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Editorial Introduction

Major Stephen Court, editor

Welcome to Journal of Aggressive Christianity - JAC121 - the Discipleship Issue. We're blessed in this edition by guest editors Ian Mayhew and Gary Pitt, two of the creative and formative geniuses of the rule of life INFINITUM that launched during the Boundless Congress (Infinitum = 'boundless' in Latin) at the Blind Beggar Pub (where William Booth found his destiny). This issue of JAC thus flows from the Infinitum charism, which, you can infer from its etymological and inaugural roots, flows out of a pure, primitive salvationism.*

They've collected some deep thinking from Salvationists and interviewed some intriguing people engaged with discipleship in a wide range of contexts. And we're the richer for their efforts. We're challenged by Joel Aston's method of extreme discipling. We're curious about the Colemans and their Godly Play. We're taught by Evans (APEST!) and White ('Cruciform Discipleship!') - lots to chew on here. We're confronted by Whitehouse by gaps in discipleship culture. We're edified by Marie Lange-Druart's testimony of discipleship. We're supplied by Wall with tools to think about intentional discipleship. We're equipped by Mayhew's Monastics and Strickland's Surrender with tools and context for Biblical discipleship.

Thanks to Ian and Gary, and to each of the contributors, for this special Discipleship issue - JAC121. May God use it for His greater glory.

*interested readers can check out more at InfinitumLife.com, the Infinitum app, or with JAC105 –

The Infinitum Issue - <http://www.armybarmy.com/JAC/article1-105.html> (nearly all of the contributors are engaged in Infinitum)

Guest Editorial Introduction

By Ian Mayhew & Gary Pitt

Discipleship

When I was 9, Alf Jenkins, a bandsman from my corps, would turn up at my house at 7:00pm every Thursday. He was there to teach me trumpet. I hated it. But I was always intrigued by what motivated him to give up his free time to help me learn a brass instrument?

A few years on I reflected on what would have happened if Alf hadn't taken time during that lesson to open up the Bible and share his faith with me.

Over the years I have been blessed with others who have dedicated time to help me grow in faith. Some did this intentionally, others would be shocked if I mentioned it.

Discipleship is our theme this month: the art, challenge and complexity of following Jesus' command. Whatever it does take - and from the articles you can see a range of views and opinions - the one thing that is always called for is time! The need to carve out time to help disciple others and the time you must prioritise for yourself to grow, deepen and develop.

Alongside some powerful articles we have added a number of recorded interviews. The latter has been particularly interesting because it is in that conversation that you feel you gain a real insight and glimpse of those people's heart. And as we see in Jesus' life and ministry it was often in the conversation that revelation occurred and allegiances were defined.

We hope these offerings help deepen your discipleship journey and develop your discipling of others.

Gary Pitt: Gary is joint partner in a Design Company called Studio Renton based in Nottingham, UK . Gary is married to Abi and together they are planting an expression of church within their local community which happens to be the birthplace of William Booth.

Ian Mayhew. Ian lives in the UK and is a support worker working with people with additional needs. He is married to Ruth, a nurse and they have 3 teenage sons.

Separation Culture and the Disciple Deficit:

An Interview with Andy Whitehouse

Andy: Sadly I find there are only a few people around who don't actually just say, 'it's important we disciple our young people', but actually take the responsibility to do it. But even those motivated individuals who are taking it on - and that's where this idea of the discipleship deficit comes in - they are leading from a place where they're not the best 'disciplers' - It seems like a harsh thing to say, but it's because they've not been disciplined well themselves. The culture they grew up in often hasn't imparted the necessary practices to be a disciple who discipled others.

Andrew Whitehouse is a Divisional Youth Specialist for The Salvation Army in the East Midlands Division. He's worked for many years helping to develop youth work and engagement, and is currently reintroducing the model of corps cadets in some local settings.

Gary and Ian sat down with him across a coffee to find out about the challenges of discipleship for the current generation.

Andy: In The Salvation Army we often exist in this situation where you start at the bottom of the age bracket with children's work. Children are taken out and you've got lessons and teaching, and there's a clear structure for that. There's a YPSM (Young Person's Sergeant Major) and a culture of practice to go with it. Now, ordinarily this transitions to some form of youth discipleship. In this instance teenagers are taken out of the adult congregation for teaching in a similar small group format. But after this, they then go back into a primarily Sunday worship expression of discipleship, from a place where they were able to discuss, ask questions, create, share together, conversation format into a front facing arena and a sermon presentation.

The problem is so many leaders have grown up in that system and in turn they're teaching the next generation to do the same. I think certainly in my own experience, I've never been *taught* spiritual disciplines. I've been *told* about prayer for example, but I hadn't been led in the practice and habit of prayer. Nobody modelled, demonstrated or held me to account in my practice of prayer.

So my experience wasn't 'we're going to help you to do this', it was more 'you should be doing this in your discipleship' and you end up being left to figure out how to do it by yourself.

To lead in the right way takes vulnerability, confession, and openness. to do that in a church setting and sadly that isn't always the prevailing culture.

Ian: I completely get that, it's hard for people to move forward from what they were (or weren't in this case) taught or shown in Christian practice and discipleship.

Andy: And its important to note I'm speaking in generalisations - this isn't always the situation. But it's clear there's an issue that's being experienced by the Church in the UK. Take Youthscape's recent research called 'Losing Heart' - it gained its title as there were so many Churches who knew they weren't doing good youth ministry/discipleship but didn't know what to do about it. The resounding response from the Church was 'We don't know how to solve this.'

Gary: Wow, that's such a sad situation! I guess what you're identifying is that Church in certain situations has lost the practice of discipleship in the everyday, and for that reason it actually can come in conflict with it's development for young people.

Andy: Where I think this is mirrored a little bit, is how as parents we raise our children in discipleship. Again speaking from my experience, I grew up in a Christian home, but the culture was not 'let's sit and do Bible study together', 'lets gather and pray together'. It was a passive practice and as a result a passive progress in discipleship.

I see more and more families, including my wife and I, who are trying to actively place a pattern of discipleship throughout home life, mirroring those attributes of openness, vulnerability together (that should be set in the church) in our family. We wanted to bring an intentionality to way we brought our children up, beyond the perceived 'minimum requirements' of Christian faith.

Ian: Church can so often become separated out from those everyday experiences as a family.

