cambridge, Ontario, Canada) in March 2004.

⁸In a personal interview at Westminster Abbey with this author on the topic of contemporary worship (Spring 2004), N.T. (Tom) Wright put this theme in this way: “If you go back to Genesis 1, the task of the human beings made in God’s image is to reflect God into the world. I see the ‘image bearing-ness’ in terms of an angled mirror. If you imagine God looking down, and being reflected by this angled mirror into the rest of creation and likewise, the rest of creation being reflected back to God, that reveals something about what human beings are here for. We are to be God’s wise stewards looking after creation, but also gathering up everything that the creation has been doing, and to come and present it before God.”

⁹The doctrine of the *imago Dei* is a fundamental, Christian anthropological belief. It would be important to note here that there is disagreement over the essential idea of the *imago Dei* in humankind, and many scholars believe this concept primarily, or solely, refers to our vice-regent, vocational stewardship status as God’s caretakers on earth. This idea is strongly supported as one studies other ancient Near Eastern origins narratives, particularly those of Egypt. In accord with tradition, experience, and other passages in the biblical narrative, I would take this idea further. The word used for “image” in the case of Gen. 1:26-27 (cited above) is the Hebrew word “tselem.” Its literal meaning is “image, likeness (of resemblance).” The inference of the Hebrew word is that of progeny reflecting a parents nature, as in a child being made “in the image” of their parent. In Gen. 5:3, one of the few other Old Testament verses using this word *tselem*, we are told that “Adam was 130 years old when he fathered [a child] in his likeness, according to his image (ed. ‘tselem’), and named him Seth.” If we allow experience to weigh in, something more dramatic than simple “stewardship” is going on behind the eyes of a human being. Something of a divine ilk seems to be at work as we love, play, sing, work and even walk out our brokenness.

¹⁰“Fell into shadow” is a beautiful Tolkien-ism, and a wonderful imagining of the cosmological crisis of Genesis.

¹¹There is neither space nor time in this chapter to fully engage these questions, which demand a much fuller treatment. The writings of

authors such as Dallas Willard, John Eldredge, Eugene Peterson and others have greatly contributed to the contemporary dialogue on these pivotal anthropological topics.

¹²This phrase is that of a friend, Dr. Peter Fitch of St. Stephen’s University in New Brunswick, Canada.

¹³For a fuller treatment of this, see the notes of my address to the Vineyard worship leaders of the United Kingdom at a retreat in 2003, entitled *Sacred:Style*, at www.vineyard.ca/resources/Vineyard_90.pdf

¹⁴Sproul, *Lifeviews*, 33-34. “Historically, the word secular is a positive word in the Christian’s vocabulary. The church has always had a good view of that which was regarded as secular.... The word secular has its origins and its roots in the Latin language and comes from the word *saeculum* which means ‘world.’ The secular priest is one who ministers in the world.... The secular refers then to this world in this time. Its point of focus is *here and now*.”

¹⁵1 Corinthians 8:1-8.

¹⁶Philippians 3:20.

¹⁷Pope John Paul II has been a wonderful example of cultural confrontation, particularly in his stands related to the dignity of human life. At his funeral on Friday, April 8, 2005, it was clear that cultures and their kings, prime ministers and presidents were profoundly impacted, even though in stark disagreement ideologically, by the Pope’s firm moral convictions.

¹⁸John R. W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press 1992), 94.

¹⁹John 3:3-8; 8:23.

²⁰In many ways, the adversarial posture the Church has often taken toward culture has caused us to abdicate our place at the roundtable of cultural discussion. Many of today’s Christian leaders, artists and influencers are enthusiastically taking their place once again in society, and shaping key aspects of life in communities around the world.

Dan Wilt is the Director of the Institute Of Contemporary & Emerging Worship Studies in partnership with St. Stephen’s University in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, and is an internationally respected communicator, worship leader, songwriter, author and trainer. Dan also serves as the Worship Development Coordinator for Vineyard Churches Canada, as the editor of Inside Worship magazine, and as the worship and youth coordinator for the St. Croix Vineyard. Dan, his wife Anita, and their three children, Anna, Abigail and Benjamin make their home in St. Stephen, New Brunswick.



THE ENEMY

by Greg Peter

You have seen the enemy. The men are usually bearded with olive skin and dark eyes. The women cover their dark hair and some veil everything except their eyes.

They take centre stage on our televisions all day long. Their faces are transposed next to ominous words like “terrorism” and “jihad.” Machine guns wave in the air and fists are raised in defiance.

The West has declared war. I suppose we are hoping to scare terror away. God-fearing politicians from both sides of the border are sending sons and daughters to keep peace in lands where peace is a stranger. When our

generals speak of hunting, human beings are the prey.

Some of us pray for an end to war. We plead for peace and cry out for our camouflaged children to come home. Home is where we can lock our doors and ignore the enemy who just moved in across the street.

My enemy is only a little over five feet tall, mostly bald, and bearded in the way of his people. His eyes are a warm brown color, like his skin, and he rarely stops smiling.

A friend of ours met him on a tour of the mosque where he worships, Masjid El-Nour.

The Mosque of Light is an old church on a small city lot surrounded by office towers and a few tall trees. The cross is gone and the building is painted in varying shades of Islamic green.

My enemy runs a weekend school in the basement. Children sit cross-legged on the floor where the former faithful once gathered for tea, coffee and fellowship. The children strive valiantly to master the flowing Arabic script of the Holy Koran and are rewarded with a warm smile.

It was here that my wife and I first learned from my enemy. I sat on the floor and struggled to identify the rabbit on the cue card as “ar-nub”

instead of “ai-nub” for grape. The children laughed at their overgrown peer but my enemy was patient.

Later we talked of religion and of the differences between us. Over a plate of fried chicken, my enemy and I made a vow. It was his wish that we would always be friends, even if he remained a Muslim until death.

During the week, he teaches Koran, Arabic, and Islamic Studies at a local private school. When I completed university, my enemy invited me to teach there with him, an answer to my wife’s prayers. Before my interview, he spoke with each of the board members. I know it was on his reputation that I was received.

We spent many happy hours in my enemy’s home. His smiling wife welcomed us in and we were mobbed by his children. We sat on the floor around a large platter of savory offerings. He broke the bread and we spoke of marriage, family, and children.

At work, I learned that I had much to learn about teaching. My enemy became my model. He stilled the storm in my classroom whenever he entered, without a single word. The students feared him and loved him.

Our hearts were drawn to my enemy and to his nation. My wife and I left for his country the following year. We found ourselves alone in a sea of olive faces and sand. We were the enemy there.

Our isolation did not survive the first walk through our new neighborhood. Children playing on the street brought us to their home for supper. We sat on mats in the courtyard and I stumbled through my first conversation in Arabic.

When was the last time I had welcomed in a stranger from the street or an alien from the far side of our earthly orb? Perhaps we were merely entertainment, or symbols of a wealthier world. Or perhaps they were loving their enemy when they placed a cup of cold water in my sweaty, white hands.

We went to my enemy’s village, a place he had not seen since his younger years. It was a paradise of date palms, shining white walls, and lanes spread with golden sand. His brothers welcomed me like a brother and we sat at a wedding feast. My wife worked with the women to prepare the evening meal and spoke with them of village life and a son sent into exile.

Coming home to the West, we were overwhelmed by the sin in our streets, on our screens, and in our hearts. I returned to my position at the private school. Working for the enemy felt a little like sanctuary now, a place where skin and seduction was not commonplace. Your own culture is never so exposed as when you’ve left it for a time. Is a culture dominated by a false religion truly more lost than one that has wandered so far from the truth it once proclaimed?

We talked often of God, my enemy and I. He had visited a church before, an alien among us then, hungry for food and friendship. He spoke of how the church had offered shelter, sustenance, and education – to all who accepted their teaching. My enemy could not be bought.

I saw the hollowness of my own religion in the mirror of my enemy’s faith. He gave me a cassette on which a man spoke with the same persuasive passion that black Baptist preachers use on Sunday morning television. At a fundraising dinner, an Islamic Dr. Dobson lectured with authority on the importance of family. Later, a Muslim theologian proved the inerrancy of his scripture beyond a reasonable doubt.

I understood that much of my own faith rested on our holy trinity of apologists, theologians, and passionate preachers. My enemy believed his experts and I believed mine. Had either of us poured over the closely guarded parchments that we both claimed as the unshakeable foundations of our respective beliefs? Would either of us dedicate the years of research needed to gain first-hand knowledge of our ancient scrolls?

Had either of us the time, in the brief span of our lives, or the strength, in our finite minds, to prove the very nature of our unfathomable God? Is it any wonder that my enemy is not so easily convinced by my carefully crafted arguments, my outstanding morals, or the angelic sincerity on my shining face?

What hope was there for my enemy? I could offer him no answers. In all of my studies, in all of the thick volumes that littered my library shelves, there was nothing on which I would stake even my own eternity. They were simply the words of other men, confident in their own dependence on those who came before.

And yet I believed! I believed with a faith so deep that it grew when the shallow pool of my

understanding lay parched and dry beneath the burning sun of reason. The Spirit, of whom I could not speak without contradiction, confirmed in me what I could not know.

Had my enemy ever known such faith? I could only hope that the Father would speak through my stuttering, reach through my trembling hands, and shine out through my blind eyes. I could only pray that the Son would call to my enemy’s heart in his own quiet way.

My enemy died last fall.

He was still a young man, full of life and laughter and love. I stood in the rain and wind as his body was lowered into the earth. He was wrapped only in a simple sheet, in the way of his people. Once again, I found myself adrift in a sea of foreign faces, dark with grief. We huddled together for warmth, my enemies and I.

I don’t know if he remembered my words before he died or if he said the prayer. I do know that, in many ways, he had understood a little of the Father’s heart. Where that leaves him now, I don’t need to know. My peace of mind is not important.

I do not need to motivate myself with guilt. I haven’t made my profession into a pulpit. In my own strength, there is nothing I can say that will save the souls of the students I stand before everyday.

What would I have done if I had known? What would I have said if the wind had whispered the imminence of his passing in my ear?

I have only one regret – that I did not love him more. ☉

Greg Peter continues to teach at the private school mentioned in this article. He and his wife, Rebekka, are part of a church plant that intentionally reaches out to people from other cultures in response to the Father’s heart for foreigners among us. He loves to follow his wife when she visits recent immigrants to their community. God has given her a key to the homes and hearts of these families. Rebekka gave birth to their first child in March. His name is Adoniah, which means, “my Lord is God.” They were able to share the news of this impending birth with their friend before his death.



TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS

Jordan & Pam Gagner interviewed by Jon Best

[Jordan and Pam are some of the best people I know at helping people meet Jesus. Talk to any new believer in their congregation and the odds are pretty good that they know the Gagners quite well, and in fact are there because they invited them. Jordan and Pam are very involved in both their community and their church, and I wanted to ask them how they achieved that balance. I hope that some of their saltiness and lightness rubs off on us. Let the Kingdom come!]

Jon - What is the impetus behind your desire to build the kind of relationships that impact people with the good news and how did you learn how to do it?

Pam - I think for us the main reason that we began building those types of relationships with people is that we grew up in non-Christian homes. When we became Christians it was just so meaningful that we wanted everyone we knew to know Jesus too.

When you have such a large number of friends and family who don't know Jesus like we did, you just can't expect them to see the change right away or understand it, so you have to live it out in a way, not necessarily that they'll accept, but that impacts them. We were under a microscope when we became Christians. All our friends were watching how we would change. So, for instance, we would still have a glass of wine with friends at lunch. We were careful not to be legalistic on things, so that we would be able to share our faith not reject people with trite responses like, "Well, we don't drink anymore because we know Jesus." We've always wanted to be real. People don't really scare us so it didn't matter if they were party animals or intellectuals, we wanted to reach them.

Jordan - It's not something that we we're proud of, but we were heavy partiers. Every Saturday night was a bottle of hard stuff at a friend's house where we would stay up to all hours of

the morning, just partying and having fun. So when we became Christians, we continued to have those parties but have them in a different way. We'd still hang out with our friends and when someone would ask if we wanted a shooter we'd say, "No thanks. I had a beer; I'm good." So our lifestyle changed, but we weren't going to reject everybody. The nature of those evenings definitely changed and the relationships, after dipping for a bit, got even better. It was very important to us not to suddenly ostracize our friends, but in fact to live out a genuine faith *with* them.

Pam - Now, most of the people we used to party with have become Christians. One couple even became pastors in our previous church!

It's always been our hearts' desire to make sure we don't forget our non-Christian friends, so we just can't imagine not trying to meet new friends that don't know Jesus. That's just how we're wired, and I'm sure it's because we came

to know him a bit later in life. When you've been forgiven much, you forgive much. When you know from how deep you've been pulled, you want to go out there and be a cog in helping other people get pulled from the same depth.

Jordan - I wrote something in my Bible that Gary Best said: "Act as if the story [of the Good News] is true." If you don't believe the story is true then you won't be out trying to build friendships with people, but if you firmly believe that the story is true then you are compelled to go out and build community with people. And it can't be made up; it has to be genuine. You have to truly believe that the story is true. And if it's true then it's true for everyone that we meet. So let's just go find a bunch of people that we can hang out with. The burden isn't on us to make the gospel attractive, we simply have to be in the presence of people and if we are living properly the Holy Spirit will make it attractive to them. We aren't perfect, but we find that the key is to be faithful to be in relationships where people can see that the story is true.

Pam - And the older we get the easier it gets because, for our friends that don't know Jesus, life gets harder and harder. I don't know how people live without Jesus or how marriages survive. It seems the older we get the bigger our need for Jesus gets.

Jordan - Mark Wollenberg, our pastor, once asked, "Are you hanging out with people that "good Christians" aren't supposed to hang out with? Those are the right people! They are the people that Jesus would hang out with." We have one of those friends... He used to be an exotic dancer, and now drives around in a Hummer. He's all bling, bling, with a heart of gold, but he doesn't know Jesus yet. In some ways he's everything wrong...but he's everything right. We've got the best friendship and always have great talks even though his beliefs mix a little bit of Jesus and a bit of the Dalai Lama and a little bit of Oprah.