Andy: It's that kind of 'separation culture' that seems to prevail. There is value in age specific teaching, but we do really struggle with all age worship as an idea. If you talk to some of the national children's specialists they would say the same thing, that all age worship is almost a misnomer. What it tends to be is, here's a bit for that age group, here's a bit for this age group, rather than genuinely exploring it all together.

Gary: What context of discipleship have you seen or been a part of that you think has been particularly helpful in addressing some of these challenges?

Andy: We were part of an inter generational cell in our current church in Arnold Salvation Army. I think to make it work, it really does come down to the attitude and heart of those involved. We loved being a part of a group where there was no patronising of the younger and no lack of respect to the older. Instead there's an open listening to everyone's experience. This creates opportunity to learn from the wisdom that comes from age - which is sometimes from those who have lived the most years, and sometime those who have lived the least so far! God's wisdom abounds across the ages.

So I guess I'd encourage people to try mixed age cell/life/Bible study groups. I've been part of youth cell groups, and young married cell groups, and there's real value in those at times, but I find the multigenerational and cross-cultural environments some of the most powerful for a deepening in discipleship, and that can start by being modelled in family.

Gary: That's really helpful to think about because actually our age specific groups do rarely extent that far beyond 18 - you typically have the children's group, a young adults group, and then sometimes a students group (if there's enough people) but beyond 18-21, you're now mixing in a context with 18 year olds to 81 year olds! I guess our adult congregations are more inter-generational than we realise and maybe we're missing something when we always separate out children/youth from that wider narrative.

Andy: And while that age band increasingly widens, I think the facilitation of learning styles becomes increasingly narrow. With children's work you've got activity, you've got conversation, videos, games, crafts - multiple learning styles are being catered for, intentionally or not. Then when you get to youth, some of those things start to drop off - some of the games, crafts; it often

becomes more discussion based and conversational. But then suddenly when you get to the adult church, you have to be an auditory learner!

Ian: That's so true! For those kids who've really engaged throughout their childhood in discipleship through the games and creative activities, not just because they enjoy them but that's genuinely the place where they content with the truth of God, they then suddenly find themselves in a context 10 years later where that only happens for the children!

Andy: All of a sudden if you're a kinaesthetic learner there's no place for you, or you've got to change - even though they you would have been so supported through your childhood discipleship

Ian: Yeah, it's a bit like the forest schools, where kids are encouraged to go outside, to learn to engage with the outdoors and then they arrive at high school and suddenly 'no, you're not allowed outside - you need to be in this classroom'. You're not getting out unless you bunk off.

Andy: Just like youth can bunk off church!

Ian: It's not fun anymore, and games can be such an important connection with understanding truth or direction

Andy: Activity and engagement is so important for learning and growing. I've been re-reading Matthew lately, and in that you see this pattern that Jesus lays out of calling, teaching, showing, and releasing.

Ian: And in Churches we rarely get to that last bit.

Andy: Well, arguably, I don't even think that all leaders have opportunity to 'show' rather than just 'teach', and suddenly we're now two steps behind on the journey.

Ian: That's true, with the current structure people might reflect that they don't really get to see the leader living this out or working this out in an everyday context. The 'show' component isn't really there and instead Church becomes more focused on the intellectual than the practical.

Andy: And I don't think we live in community enough to make it possible to see.

We've recently run our Youth Councils as a retreat, incorporating outdoor physical activities. One of the things we did this year was a night walk, where you are blind-folded and follow a rope and a person in front through the forest. It was opportunity for us all to learn God's trust in our times of fear. One of the really interesting things to come out of the activity was that the young people knew how I struggled with the task. There were moments for me that I felt uncertain, or stepped out in faith, or less gracefully tripped over a log. I shared openly with them how God was speaking to me and teaching me through that activity.

We were in it together and I think that's what discipleship in community is all about - it's how we can beat the deficit.

Gary: I guess this is also where language can become a barrier when we name some things as discipleship (generally conversations and teaching) but don't allow discipleship to encompass the whole of life, ready to learn and journey in every activity and walk of life.

Andy: I totally agree, if you're a disciple, it's a whole life response. My divisional leader doesn't like the title 'Whole Life Discipleship' because he feels there is no discipleship that isn't whole life. My response though is that because we have separated things out, we need to give it a title to remind people to put it back on track.

Gary: And we see that as so important across society, take for example a movement like 'Black lives matter' - the truth has to be highlighted because we've been in a time of injustice and inequality.

Andy: An analogy that has been used for that is with some people saying black lives matter, people have responded saying 'yeah well, all lives matter'. But if you have a street of houses with one that is on fire, you don't pour water on all the houses. No one house is a greater value than the other, it's just one is on fire and you need to sort it out, because otherwise it spreads.

Gary: So what's on fire for youth discipleship in this generation?

Ian: Yes, Gary! I love that question

Andy: It's hard to boil it down to just one thing, but I do think leadership and the examples being set are so incredibly important for a healthy discipling culture, and that sadly isn't always modelled.

Ian: I suppose it leaves us with the question, how are we going to change this culture? How are we going to create better environments to facilitate this?

Gary: I guess part of what you're highlighted earlier on Andy is actually the attitude and intention is key - you can have so many different strategies or programmes, but it's that heart of openness, vulnerability in leadership, that's so key.

Andy: I agree, you can come up with the most bulletproof model for youth discipleship, but if the heart and attitude isn't right in delivery it will never work. From that Youthscape research it's clear that the church knows its youth ministry is in some places 'on fire' (to return back to that metaphor) and maybe the challenge for us all is to be practicing and modelling this walk, not just for young people, but alongside them.

Equipping and Christian Leadership

By Jonathan Evans

There was no scandal, yet Francis Chan left his church. Pastors challenged Chan to return.¹ He realized his mega-pastor role was not congruent with the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11-12 stresses that the ascended Christ is building up his body through five charisms: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher (APEST).² This essay argues leaders are not central performers but are to empower the church by stewarding a discipleship culture in plurality of leadership for God's mission.

The saints are every member of the church: those chosen to be holy, blameless, adopted, redeemed and forgiven through Christ's blood and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:4-14). The saints were dead in sin but are now alive in Christ as a new body and holy temple (Eph 2). Being *in Christ* is the environment in which the saints are empowered.³ "Living *in Christ*," Wright insists, "develops the habits of the daytime heart in a world still full of darkness."⁴ In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus gives his great commandment to "Go... make disciples teaching them to observe everything I have commanded." Bosch succinctly says, "Discipleship and mission belong together."⁵ The community⁶ must encourage each member to hear and obey God. The most caring response leaders can take is to create a healthy culture where people "take responsibility for themselves"⁷ which is critical to the community's health.⁸ Benner describes this as an interdependent process of knowing God and knowing self,⁹ a process requiring "the capacity to become oneself out of one's self, with minimum reactivity to the positions or reactivity of others."¹⁰ Wesley asserted that Christianity is in

¹ "Pastors challenge Francis Chan Over Decision to Leave Megachurch," *Christian Today*, September 3, 2010, accessed: August 19, 2017, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/pastors.challenge.francis.chan.over.decision.to.leave.megachurch/26629.htm>

² Hirsch briefly defines each charism of APEST: "Because each function/calling contributes something to the Body that the others do not, they mutually enrich each other. They are not to be sundered apart, as we have tended to do in church history. In other words, the church always needs to experience itself as sent (A), the prime agent to God's ongoing mission in the world. The church should always attend to God and his concerns (P), should always share the story and invite people into living relationship (E), should always maintain and develop healthy community (S), should always be rich in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (T). All are needed in every time and in every place." Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* (Los Angeles: 100Movements, 2017), iBooks, 35.

³ "Ephesians is an inside look at what is beneath and behind and within the church that we do see wherever and whenever it becomes visible." Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 14-5.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 137.

⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 36.

⁶ Muthiah argues the power of institutions "give shape to collective and individual experience. The power of the institution over the individual usually exceeds the power of the individual over the institution." Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 90.

⁷ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 137.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁹ David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2004), 26.

¹⁰ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 183.

essence social and “to turn it into a solitary religion indeed is to destroy it.”¹¹ Discipling relationships are critical for maturing as a community. “When the congregation is a healthy system,” Stevens affirms, “individual members thrive because of the empowering influence of the life of the body.”¹² Crabb agrees, “The greatest need in modern civilization is the development of communities – true communities where the heart of God is home, where the humble and wise learn to shepherd those on the path behind them, where trusting strugglers lock arms with others as together they journey on.”¹³ It is not a leader who equips the body but the body that empowers its members.

Ephesians does not outline how a Christian CEO can establish an efficient discipleship system, rather, “Paul makes a direct link between the spiritual maturity of the church and the five kinds of equippers operating in the church.”¹⁴ The ministry and leadership are the APESTs in community.¹⁵ Ephesians 4:11-12 “does not set up a hierarchy of clergy and laity; rather, it speaks of people given to the church to assist its service and edification. The idea is not of gifts given to a special group, but of grace giving people to the church.”¹⁶ Guder agrees,

The corporate, Spirit-empowered leadership described in Ephesians transcends clergy-laity difference. In the missional community all are ordained to ministry in their baptism; all receive the same vocation to mission; and all are gifted in various ways for that mission as they participate in the twofold journey of the reign of God that is both inward and outward. Overcoming the professional clergy-shaped leadership models is an essential shift toward a *missional leadership*.¹⁷

Guder’s proposal is essential in our postmodern society. Suzanne Morse writes, Successful communities, even those with long traditions of organized community leadership, will continue to broaden the circles of leadership to create a system for the community that is neither centralized nor decentralized, but rather polycentric. The polycentric view of community leadership assumes that there are many centres of leadership that interrelate.¹⁸

This interrelationship is in the leadership of APEST “to collectively equip the entire body so that it would build itself up in love.”¹⁹ Hirsch takes it further, “APEST is not only an

¹¹ John Wesley, Sermon 24, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse 4” *Wesley Center Online*, accessed August 19, 2017. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-24-upon-our-lords-sermon-on-the-mount-discourse-four/>

¹² Stevens, *The Equipping Pastor*, xv.

¹³ Lawrence J. Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and our Relationships* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), xvii.

¹⁴ J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 20.

¹⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 209.

¹⁶ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 203.

¹⁷ emphasis added, Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church*, 200.

¹⁸ Suzanne W. Morse, quoted in Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 31.

¹⁹ Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 86.

integrated system; it is derived from the definitive expression of the ministry of Christ himself. It is Jesus' ministry in and through the local *ecclesia*.²⁰ The medium is the message – “that through the [entire] church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known” (Eph 3:9a).

Ephesians 4 is the pivotal section where Paul moves from theology to praxis.²¹ The saints must be equipped for their “ministry” which Paul defines in verses 12 – 16: the body to grow into maturity (v.13), attain to the fullness of Christ (v.13), live out unity described in v.1-6, not given to poor theology, deception or compromised by culture (v.14), to grow up into Christ our Head (v.15), fully integrated and performing as one body in Christ and each other (vv. 15-16). Such a ministry cannot be undertaken by one leader but is expected to be a body itself; an active organism displaying holy living in the world and at home, outlined in chapters 5 and 6. The armour of God is given to describe the church equipped “against the schemes of the devil” (6:10-20). Again, this armour is not for one hero but for the whole body to be clothed in Christ (cf. Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). This militaristic imagery is drawn from Isaiah depicting the armour of Yahweh and his Messiah (Isa 11:4-5; 59:17; cf 49:2: 52:7).²² The figure of a soldier is the most frequent image for a Christian in the world in the New Testament.²³ Weber notes that enlistment into the Roman army was called the *sacramentum*, or military oath. The Church utilized *sacramentum* to signify the decisive act of becoming a soldier of Christ in baptismal vows.²⁴ Through baptism each member vows allegiance to Jesus (2 Tim 2:4), is enlisted in the Kingdom of God and to the mission for its realisation.²⁵ This image embodies Paul's picture of the whole church much better than an ultra-gifted and glorified pastor.

Chan did a favour for the church. He emphasized, “every single one... has a supernatural gift... 5000 people show up every week to hear my gift... That's a lot of waste.”²⁶ Imagine instead, the effect of a disciplined and empowered army, equipped in Christ for the world.

²⁰ Hirsch, 5Q, iBooks, 34.

²¹ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), iBooks, 606.

²² Peter O'Brien, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians*. Edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), iBooks, 324.

²³ Harvey Cox, *God's Revolution and Man's Responsibility* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1965), 115-7.

²⁴ Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Salty Christians* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 25.

²⁵ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 196-7.