Recently, he was invited by his bookkeeper to church (she was using him in a sermon illustration and invited him to come and listen) and he went... and liked it! Also, he needed an assistant so I recommended a Christian friend of ours, and she's now working for him full time. You know it is just a matter of time before he gives his life to Jesus. It is so great to look back and see all the people that have had a hand in helping him step towards Jesus, each of us joining God in what he's doing.

I think that's the DNA of the Vineyard isn't it? The whole idea of having your eyes open to see where God is working, listening and asking, "What are you doing?" It isn't something that we learned on our own, it has been lived out and modelled by our leaders for the last 7 - 8 years.

Jon - How does being relationally focused work for you as a family? Have your kids caught your heart for sharing Jesus with the people around them?

Jordan - Since we've had kids, a lot of our relational connections have come through them. They love sports, so we connect with lots of other people by being involved with sports. We always pray before going to a game or practice. I tell the kids to remember that people know you are a Christian by how you're treating them...so it's in our vocabulary.

Pam - I really see a difference between our kids that know they're loved by God and kids that don't. I notice it in how they talk and how they treat people, especially their elders. They know Jesus loves them and they love Jesus and they want to please him; it changes everything. We try to teach our kids that we are all missionaries in whatever we are doing, that we are always a witness for Jesus, either a good one or a bad one. We're always evangelising even if we aren't giving them the gospel. We can be Jesus to people in what we say and what we do, so as a family we look for ways to do that.

I think they are learning to be friends to others. For instance, Landon, our oldest, had trouble relating to one of the neighbourhood kids at the end of our street. Then last year Landon went through a rough time for a couple of weeks in school. He had 3 really good friends but for a time was the odd one out. We talked with him explaining that he could still be a friend to others, that he could use this experience to know how it feels for others to be on the outside. And we thank God for that experience because it opened his eyes to see the boy down the street and how he gets picked on at school. Before Landon didn't have time for him because he couldn't relate, but now he has time for him. The other day, they stormed into the kitchen asking me to help resolve a disagreement they were having about Jesus. So Landon has gotten really good about talking to his friends. Brady has always had a major heart for people. He is our family's Billy Graham.

This is Landon's last year at Pacific Academy [a private Christian school], so he'll be going to the public High School. A friend of ours is going to gather a sending team for him like our church does for missionaries, so he knows he gets to be a light in his school.

Jon - Are you intentional about meeting and spending time with your neighbours?

Pam - When we moved to Walnut Grove, into a townhouse complex, the community there was fabulous. We were the first ones in, so we'd walk down the street and pray over the buildings. We fell in love with a lot of the new neighbours. The first 8 people to move in on that street are still dear friends. One couple has come to know the Lord, and we are hoping that the rest will with time. So that neighbourhood experience was great. We'd go to take out the garbage and come back in 30 minutes later...but I loved that community. Where we live now is nice, but it is more work because the neighbours are farther away.

Jordan - When we moved we did go and meet our neighbours. And I want to have a block party this summer and invite them over for a BBQ. But we don't just focus on the people close to our home, the neighbours we spend time with could come from our own neighbourhood or across the city, it doesn't matter. It depends more on who we feel we should spend time with.

Jon - How do you intentionally spend time building relationship with people outside the church?

Jordan - Well, I don't know if this qualifies, but I'm intentional about being on the board of directors for Langley Lacrosse and about coaching the lacrosse teams for our two boys. I've been intentional about starting the first High School football program in Langley and being the head football coach at HD Stafford Secondary School. So, to me that is being intentional about building non-Christian relationships.

Pam - After games, especially when the weather gets nice in the summer, we invite people back to our house for a BBQ and a swim in the pool (that's the reason that we put it in).

Jordan - Another thing we do is run a football camp here in the summer. We take 20 kids and watch NFL videotape and run drills in the morning and teach biblically based life skills in the afternoon. We don't preach from the



Bible, but the kids know we are Christians. In one of the lessons Pam gives every kid a tube of toothpaste and says that she will give \$20 to anyone that can squeeze out the toothpaste and get every drop back into the tube. The kids love this challenge, and are of course covered with toothpaste afterwards. The object lesson is that once your words are out of your mouth you can never stuff them back again. You can use words that will hurt or words that will heal. You decide which ones you will use. Parents love the life skills they learn in the second half of the day just as much as the football skills they learn in the morning.

Jon - So are you saying that, as opposed to coming with a big plan or agenda for evangelism, you simply enter into the spheres of relationship that you already have and ask, "Who has an open heart? What can I share with the people around me?"

Jordan - Exactly! It's about building friendships and seeing what God will do. For example, I approached the Langley School Board about starting a High School football program. Now, I'm the football coach at Stafford, so I have the keys to the school. I have my whistle and can walk up and down the hallways any time I want. Everyone knows me as coach. I get to partner with Landon in changing people's lives in this school. And Pam is on the PAC (Parents' Advisory Committee).

Pam - I'm going to be on the PAC. It's so neat when you get involved. You get opportunities to impact people. For example, because Jordan is the football coach, he was given permission to teach the abstinence section of Sex Education. And we are getting involved with Young Life, which reaches out to the High School kids.

Jon - It sounds like you have pretty busy lives. How do you set appropriate boundaries and live with a realistic schedule, balancing work, family, church, friendship and everything else?

Jordan - Sometimes we'll go to bed at night, turn to each other and say, "No more entertaining for a while!" Sometimes in the summer it seems like we are having one family over after another. It's good for a season, but you can't do that all the time.

Pam - Now that we are on the Young Life committee and I'm on the PAC, we just make sure they don't line up too much. We're very careful about the balance. When it gets a little heavy we pull back on the entertaining. When the meetings subside we do a bit more entertaining, but you're building relationships in all the different things.

We know we must make Jesus our priority but at the same time we know we're not to neglect our family, so we're very careful that when we reach out that we're doing it as a family. We're not going to spend 7 days a week out in the streets evangelizing and having someone else raise our kids. We are very conscious of making sure that our kids are included and that they learn how to reach out. They're young, and we know that a lot of their beliefs are still our beliefs, but we are trying to show them how to be Jesus to people and have them experience that for themselves.

Jon - The two most common excuses long time church goers give for not sharing Jesus with the non-Christians they have relationship with are that they know any non-Christians and that they are too busy. How have you made sharing the good news a priority in your life?

Jordan - I think if I were speaking to those people then I would say, "Find ways to leverage both the things you are already doing and the non-Christians you find there. So, go build friendships while you are coaching lacrosse, or go build friendships while you are at the gym." Some people would say that they don't have time to build community with non-Christians, that they have to go coach... Well, what a prime opportunity to build relationship with

non-Christians, while you're coaching. Right? So I think it is really just a paradigm shift to see the things that you are busy doing as ministry opportunities. That's God's heart. You may be cleverly disguised as a football coach, but really you are God's Kingdom agent, evangelising with your words and actions. Busyness is always an issue, but in terms of not having relationships to be able to build, you just have to have your eyes wide open in your extra-curricular activities.

Pam - We actually dropped homegroup for about a year because we were connected enough being a part of the leadership team and mentoring other couples that taking up one more evening wouldn't leave us with any time outside of church activities. We always try to make sure that we are reaching one hand into church and one hand outside of it. When we finished the couples mentoring program, we were glad to get back into homegroup and connect in that way and probably won't mentor another couple for a while. So we're always trying to balance where we spend our time.

Because I work in a Christian school and a lot of our friends are Christians we have to be very conscious of who we are spending our time with. A little while ago I remember Jordan saying, "We're spending a lot of time with Christians... it's time to start inviting our non-Christian friends over." Jordan is a good barometer for that. It is a challenge because we have so many good friends, Christian or not, that we don't get to connect with often because we're busy with family and there are only 7 days in a week. We just try to make sure there is balance.

Jordan - It's become easy for me to build relationship with someone. Now the challenge is to then have the bridge conversation. "You're here. There's a chasm, you need to get to the other side and there's a bridge that gets you there." I've become comfortable in relationship with non-Christians. I have to push the envelope to have the deeper conversations with them. The tendency is to just to be friends and that's ok, but there has to be times where the rubber meets the road. I have to find ways to have those conversations because right now I have wonderful friendships with non-Christians and they know what I'm all about, but maybe I can find ways to have the really meaningful conversations. I've got the equity in those relationships now where I can do that. ☉



THE WORLD IS ALWAYS WITH US

by Peter Davids

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . .” says 1 John 1:15. This and similar verses has led to a type of two step dance with our culture. In one step the people of God are absorbed into the culture (often at the same time avoiding some things that narrow the definition of “worldly”) and in the other they withdraw from everything that they consider “compromise”, isolating themselves from culture as much as possible. Neither fits the examples and teaching of Scripture. The difficulty for contemporary believers is in finding a way to be involved with culture without being absorbed by it.

This tension is not a new problem. In the Hebrew Scriptures one has the absorption of Israel into culture, exemplified in Baal worship, and Israel’s withdrawal seen in Nehemiah, who rather than being a light to the nations isolated the returning exiles. Ancient Israelites also used the

surrounding culture in ways considered appropriate by later generations. For example, (1) far from being a divine revelation, the Temple was built by a pagan architect in a style like the temples he knew from Tyre and Sidon, (2) the Proverbs borrow freely from older proverbs in the surrounding cultures as comparison with the known literature shows, and (3) the imagery for God in Ps 18:7-15 appears to be borrowed from Baal hymns (Baal was a storm god) that we know of from Ugarit (Did some Psalmist ask, “Why should the devil have all the good music?” and then borrow some lines and perhaps a tune?). In fact, God virtually required cultural borrowing in bringing his people into Canaan, for without taking over plastered cistern technology developed by the Canaanites, the Israelites could not have survived. Yet while this and other borrowing (Hebrew itself was related to the languages around them) made survival and communication with surrounding peoples possible, it also raised

the danger of absorption into the surrounding culture, of becoming “the world”, a danger that was often realized. This was especially true in that, unlike today, neither Israel nor the surrounding nations ever separated religion from culture, including technology, politics, and agriculture (this separation is a creation of the Enlightenment). Nevertheless, God did not make it possible for Israel to “play it safe”.

The same dance of absorption and isolation is true of the New Testament. There the isolation from culture option was adopted by the teachers that Paul opposes, i.e. those who taught that all who come to Christ should become ethnic Jews (circumcision, observing dietary restrictions, etc.), which would naturally separate them from Greco-Roman culture. On the other hand, there are certainly a number of examples of loving



the world to the point of absorption (e.g. Col 2:20f.; 2 Tim 4:10) – indeed, 2 Peter may be written against Christian teachers who had adopted Epicurean ideas. But the dangers raise the question, If one rejects the option of withdrawing into a Jewish enclave, can one interact positively with a largely hostile culture without absorption into that culture? Can one use the cultural forms to express the good news? The answer (at least for some authors of the New Testament) is, “Yes, one can.”

Because we cannot explore the whole New Testament, we will instead examine one daring example of the use of Hellenistic culture, in 2 Pet 1:3-4.

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. (NRSV)

In this expression of the good news, we first find a reference to “divine power”. In the New Testament this occurs only here and in Acts 17:29, Luke’s report of Paul’s speech on the Areopagus, where it refers to the

divine in terms understandable to Greeks. The Christian author has not shied away from using such a term. The means of getting all that we need for life and godliness is through knowledge, in this case personal knowledge of the deity. That is language that would be most attractive in a Hellenistic culture, where knowledge was the way to freedom. Notice that there is no reference to the blood or cross or other such concepts.

Furthermore, what one is escaping from is the corruption in the world due to desire (“desire” is better than “lust”, for the Greek term refers to any type of desire, not just specific negative ones). While the concept that desire, or our human drives, is the basis of corruption may stem from the Jewish concept of unbounded desire in human beings, it is also true that Greeks viewed desire as negative: it was changeable and temporary and thus blocked true happiness which must be constant. Whether

one was an Epicurean (who counseled moderation in pleasure rather than giving in to desire as the way to the good life) or a Stoic (who strove to rise above all the vicissitudes of life, which would include the human drives), one wanted to overcome the vagaries of desire, for it would keep one from a truly wise or good life.

Finally, our author refers to the result of God’s action

in freeing us from desire: we become participants in the divine nature. The idea of divinization was known in the Hellenistic world. After all, in the mythology various mortals had become divinized and at least the most recent Caesars were said to be divinized at death (if not before). Furthermore, some of the virtues listed in 2 Peter 1:5-8 are particularly Hellenistic virtues. Thus what has happened is that 2 Peter has translated the Christians’ message into Hellenistic language, using the current coin of popular philosophy and religion (not to mention politics, for in calling Jesus, “God, Savior, and Lord,” he has applied to Jesus three of the titles of Caesar, implying that Jesus is the true Emperor as opposed

to any other claimant). Rather than isolate from the world, he has used the language of the world to express his message. But that means that he needed to know his world and use not only its terminology but also its rhetorical forms (2 Peter is skilled in the Asiatic style of rhetoric). And to do this he had to first have obtained and then to have used a good education and then not shy away from terms and expressions just because they were also used in non-Christian contexts. While speaking to believers, 2 Peter is speaking to them in a way that assumes that they are fully in contact with and participating in the culture around them to the degree that it is possible for people committed to the rule of Jesus.