²⁶ Francis Chan, quoted by Timothy Yap, “Francis Chan Reveals His Reasons Why He Left His Megachurch” *Hallels*, July 3, 2017, accessed August 19, 2017, <http://www.hallels.com/articles/17684/20170703/francis-chan-reveals-his-reasons-why-he-left-his-megachurch.htm>

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Cruciform Discipleship: Receiving Like Children

By Aaron White

Most of us are familiar with the story of Jesus welcoming the child in Mark 10:13-16. What we often fail to see is that this story is set within the second thematic section of Mark, a section that focuses on Jesus revealing to his close followers his identity, his impending death, and the requirements of cruciform discipleship. So, this story, often used during children's teaching times, is somehow directly related to Jesus' predictions of his own death; the disciples' jockeying for power and position; the transfiguration; and the repeated welcoming of the vulnerable. There is a particular emphasis here on Jesus' insistence that following him will require radical self-denial, which contrasts sharply with the world's desire for power, position and wealth.

Twice Jesus uses a child to teach about the Kingdom of God. In Mark 9:33-37, while discussing a squabble about which disciple was the greatest, Jesus explains that power and position are reversed in his kingdom, and illustrates this by bringing a child into the middle of their group. Later, when people were bringing children to Jesus to be blessed, Jesus announces that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these, and can only be received like a child. In both Mark 9:33-37 and 10:13-16 there is a connection between the word "child" and the idea of "receiving the kingdom." In both passages Jesus brings children close to him, embracing them or laying his hands upon them. In both passages Jesus uses the presence of children to rebuke his disciples. This should be understood as part of Jesus' teaching about cruciform discipleship.

Mark 10:13-16 takes place in Judea beyond the Jordan, and the audience includes the disciples and the crowd who are bringing children to Jesus. Let's imagine a woman named Sarah – a woman who brought her children to be blessed by Jesus - as a typical member of this crowd. She will not have a modern, romanticised view of children's "innocence and purity", but will perceive children as vulnerable and dependent. Most of the children mentioned in Mark's Gospel are sick, suffering, and in need of healing. Sarah will also be familiar with a culture that emphasises one's status and honour above all, something that children in particular lack. It is likely that Sarah will have some notion of the kingdom of God, based upon the Hebrew Scriptures and daily prayers, and possibly some messianic hopes as well.

It is also probable that Sarah has heard of Jesus' miracles and authoritative teaching. Why else does she bring her child to be blessed by him? This interest in Jesus does not necessarily indicate a commitment to his discipleship. If she has been interacting with Jesus or his followers on their way towards Jerusalem, she will have heard some disturbing ideas about death and the requirement to pick up one's cross. This would not be understood as just a "spiritual" metaphor by a subjugated people under the shadow of a Roman Empire that ruled through power and terror. It is a strange idea in the light of Jewish hopes for the consolation of Israel and divine relief from the grinding poverty brought about by Roman oppression.

The fact that Jesus welcomes the children shocks the disciples, but they are frequently surprised by the “unimportant” people Jesus invites into his presence. Sarah is presumably not shocked by the welcome, as she brought her child to Jesus for that very purpose. His teaching, however, that one cannot receive the kingdom except as a little child, would be jarring. Jesus asks his followers to put themselves in the place of an insignificant, dependent child. This type of dependence on God and abandonment of the world is the only way to receive the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not something that can be earned, but can only be given by God and received by one who is holding onto nothing else. This is the way of self-denial, the way of the cross, the way of discipleship.

We get a hint of how difficult this was for the audience - intellectually, emotionally and practically - when we read the story of the rich man in Mark 10:17-31 who cannot receive the kingdom of God like a child. He asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, not understanding that the kingdom is not a matter of doing but of receiving. He is too attached to the idol of his wealth and status to receive like a child, and he leaves Jesus disheartened and sorrowful.

Jesus’ teaching about children might leave Sarah disheartened and sorrowful as well. This is no battle-cry rallying Judea into righteous revolt against Rome. Rather, it seems to strip away any hope she might have for social advancement, prestige, and power, and leaves her in the precarious position of worldly failure and insignificance.

On the other hand, given the desperate situation of Sarah’s family, the fact that Jesus welcomes in vulnerable children could be a message of profound hope. It could fan into flame the already existing faith that the God of Israel has not abandoned his suffering children. The weak, the poor, those without any rights or power, are welcomed right into the heart of Jesus’ compassionate ministry. This action would remind Sarah of the Song of Hannah from 1 Samuel 2:1-10, in which God is praised for strengthening the feeble, satisfying the hungry, raising the poor from the dust and the needy from the ash heap. Jesus wants Sarah to know that she is welcome in his kingdom, but also that receiving that welcome will not result in a simple mimicry of worldly power.

Grasping after position and privilege is part of the world system that is being overcome by Jesus’ kingdom. It is not just the Roman system that Jesus intends to conquer, but the whole idolatrous human system of pride, competition and sin. Thus, Jesus is challenging Sarah to discover a new definition of self and other that finds its worth entirely in one’s relationship to God, not in one’s standing and recognition among other people. Jesus welcomes the unwelcome into community, honours the dishonoured, and recognises the dignity of the undignified, and his followers are to do the same. This is what cruciform discipleship looks like.

Taking the Church to Places Where Coca Cola Hasn't Reached Yet!

Conversation with Joel Aston

I have spoken to Joel on a number of occasions over the last few years. As part of World Horizons, an International Missions Agency that specifically targets the Muslim Majority population in the 10-40 Window, he has spent time around many people who have lived a radical expression of faith and discipleship. He has pursued a similar path himself now for many years.

I wanted to find out a little about his recent life in Venezuela and also his new vision to establish a radical discipleship school to prepare people for mission in some unreached parts of the world.

“If the church was Coca Cola Jesus might well have come back by now!” said Joel Aston, who along with his wife Kaitlin and their son Levi have just returned to the UK from mission work in Venezuela.

Coca Cola has penetrated most places on earth - yet it's the locations where it's not available that interest Joel the most.

Inevitably these places are the most remote and sometimes the most dangerous, so for that reason Joel believes that discipleship training for these locations needs to be targeted, tough and imaginative. He is currently constructing a course that will prepare teams of people for such places.

Tell me more about this Pioneer course Joel? There are tonnes of discipleship training programmes out there, so I am intrigued what makes yours more suited to the environments that you are talking about?

Well I certainly believe that discipleship must look different for the context that you are preparing people for. In the New Testament the 72 had very different access and development to the 12. Jesus taught the 72 and then sent them out, with the Holy Spirit as their lead. But He chose to remain close with the 12 - until he was convinced that they were ready.

So this Pioneer Discipleship Course is about keeping people close enough until you believe that personal issues are dealt with and that they are ready to embrace the arduous demands of these hard places around the world.