There are many such examples in the New Testament. Paul, for example, shows evidence of at least a foundational education in Greek rhetoric. While he did indeed identify with the shamefully crucified Jesus of Nazareth as his resurrected leader, which is what he means by knowing “Christ, and him crucified”, even 1 Corinthians shows skillful rhetoric and cultural knowledge, a “wisdom” of this world that the uneducated did not have. Furthermore, in 1 Cor. 8-10 he refuses to demand that Christians totally separate from pagans and paganism: they should not go to meals in pagan temples, but they may eat food from the marketplace that they know to have been sacrificed to idols and they may go to a meal in the private home of a pagan and eat anything served, so long as the pagan does not make a point of its association with idols. Christians are to handle their legal issues internally (1 Cor 6), but they are not to break up their marriages with pagans (1 Cor 7). There is a careful dance along the line he perceives between what would compromise total loyalty to Christ and what would be inappropriate separation from



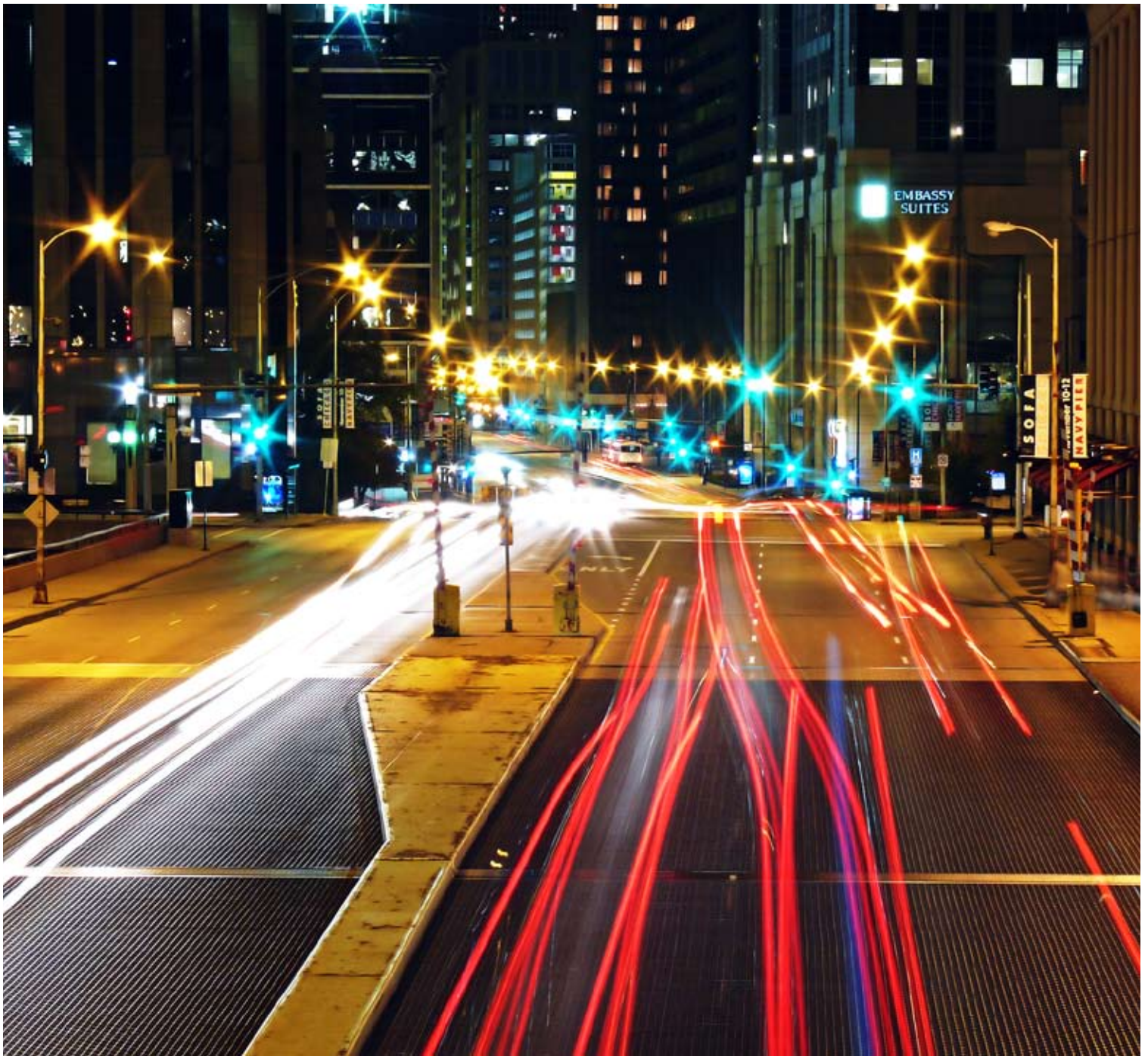
the world. He wants the married in contact with their spouses, for they may well “save” their spouses; he is not concerned about associating with “the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world,” but only about association with those calling themselves Christians who participate in such vices. A missional people cannot be an isolationist people.

Thus in the New Testament as in the Old we see the following. Christians are to give uncompromising loyalty to Jesus – he is their Lord, their king, and the various powers of this age (masters, spouses, governors, Caesar himself) only receive acknowledgement to the extent that they do not conflict with the directives of Jesus. Yet the Christian is to be in the world, for otherwise they cannot live out their calling to be a light to the nations, a city set on a hill. They live in the world according to the rules of the coming Kingdom, showing what the world will be like when the true King returns. Thus they respect the creation as God’s creation of which they are only stewards, they respect other people as made in God’s image, they refuse to retaliate against evil, etc., but they do all of this within the world, for they know themselves to be the future of the earth and they know that God wills that the rest of the inhabitants of this earth join them. Yet, as we have seen, at the same time they remain in contact with, knowledgeable about, and borrow from the culture around them, even from parts of culture with which they may not agree. On the one hand, they recognize that everything true in philosophy, art, etc. belongs to God and thus is not to be rejected, and, on the other hand, they recognize the need to clothe God’s message in the language of culture so that it can be heard and understood.

In other words, if it were possible to have life revolve around a Christian church, children going to a Christian school, employment from a Christian employer, neighbors who are fellow-Christians, recreation that is in Christian centers and/or Christian groups, not to mention purchasing from Christian merchants, going to Christian hospitals, and eventually being buried by a Christian undertaker in a Christian cemetery, it would not be desirable. That would show a withdrawal from the world that neither Judaism (which did have boundaries) nor Christianity (to the extent that it was separate from Judaism) show in the New Testament period. That would be a denial of Jesus’ instruction to bear witness everywhere, to be a city set on a hill, to be salt and light in this age. That would be a way of life that no one in the New Testament lived. Rather, in the New Testament the church is the place where believers gather in order to worship Jesus and receive instruction so that they can go out into the world and discern how to interact with it wisely and in a way that accords with loyalty to Jesus.

The world is ever around us. The tension remains. The people of God are a missional people, always seeking to bring the world in which they live under the rule of Jesus, who is the coming King of the world. ☉

Peter and Judy Davids have served as missionary educators in Europe providing biblical-theological and counselling services and training to churches and Christian leaders in the German-speaking world and the surrounding areas of Eastern and Western Europe. After four years in the area of Houston, Texas, they now reside in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, Canada, where Peter is Professor of Biblical Theology at St. Stephen’s University and Judy provides counselling training and burnout recovery retreats for missionaries and pastoral couples, especially those associated with the Vineyard movements in the USA, Canada, and Europe.



FATALLY DRAWN TO THE BIG TIME IN SEARCH OF THE RELEVANCE OF JESUS

by Tobi Elliott

[Sometimes we go out to change the world, and it doesn't seem to work the way we anticipated, we try to pick ourselves up off the floor, finding that we were the ones ones being changed. We forget that God is always in the business of changing us. We forget that in the equation of "Jesus + us + the world = change" the focus is always Jesus, not the world, not change, not even us as much as we would like to think it is.

This article is the story of a girl searching for Jesus, of a journey that we are all on. It helps remind us that we can never do it alone. It isn't a

reason to lock up your children, or yourselves, sheltering them from the evil world. I believe that it is a beautiful story of the unrelenting voice of the Father calling us all home.]

It was an unmercifully hot August day when I left Toronto two summers ago. Tarmac-smoking hot. A week before Labour Day, it was also the day gas prices shot to over \$1.20 per litre. Stuffed into my little Ford Escort were 11 boxes, four coats (none of which proved equal to the winters)

a donated futon and a very pregnant and unhappy calico cat. If I were looking for omens I would have stopped right there.

But I was headed for the big, bad city of Montreal for my very first year of university, and I wasn't about to turn back.

Restless, I was desperate to test the theory that Jesus meets you when it really hurts. I often wondered, *Would just Jesus be enough to sustain me in a really tough place? What would it be like to relate his personality to people who had no background in church at all?* It was more these questions rather than the fact that I truly aspired to be a journalist that compelled me to pick up and move. I wanted to live someplace *difficult*, somewhere I knew I wouldn't be able to insulate myself from the world with the joyful crush of a big church family. I felt I had been in church all my life.

Behind me was the Follower's Mission where I had lived for nine months on Queen Street's "crack corner". Ministering to Toronto's most desperate addicts – well, half its population, as most of the women seemed too shy to attend the services – I dished out Bible studies with zeal and administered prayer like it was going out of style, whether it was for a sniffle, an addiction to cocaine or a half-crazed woman running naked through the service. I was often spent after long days serving

What happens when you live a normal life, as a Christian, among all the regular people out there? Would my faith be enough? Gnawing questions in my soul tattled the tale of my dissatisfaction with the status quo, despite the fact that I was traveling in some of the hottest ministry circles around.

And so I was fatally drawn to the most religion-innoculated place I could think of: Montreal. During the 1960s, the Church in Quebec, largely represented by repressive and authoritarian Catholic rule, had been served its notice during what was called the "Quiet Revolution". Baby Jesus was thrown out with the christening water and anything remotely resembling traditional religion has since been viewed with suspicion and anger.

Montreal is also a city rife with division: between French and English, Muslims and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, police against street kids, the "Greens" against anyone who isn't doing their part for the environment. It's as if every bloody war on the earth has been transplanted to this island and has bitterly taken root. It carries the grief of the nations.

If I knew what lay ahead in its spiritually frozen, stubbornly potholed and wildly hedonistic streets, I probably would have done a U-turn on the



coffee and meals, arbitrating between disputes and doing everything in my capacity to love those with no apparent social graces. I did spend time with Jesus, though usually just enough to get me through the day.

As our little team worked to bring hope and healing into dark places, together we wept, laughed and were transformed along with those we sought to help. We saw many miracles and breakthroughs. One man's leg was healed from crippling pain. Another was restored to his estranged girlfriend and seven-year old daughter. Many came to Jesus. Anger and rage melted away. Those who came daily to the Bible study asked some pretty tough questions, teaching us along the way.

But it was still church with a capital "C". Although we served hot dogs on the streets and invited the homeless to our drop-in centre, there was no hiding the fact that we were bringing them to a Christian service. The ritual calls to the front for ministry were as familiar to me as Sunday School was as a 12-year-old. I had already spent seven years at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, locus of the "Toronto Blessing", as a cook and caterer, and had traveled around the world in ministry and mission contexts. Church was good, but it was all I had ever known.

TransCanada highway and sped back to the safety of BC's gorgeous Fraser Valley where I grew up.

If only I had known that I would lose sight of my Jesus in the streets of Montreal, the precious Friend that I had known since I was six, I probably would have headed west, not east. There's a reason we're not prophetic all the time.

For two years, a fierce wind ripped at my soul, tearing off the layers of self-sufficiency I wore, even as I hastily put them on again in new guises, now becoming the news editor of a campus newspaper, then the production manager. It ripped through the layers of affirming love I was shown in all the churches I'd been in, culling my self-confidence and shredding everything I thought was me. And worst of all, all that I understood to be Jesus was taken in for questioning.

Just when I needed his comfort most, I couldn't find him anywhere. When I walked the streets of Montreal, a city known for promiscuity and nightlife (just ask any teenager in New York or Jersey where they had their first drink on a school-sponsored field trip), all I saw was the lost. Fatherless teens hitting the clubs in a whirl of frenetic partying, trying

to find an elusive happiness. Hopelessness on the faces of the people riding the metro, confused, vacant, lonely. Bruised, battered hearts moving from one boyfriend or girlfriend to the next, looking for that next person to fill the gaping hole in their lives. The insane, the drunks, the crack addicts and the angry punks who don't care who they hit up for a dollar, if only it got them a fix or some temporary relief.

Every time I walked around this city, I was bruised and wounded by the lost, tormented by the tormented. *Where was Jesus?*

And in my classes, the agony of aloneness accompanied me. The journalism track, I learned, has precious few Christians. Out of a class of eighty, I didn't meet a single one in my first year. Instead, I found an unquestioning acceptance of atheism so natural that "God" wasn't ever discussed. If the topic of religion was ever brought up it was with a tone of ridicule, as if referring to an antiquated concept. Or near-hatred. We were taught to challenge everything, to accept nothing at face value and certainly to suspect those "crazy fundamentalists" of every stream of religion.