Are you inferring then that people don't “graduate”, for want of a better word, until they have moved through certain phases, or dealt with certain things? It sounds a bit more like military training!

Well it builds on lessons I have learned and also approaches that were perhaps missed in the past. And it is true that some people will be asked to leave the course and return when they have dealt with various issues. At present they won't be effective in the “mission field”. I was on a course with a guy who was always a flirt. He was told to return home, get married and then think about coming back!

We are not trying to be awkward, but we are wanting to prepare teams (not just individuals) who will be a blessing and of benefit to those they are being sent to

I am interested in your focus on training teams - this is not just for training solo practitioners then?

Definitely not. It's all about teams. We start by placing people in to these teams of 4. We want as much training as possible to happen there. Although cultural integration is absolutely key, we know that much of the tension for missionaries comes within the cultural and personality differences with their fellow missionaries. So training within these teams is critical. Team integration and training has often been neglected. So we want these 4 people to develop authentic and radical inter-relationships.

If you are going to last in these demanding places you need to learn how to surrender your needs and work with those you are placed alongside. Learning humility and conflict resolution are essential skills.

Tell us a bit more about the specifics of this Pioneer Course, Joel?

We want these missionaries to experience and learn to deal with these 3 main things:

- a/ lack of sleep
- b/ pressure and stress, and,
- c/ hunger.

Right - ok. I don't think I have read chapters about those issues in many, or indeed any, discipleship material. Strangely, it sounds like New Testament stuff.

That's true - this is not just a "care, share and a prayer" study group. In the first 3 months we want the course to be hands on. For example it would be good to learn basic motor mechanic skills, first aid and how to endure interrogation.

We also want to help people deal with their food tastes. We will deliberately serve up food that is both very bland and also very unusual. As these guys will be sent to parts of the world that eat food far different to the tastes of most missionaries we want to prepare them for that.

In part of my training I was served chicken's feet for some days until I could learn how to control my "gagging". We need to ensure that you will not offend the people you are going to try and reach. I am now pretty sure I can eat most food people throw in front of me.

So the first 3 months sounds brutal Joel - do you think many people will actually stick this out?

I do actually. Those who endure may not be Europeans or North Americans. In fact at the moment it's the Venezeulans that seem to understand and respond to the most intense of circumstances. I actually did some training with them in Caracas. We shared a building with about 25 other people. The building was encased in metal bars - across the windows, doors and roof. Once you were in, you were in. Of course you could go

out during the day but everyone was told that “most of you will be robbed at gunpoint!” I think I was one of the only ones who wasn’t - although I did have other scary moments. For those people who are willing to train and be disciplined in those environments are the ones who will endure great hardship for the sake of the gospel.

I also think that younger people will respond to adventure. This may look different to the adventure they first thought but the opportunity to follow Jesus into some of these non-Coca Cola places may well draw them.

Tell us about the other aspects of the course?

Well for the 2nd 3 months we send you on expedition training. Here we will push people physically. We may well hold all lectures outside and get people to walk for long periods of time. This is about pushing your physical and psychological limits. Most of what we do is built around convenience and comfort - this type of approach challenges that gets you ready for what you might have to endure.

We might well ask your team to meet us in another country and be there within 3 weeks. We won’t give them enough money for the air or train fare, so we will expect them to discover ways to get themselves there. In all this time we are pushing for people to deepen faith and belief whilst enduring quite high levels of hardship.

I am guessing you have experienced some of these demands and challenges yourself, Joel?

I have Ian. The first time that we went to this tribe in Venezuela we had to build our own house. They were kind of sheds on sticks. The sheer effort of chopping down trees and building this thing was immense, and took forever - almost as long as building my own canoe! We had a log and were trying to hollow it out. After a few weeks some guys from the tribe came and put me out of my misery and helped me.

Of course only some of the challenges are physical. Many are emotional and psychological, let alone spiritual. Trying to keep my young boy safe was a huge stress. In fact many people in that tribe don’t actually name their child till they are ages 5 because the chances of survival are still very slim.

So if you discerned a call to this tribe, how will people on your course do that?

Well this is really the last phase and we will give the teams time to discern where they think God is leading them. This can be tense because people have all sorts of dreams and visions about where they want to go, but often you have to surrender your dreams for the sake of others. So this phase is about discerning that location, working through cultural engagement, deciding on financial support, clarifying dress codes and deciding on roles.

Then, once that is clear, you make plans to move there and remain there for at least 2 years.

It’s not easy by any stretch but we hope that with the right preparation and support we will see disciples emerge within these “undiscovered places”

If you would like to get in touch with Joel and discover more then please e:mail him at joelaston@fastmail.fm

Most of us are familiar with the story of Jesus welcoming the child in Mark 10:13-16. What we often fail to see is that this story is set within the second thematic section of Mark, a section that focuses on Jesus revealing to his close followers his identity, his

Discipleship That Disrupts The Cycle Of Dysfunction:

An interview with Vanessa and Xander Coleman

Xander and Vanessa Coleman are officers in Buckingham, UK where they've helped to plant a new Salvation Army community in the past year. They have 3 young boys, Isaac, Asher, and Gideon.

Gary: So I guess the first question, and the big question is, what does discipleship look like for you in your context?

Vanessa: So we are mostly working with people who are new to church and church culture in recent years. Because of this we're working very hard on trying to build together a community that loves Jesus, builds supportive relationships, and works out what it looks like to do community discipleship in a healthy way. Because of the demographics we're often working with chaotic young families that don't know how to behave in Church or how to sit quiet in a sermon because they've never had to listen to a sermon before in their life! So we've explored two main routes for our community discipleship.

On a Sunday for the adults, that looks like small Bible study discussion that's not very teaching-heavy, but instead revolves around scripture and 4 questions; what does this passage tell us about God, what does this tell us about people, is there a command to obey/example to follow/promise to claim, and who do I need to share this with? The idea is for people to engage with scripture for themselves and then to share it. So discipleship in this context is about applying it, living it out and sharing it; it's not us at the front telling people what it is (to either forget about by the next week or to be totally disengaged during it) but instead it's a journey where I learn from you and you learn from me, and together we get a fuller picture. I feel like I grow and am shaped by this practice as it's such a privilege to hear from people from different backgrounds and contexts.

Xander: To just go a bit more into the abstract for the moment, I think discipleship falls into two categories in my mind. The first is my journey of discipleship, how am I being more like Him and following Him closely and the second is the practice of discipling others. Those two are not unrelated, but in my head it's sometimes helpful to differentiate between which of those that we're talking about. So which of those are we talking about?

Gary: Ha, great question! Well I think we're open to either and that connection between the two that you've mentioned

V: Because think what we're trying to do in the discipling others way, as well as the typical church activities of how we worship together, is wanting to model family life together and how people can enjoy each other and spend time together doing relationships in healthy ways.

X: And trying to do that as a family of of 5 ourselves, which we're still learning!

V: Sometimes there's moments in our community where two family members want to punch each other's lights out and so we enter into that situation to see how we can model reconciliation and grace. But on the other end of the spectrum, we're sometimes just letting an event or activity overspill past its finish time as people are just together joyfully sharing and celebrating together.

X: That mix is really the day to day, nitty gritty, journeying together of community

V: And what's so powerful about discipleship in this context is it's cycle breaking, we're hoping to disrupt the cycles of dysfunction, where there mum was awful because their mum was awful, and their mum was awful.

I'm a running a women's group (that Xander keeps calling a Home League) and I was asking them what dreams they had as kids and how they're different to their dreams now. One of them said that as a kid she just wanted to be a mum because her mum was so awful and she just wanted to try and learn how to do better than that, but she had no idea how to do it. She shared that since she's started coming to church and being around people who do this differently, she's finding that her home and her children and her life as a mother is changing in a beautiful way.

So for the days when I feel a bit burnt out by church and by doing all 'the stuff' and end up taking God's grace for granted, I think about that kind of transformation and it's a beautiful slap in the face for me that what God has done in my life is incredible and it's beautiful to share with the world.

G: That's so great and such an important model for following Jesus - discipleship that disrupts the cycle of dysfunction.

X: It alliterates perfectly! One of the things that's really important to us in our discipleship expression is encounter with God and surrender to God. I think that spiritual disciplines have been really important in my own life for maintaining contact with the Life Giver (as orders and regulations for soldiers puts it) but the things that have really pushed me forward in discipleship have been encountering God and then responding in surrender to those encounters.

We want to consistently invite people to encounter with God in our ministry, and urge them to surrender. To us that seems to be the pattern in scripture as well, in how God takes His people into a deeper level of discipleship.

V: And it changes it away from just head knowledge. So many people's engagement with Church and with God is just what they know about Him rather than the powerful revelation that He's right here and we have a direct interaction and relationship.

X: Often at times our discipleship programmes have been about imparting knowledge, particularly with kids, it's very didactic. You listen to this story, then you create a craft based on it, and if you can't do the craft properly, someone will help you do the craft properly so that you can show your parents what you've learnt today.

So to change this around we've been experimenting with Godly Play - it's a way of respecting that children have their own spirituality. Godly Play is about bringing the stories of God in ways that are not so didactic, but invite kids to wonder and give them a language to explore their own spirituality

V: It uses and engages their imagination, in a similar way that listening prayer does - it's encounter based.

X: There's a strong repetition of the phrase 'I wonder' and it invites anyone who's doing it to engage in that place of encounter with God in his 'wonderness'. I find that really compelling about Godly Play as it's the encounter that has led me to a deeper level of discipleship.

G: That's so powerful to place discipleship in a framework of 'wonder', I think so often it's placed in a framework of 'work'. Its amazing to think that so many of these practices for you guys now have been shaped by your unique setting - how would you say this practice has impacted your own personal discipleship journey?

X: As soon as we started here, we were encountering these families from all different situations and backgrounds. We had just moved, we'd just had a baby, there was a lot of disequilibrium in our own life. And in the midst of all of this we had all of these kids coming into our building; our church quickly became a child majority church. Vanessa and I don't have much experience in kids ministry...

V: It's not at all what we're good at!

X: It's not a comfortable place for us - yet Churches would give their right arm for children who are pouring in and want to believe in Jesus, but yet we feel completely out of our depth! I think that's how these two areas of discipleship intersect in my life. God takes us just a little bit further than we're willing to go, just out of our depth, just so our feet aren't touching the bottom of the pool. What it does, it forces you to Him! It compels you to rely on Him, and I think for me in this context I've been really excited by what God's doing but finding myself barely able to keep up with where He leads me. My personal journey is one of growing trust and my ministry to others is out of my depth.

V: And that's how we started Godly Play! We didn't know what we were doing so we searched to find something that could help, when we saw it was about encounter we thought, well that fits perfectly, and it all went from there.

G: I love that idea of discipleship leading you to a place of trust and faith as you help to disciple others. As a final question, what for you guys is the greatest joy of the discipleship journey? What fills your hearts?

X: For me, it's whenever I get to hear the voice of Jesus. I don't hear with my ears, but the sense of God talking and sharing with me. Whether that's an intimate moment for me in devotions or whether it's sharing with a friend or someone else the things I think God is saying, I think for me, those moments are... I just love them; they're the best.

V: I think for me, I've found the past year really hard for a lot of reasons. But one of the things that God keeps reminding me over and over again in my walk with Him, is that He has blessed me and graced me with so much. I think as I find myself in this season journeying discipleship with people who are all new to this, God keeps reminding me that what I've seen, and experienced, and tasted in Him isn't to be taken for granted and it's so so precious. It makes me grateful I have Jesus, and on those tough days it makes me get up and try again, as I really want to share that life with others.

Contactless Discipleship:

An interview with Phil Wall

Phil Wall is an executive leadership coach based in the UK, although he works extensively in mainland Europe and the US. He and his wife Wendy are also the founders of We See Hope a charity working with Aids Orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. Phil is a life long Salvationist and for many years, while working with The Salvation Army, helped to create Roots - a conference (which in fact became something of a movement) for spiritual renewal. He has written extensively on discipleship both in his book "I'll Fight!" and also in various articles and publications.

Ian: Phil, thanks so much for taking the time to help us think about this issue. We were wondering if 20 plus years on from that influential book with now a whole new world you inhabit - coaching and speaking to a variety of business people and execs around the world - how your views on discipleship had changed?

Phil: Thanks, guys. It really was that long ago I wrote that book! But, interestingly, and perhaps challenging, some of the themes, issues, and opportunities have not changed that much. The people I spend the vast majority of my time with now have no, or very little knowledge of church. Yet in their most honest moments they want to find meaning behind all the success and the the potential trappings that come with that.

Gary: From your experience, do you think you could give us 5 themes that you think are critical to us thinking more acutely and intentionally about discipleship?