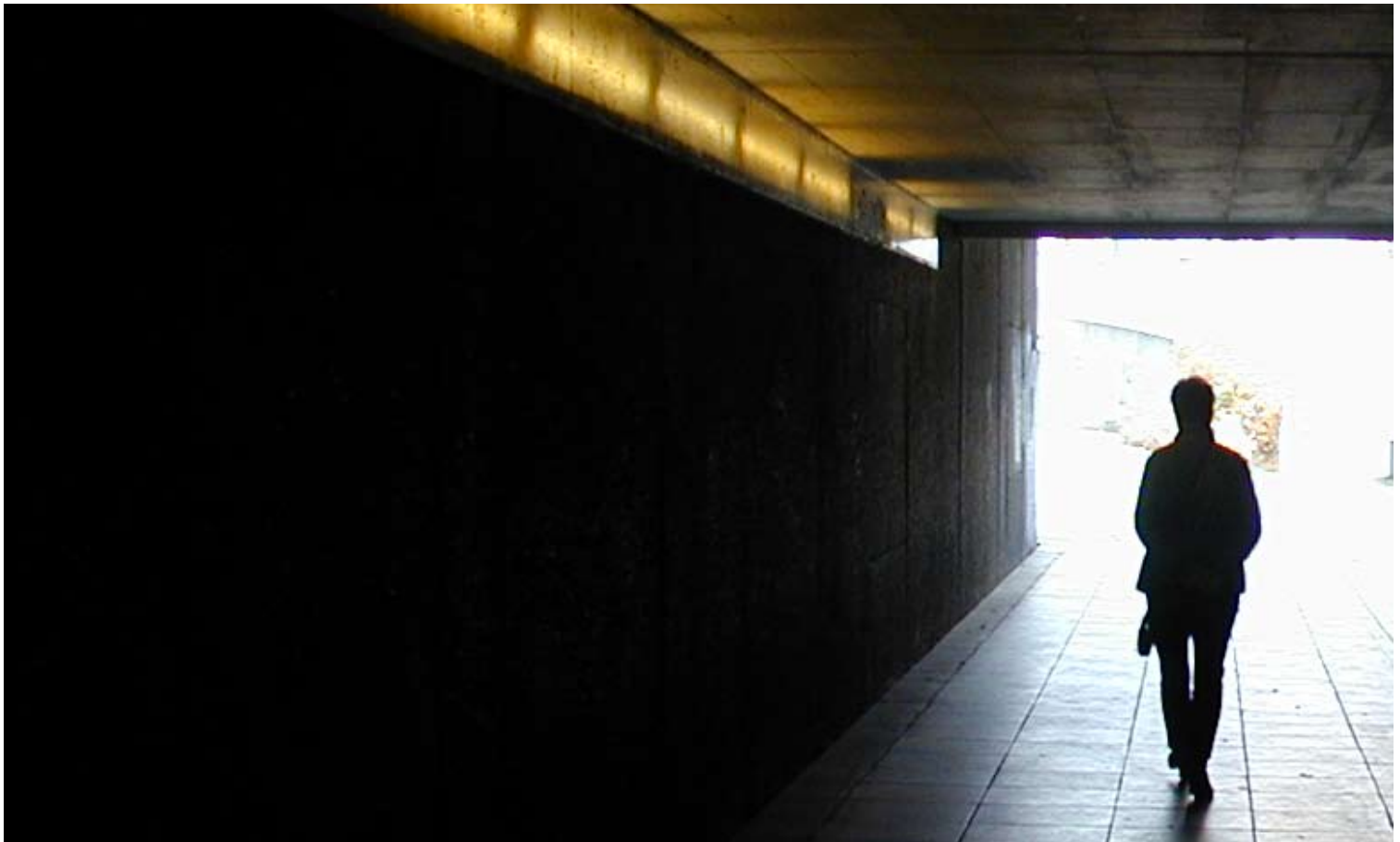
I worried at my faith like an obsessed dog with her tattered bone. It wasn't long before I found myself trying to remember who I was, who I had been and most importantly, why someone called "God" had once

I had no answers. I couldn't explain him or why I believed what I did anymore than I could explain how to get to the moon. I know the moon is out there, I can see it, theoretically it can see me, but it's an exercise in frustration. My whole reason for living had been to express God, now I didn't even know what "God" meant anymore.

Hope died. So I ducked my head down and pretended to be something other than what I had been all my life. I got on with the business of working myself to death. Partying, drinking whenever I had the chance, partly to see if there was anything in life I was missing, to forget, to find something to live for now that I had lost my anchor and best friend. I did all the stuff at 28 that most kids go through in their teens.

The mental energy required by my double life was so intense I was drained of the desire to do anything but survive. Oh sweet Jesus, my heart would cry! Once in a while, maybe once a month, my heart would wake up from its frozen state and accuse me: *After all this time, how could you lose faith now? After all you've learned, how can you question him?*

In all honesty, I believe I would have started doing hard drugs after about a year just to stop the pain, if not for one thing: my stalwart, stubborn,



been so important in my life. With the little faith I had left I wasn't even sure who – or what – that God was. Did he really have anything to do with the religion my contemporaries hated and despised so much? Was he the reason those from Muslim and Jewish backgrounds carried their enmity here? Had he just been an *imaginary* Friend, a particularly nice psychological creation of mine? A pet dream that helped me through tough times and deal with an over-active conscience?

feast – and Jesus – loving little Vineyard church. Every Sunday, whether I liked it or not, something dragged me to Montreal House X. Although I tried to make my heart stop feeling and cease its cry, something kept me coming back.

And every Sunday night without fail, sometime around the third song in worship, the ice would begin to melt around my heart and I would

remember how I had lived once as “a real girl”, and weep. Every service, Jesus was so tenderly close, so sweetly forgiving of my every wipeout, that I came alive again. I remembered what Eden tasted like, was plunged into grace and reborn afresh.

Community kept me alive when nothing had any meaning anymore. Real people, warm and forgiving, without condemnation or condescension, reminded me of the truth. Although only my pastors, Dean and Matte Downey, knew the extent of my struggles,

the warm hugs and wisdom of Awa from Gabon,
the laughter of South Africa’s shining star, Natasha,
the unremitting, tangible kindness of fellow West Coasters, Jaana and Jeremy,
the thoughtfulness of David from Montreal and Stephane from Rimouski,
the strength of Mama Carolle and Papa Alain,

all lifted me up when I had nothing left. Heaven can’t sing their praise enough.

I can’t say what started the slow U-turn back to the track, but after two years of heavy slogging, I started to see glimpses of light. Maybe I just got sick of myself, or maybe God decided to close my personal chapter

can’t carry this city by myself, and that only Jesus can heal her hurt. Over the course of a few heartfelt prayers, I released the burden I felt for the city, repented of ever having wandered too far into the streets of sand and ashes, and buried my face in Daddy’s shoulder.

I found out I need a personal Saviour after all. If Montreal doesn’t want God, so be it: I need him just for me and will now refuse to take a step without him. If not a single soul here wants to see or understand there is a Jesus who is relevant to their circumstance, joyful and forgiving in their pain, and who wants to see them become the glorious creatures they were created to be, then I’ll just have to trust him for myself and see what happens.

Besides, having tasted the unspeakable joys of a life lived in grace and having once eaten from the tree of life, I can’t stay out of Eden any longer. I’m going Home.

Tobi, at 28 years old, has just completed her “Learn by Doing” course for the zillionth time. She didn’t learn to cook until her test audience was a hundred international students. She never really wrote until she became the news editor of her university paper. Her first sermon was to a crowd of homeless men. And she learned to sail when the captain of



of lamentations, or maybe someone praying somewhere broke through for me, but at some point this month I decided to stop questioning and being angry at the lack of answers, and just get on with living.

If God loved me enough to show me a bit of himself when times were bright, maybe he was worth it to believe and trust when times were dark. After two years in Montreal, I have started to wake up to the fact that I

the boat she was on got food poisoning. Her scariest moment? Going to university. It’s the first time she’s ever had to purposefully learn anything.



THE TRANSPLANT

Adapted by Jon Best from a skit by Paul Anglemyer¹

A doctor and his assistant were standing in a hospital room next to their patient who was lying on an examining table.

“Hello,” said the doctor to the patient. “My name is Dr. Mel Practice.”

“Hello,” said the patient.

“I’m going to have to ask you to stick out your tongue and say, ‘Ahhh.’”

The patient opened his mouth obediently. As the doctor put a stick in the patient’s mouth to hold down his tongue, he said, “Oh my!” When he shined a bright flashlight in the patient’s eyes, he said, “Who would have thought?” After he hit the patient’s knee with a rubber hammer and watched his knee bounce, he said to his assistant, “Quick! We are going to have to perform a brain transplant IMMEDIATELY!”