Only 5 might be a struggle! But I'll start with the most critical and we'll see where we get to.

So the first would be **Habit Formulation**. This is absolutely critical. We need to deal with habits and practices that are "unhygienic" - they destroy us. I have this News App on my phone - and when a new story is released the App's trigger-sound sends a shot of dopamine to my brain. I know it sounds sad but I, along with others, can become addicted to that sound. However, like everyone else who gets the same sensation when they receive a message or notification, we are not built to withstand the sheer number of these. Our reward pathways get completely overloaded. So, conversely, to really journey in discipleship we need to create and form habits that will bring life, purpose, and shape to our life as a follower of Christ. We want those habits to be embedded far more deeply than our text or news message alerts, and habits that help us to support others on this journey, too.

The second would be **Healthy Deep Relationships**. This is still the same as it has ever been. I know that deep safe relationships that provide the support, challenge and accountability that are essential to help me grow in discipleship. It's these safe spaces that provide a place for me to confess my sin. If I don't have those then I either have to hide my sin or actually believe that I don't sin! One's not true and the other doesn't end very well.

Ian: I completely agree, and I've noticed this has been a theme of yours for some time, Phil. We have heard you speak about the importance of this and watched you practise this over the years. With the advent of social media - which was not even a thing when you wrote your book - do you think that's changing the way we view relationships?

Wow, before social media, that's true! Frightening, really. But, yes, I have started to talking about "Contactless Relationships". Over the last few years we have migrated from cheque books to cards with a pin number and now we just wave a card over a machine and it debits our bank account without any physical touch! That for me seems to mirror what is happening culturally. Our relationships are becoming increasingly transactional, it's all about 'what I get' from the church, relationship, friend. Added to this, we want relationships without the contact - minimal engagement for instant gratification.

Although Jesus lived and worked in a very different era, climate, and culture to mine - it was in the touch and depth of even the most fleeting of moments with people that He healed and helped. These significant encounters brought freedom, faith and forgiveness. The danger for us is that we want the added value of having people "like" and "follow" us without the challenge and demands of actually getting involved in their lives. As followers of Christ we have to reject so much of this cultural norm to pursue relationships of depth. Otherwise we won't be able to sustain any real clarity and potency in our life as a disciple.

Gary: What a descriptor, 'contactless relationships'! It's so true and such a challenge for us to follow a different path in this dominate culture. So that's 2 top themes, next 3?

Well I think the third needs to be putting yourself in **places of discomfort**. It's absolutely critical that we embrace some of the challenges and inhabit spaces where we don't always feel comfortable. Being around people and places that call us to lean on God and experience his power and grace are critical. When you do any weight training you have to break down the muscle before you can start to build and grow it. When it comes to faith, you have to take bigger steps of faith and deeper steps of faith to enable us to grow in faith. We have to break down our faith muscles so we can achieve bigger and greater things in life's ongoing journey.

I know that it's in some of the most disheartening and challenging environments that I have grown the most. In particular, the environments within which We See Hope works has both exhausted and exhilarated me. I have wept and laughed in the same measure. These places, and other similar but vastly different environments within the UK, have shaped me beyond measure.

The fourth will be the issue we have in the West with **Health and Wealth**. know this is an unpopular thing to say, but I think the vast majority of Evangelical Christians in the UK believe in health and wealth Christianity. They say that "if I am obedient I will enjoy health and access to security and wealth!" The reality is there's no place in the New

Testament for that belief, it is not the testament of Scripture. The vast majority of Christians around the world who are subjected to persecution don't have the luxury of this belief.

We need to be disciples that don't distort scripture to our own cultural and personal preferences.

Gary: And I guess that slips straight back into the transactional model we were talking about earlier, where can even make our relationship with God about what 'I get this out of this'.

Exactly, and for the fifth and final thing, I would say discipleship is all about **leadership**. If you can't lead yourself then you can't lead others. It's that simple. There is no discipleship without leadership, and in the church of Jesus there is no leadership without discipleship.

Thoughts About Discipleship

By Marie Lange-Druart

Marie Lange-Druart is a Salvation Army Officer based in Liege, Belgium. Along with her husband Mic they have seen a remarkable growth in the number of young people coming to know Jesus and be associated with the corps there.

As I reflect on discipleship, I realize that it took me a while to understand the importance of being a disciple of Jesus that makes disciples. In fact, it's easy to live our Christian life and forget about the Great Commission that was given in Matthew 28:18-20, "***All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.***"

What's great about discipleship is that we don't need to be long-time disciples of Jesus in order to teach others and to help them grow in their journey with Him. Whatever we learn from Him can be taught to people as we meet them in our everyday life. As I cross the paths of different disciple-makers who help me to become more spiritually mature, I can then share about what I've learned too.

The image that comes to mind is a sports coach who encourages, challenges, and trains his players, though he himself has been taught by another coach. Surely this person has been able to give advice to his peers even before becoming a real coach himself. We can do the same by not waiting until we think we know enough to make disciples.

From my own experience, when I gave my life to Jesus, I didn't really have someone who helped me spiritually grow. I was reading the Word of God because I knew it was the thing to do, but I didn't understand much from it. Nobody was there to disciple me. I was a bit like the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 who needed Philip to explain what he was reading. What I was learning only came from Sunday messages and weekly meetings at church, but I really lacked the help of others to go deeper in my relationship with the Lord.

At some point in my life, I met a friend who shared how she personally lived her life with Jesus, telling me how she took time to read the Bible. She even showed me her notes about what she was learning, how she would make it applicable to her life, and how she prayed for what God showed her. We often prayed together as well. That was the start of my real spiritual maturity from a baby Christian to learning how to stand alone and walk.

Sadly, this friend was promoted to glory, and again I was left alone. I thought I didn't have enough from her to walk totally on my own yet. So I prayed the Lord to send me someone to study His Word with me who would also be there to disciple me. This took a few months until I met someone who was willing to teach me how to study the

Scriptures. She eventually became my close friend as she took the time to actually study with me and give me advice, and little by little I become more confident to study on my own. I promised myself that I would always look for people around me to help them grow and be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples.