The patient, shocked, sat up hurriedly and replied, “But I only have a stomach ache! I thought you said this was going to be a minor procedure... I think I’ve changed my mind.”

Dr. Mel Practice looked at the patient with a twinkle in his eye and said, “Actually, your mind hasn’t been changed... yet! We’ll be getting to that shortly. Now don’t worry. The first thing we need to do is apply the anesthesia.”

The doctor nodded to his assistant, who nodded back. The assistant reached into a big black medical bag, pulled out a rolling pin and handed it to the doctor. Dr. Mel Practice swung the rolling pin around in the air a few times.

The patient looked at the doctor, not quite sure what he was up to. “What are you doing?” he asked.

The doctor looked at him and replied, “Practice swings. You don’t want to be awake for the transplant do you? Of course, if you would rather, I could use this...” And at that moment, the assistant handed Dr. Mel Practice the

LARGEST syringe with the LONGEST needle that the patient had ever seen.

The patient took one look at the needle and passed out immediately.

“Works every time!” said the assistant. “Time for the transplant.”

Dr. Mel Practice opened a cupboard and pulled out what appeared to be a chainsaw. “Hmmm,” he said. “It’s not quite what I want,” and he put it to one side. He rummaged around a bit more in the cupboard. Something went RATTLE! Another thing went CLINK! Something else went THUD, CRUNCH! The doctor said, “Oops. I guess we’ll need a new one of those.” Then he reached way in the back and said, “Aha! Here it is.” And, pulling out what looked like a large can opener, he handed it to the assistant.

For a while, all that could be heard was the squeak of the can opener and the odd “Mmm” or “Yes, that’s it!” from the doctor. Then the assistant stood up and held out something small and brown. It appeared to be a walnut. “I have removed the patient’s brain,” he said.

“And now for a new one,” said Dr. Mel Practice, clapping his hands. He opened a cooler pulled out a fresh pink brain (like the one you or I have), turned to place it in the patient, and just at that moment... SNEEZED! “ACHOO!”

SLIP went the brain. SQUISH and BOUNCE went the brain, right out the window.

“Oops!” said the doctor. “My, oh my. That isn’t good.” He wiped his nose and with a silly smile, looked at his assistant and asked, “Do we have any other brains?”

The assistant went into the next room and could be heard grumbling, “(mumble, mumble)... always happens (mumble, mumble)... crazy doctor!” After a couple of minutes the assistant came back and handed

the doctor something, saying, “I found this in the back of the freezer. It’s all I could find.”

“Wonderful!” Dr. Mel Practice exclaimed. “It will do perfectly.” Quickly the doctor and assistant set to work getting the new brain into the patient. It wasn’t long until everything was finished. The assistant waved some smelling salts under the patient’s nose and slowly he began to wake up. First, he blinked his eyes. Then bit by bit he sat up. Then all of a sudden, he shook his head vigorously, stopped and looked at the doctor expectantly.

“Hmm,” said the doctor. “Tell us how you feel.”

The patient looked at the doctor, then at the assistant and then back at the doctor. He opened his mouth and out came, “BARK, BARK!” Then he stuck out his tongue and began panting.

“Oh dear!” said Dr. Mel Practice, scratching the patient behind the ears who yipped with pleasure.

“Well,” the assistant said, rolling his eyes, “it certainly looks like he has been transformed by the renewing of his mind.”

“It certainly does.” said the doctor, handing the patient a milk bone. ☉

[LET’S TALK ABOUT IT]

by Renee Frayne

Wait a minute...in order to follow God and know his will you have to have brain surgery? And if you get a crazy doctor you will be a dog instead? No way!

Being transformed by the renewing of our mind means that we think and act differently. Picture a caterpillar. It goes along the ground and climbs from plant to plant eating leaves. You are like that caterpillar until you give your life to God.



Caterpillars then go through a complete change in their chrysalis – this is what God does in our hearts and minds when we live everyday out of love for him.

Now think about a butterfly. It thinks and acts differently than it did when it was a caterpillar! It flies above the ground and doesn't even eat the same food; it eats nectar from flowers not leaves.

When you are a butterfly, a transformed creature, you are still the same person, but you live differently – at least you ask God to keep changing you to be more like Jesus! ○

TRUE STORIES OF GOD'S TRANSFORMING POWER IN OUR CHILDREN

"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Luke 18:17

Here are some stories about kids who are being transformed by God. They are normal kids, but they want God to be part of their everyday life - and he is!

LITTLE ONES LEAD

Seth, 3 years old

In a class for ages 2-5, the older children were hesitant to pray for a young boy from their class who was in the hospital. One of the 3 year olds said, "I will pray. I am a good prayer!" Then he, confidently and simply, asked for God to heal his friend. ○



I AM GOOD SOIL!

Ian, 7 years old

Discussing the parable of the Sower and the different kinds of soil in an elementary Sunday class, a seven year old boy offered, "Do you want to hear how I became good soil?" His leaders were eager to hear and gathered everyone's attention.

"Well when I was a kid I was like the rocky soil. [He rejoiced when he first heard the message but the excitement died away and he didn't look to God when trouble came.] But then I started reading the Bible [his parents gave him one for Christmas this year] and listening to God and singing during worship. Now I am good soil!" ○

PHYSICAL NEEDS, BEING REAL AND OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

Ethan, 4 years old

A four year old was hungry from the moment he walked into class. The children were going to play for a bit so when the little boy asked for a snack his leader said, "Let's play first." "Ok, but I'm hungry." When the children were cleaning up their toys, the little boy said again, "Is it time for snack? I am hungry." The leader encouraged him to be patient because they were going to have a story first. "Ok, let's have our story." Finally it was snack time and the leader asked if this particular little boy wanted to pray for the class and thank God for the food (knowing that he had keen interest!). He readily agreed...

"God I am sooo hungry. Thank you for our snack." ○



GOD KEEPS ME FROM TROUBLE

Dylan, 6 years old

A six year old was having a difficult time at his school recess. He was often getting in trouble for hanging out with children that provoked him. His mother was talking with him about the problem. She asked him who could help him make better choices on the playground... thinking that other friends would make a big difference.

He replied, "God helps me. When I pray and ask him to help me make good friends, he does."

"And does that help?" his mother asked.

"Yes. On those days I don't get in trouble!" ○

(Endnotes)

*found at www.kidology.org



Vineline

#403 19292 60 Ave
Surrey, BC
V3S 3M2
Tel. (604) 539-8570
Fax (604) 539-8560

www.vineyard.ca

Gary & Joy Best
gary@vineyard.ca

Bob Hughes
bob@vineyard.ca

Monique Tute
monique@vineyard.ca

Jon Best
jon@vineyard.ca

Buffi Davids
buffi@vineyard.ca

Layout & Design
jon@vineyard.ca

Photographs

yaroslav b - index
salva barbara - front cover,
index, back cover
isaac bowen - 14
maxime caissy - 3
tom fawls - 8
helmut gevert - 30, 31
sanja gjenero - 4, 26, 27
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