My own walk to becoming a disciple helps me in my responsibility as an officer of the Salvation Army to really focus on discipleship. I show new and seasoned converts how to study, encourage them to find mentors and spiritual partners, while being willing to share what they have learned with others. I truly believe that every believer needs to disciple others. In my position, I have the great privilege to be with a lot of youth and see them grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Using the three following resources has helped tremendously: First, INFINITUM, is a tool that encourages staying focused on Jesus and being accountable to someone. Second, ATHLOS combines sports along one's spiritual journey and has been very helpful. Finally, scriptural studies like COMMUNITY BIBLE STUDY and BIBLE STUDY FELLOWSHIP challenge new disciples to first personally invest in a passage of scripture with questions before coming together to discuss the responses as a group. With this tool new disciples also have the opportunity to take turns sharing an application point through giving a short talk to their peers. Each of these tools touch on the importance of making others active in their learning in order to deeply impact their spiritual growth.

In summary, what encourages me the most about discipleship is that whatever I am learning in my spiritual life I have the ability then to pass it on to others. Consider all the things we have learned about Jesus and our willingness to share it with our friends at church, our Bible study group, or anyone with whom we are in contact. We can't be quiet about it, because in sharing we make God's kingdom grow. We must recall all the people who have journeyed with us and how they taught us to follow Jesus, and then go be that person to someone else.

Most importantly, I remember that Jesus called each of His followers to make disciples of all nations, and our personal mission fields may not be miles away. Let's commit to making disciples wherever we are: in our neighborhoods, offices, or places of leisure. Let's not forget the many opportunities Jesus gives us to share about Him by walking alongside others and really loving them, just as He does.

Monastic Cycles

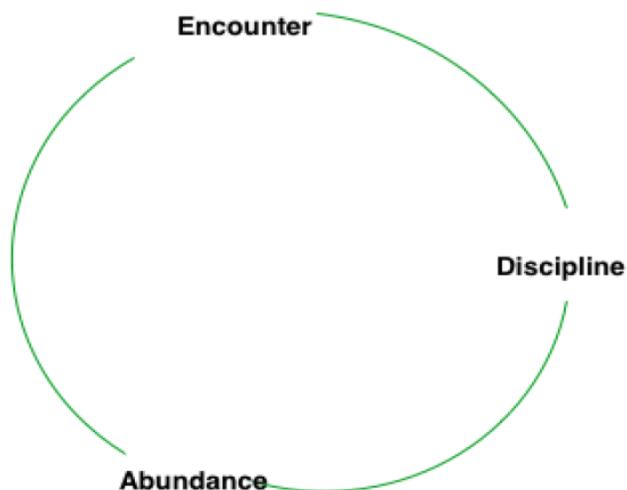
By Ian Mayhew

I read an article some years ago where Jim Wallis (Sojourners) was interviewing Gordon Cosby, the long time pastor of Church of the Saviour in Washington DC, USA. Church of the Saviour was, and is a remarkable church.
(<http://inwardoutward.org/the-church-of-the-saviour/churches>)

It is not a mega church in the sense that we understand it, but it has affected the life of many thousands of people. I was so struck by what I read about it that I went to visit and spend a few days at its Servant Leadership School. It changed the way I viewed Discipleship and commitment to pursuing the Kingdom of God. Through a network of very small communities / churches these people were helping to see change come throughout that downtown area of Washington.

Cosby, who preached every Sunday for over 50 years, until his recent death in March 2013, was always wanting to ensure that the Church of the Saviour remained true to call to following Jesus and the radical lifestyle He demanded. In an article by Jeff Bailey titled: *The Journey Inward, Outward, and Forward, the Radical Vision of The Church of the Saviour* - he recalls this incident.

Ten years after the founding of the church Gordon said this to his congregation: "My conviction is that our church is in greater danger now than we were in the beginning. You have heard of the monastic cycle which goes like this: encounter produces discipline; discipline produces abundance; abundance destroys discipline. We are at the point of having a relative abundance of spiritual power, of spiritual dynamics, of pure joy because of what has been done for us. If we are not very careful, we will let the abundance destroy the discipline."



Our drive and motivation to pursue greater depth with Jesus invariably begins with an encounter. That can happen in a myriad of ways - be it at a conference, prayer time, worship session, walk, life incident etc etc. That often leads us to create a discipline(s). That might be a more focused time in prayer, a greater commitment to accountability, a desire to want to pursue a specific Spiritual growth discipline - fasting, giving, confession etc etc. With this new discipline in place it can often lead to a greater abundance in your life.

However, the sting in the tail is that abundance can often make us believe that we got to this point ourselves, and in fact distance us from Jesus. Abundance is both beautiful, but can be a beast! Instead when we see signs of fruitfulness etc we need to constantly try to encounter Jesus and ask him to guide and lead you for the next part of your journey. Abundance is not an end point!

Perhaps you can see evidence of abundance happening in your life as you have committed yourself to the rigours of being in a HUB.

The Monastic Cycle is a reminder that we do this so that we can encounter Jesus deeper, in a fresh way and see where that leads.

Perhaps go through the cycle as a HUB and give evidence for each stage - the joys and concerns that you carry.



Surrender

By Danielle Strickland

I went on an epic journey last week. It was with a bunch of friends and warrior women and we went back in time. Well, for many of them it was a first time look but for me it was a memory tour. I went back and remembered all that God had invited me to. I remembered some amazing stories and some sad ones too. I remembered and met people I fell in love with, who have helped shape me on my own journey while I was with women I love, who are shaping me still. We saw and did crazy beautiful things.

One of the things we did was a prayer labyrinth. It's a huge mapped out circle with a meandering path that winds and turns, leading into the centre and then out again. It was infuriating. I'm a functional person. I like to get things done. And that path was design to SLOW PEOPLE DOWN. It's designed for reflection. It's meant to help you clear your mind. It was so frustrating. I was holding it together on the outside but on the inside I was flipping out. It was a great source of reflection in the end of course. I realized a bunch of things through that exercise I'd like to share:

//011. Advance isn't always obvious

As you wind around these tight corners you kind of snake your way forward. It actually feels like you are going backwards sometimes. You literally turn around and walk back past where you just were. Except, you aren't still there. You are following a line that is progressing forward. So, even though you feel like you are repeating and going over the same space – you are not. Can you see where this is headed? That is called progress. But it isn't always obvious. Sometimes progress is so slow and so windy that it feels like it's not progress at all. But every time I started getting frustrated I would look down at my feet. I would realize that I was further along the path than I was the last time I was here. And it got me thinking. What if I did that more in my everyday life? What if I took the time to look down at where I'm standing and even though it feels like I've been here a hundred times before I recognized that it's not the same place? What if the place I'm standing, seems familiar, but is actually farther down the path? It would inevitably lead me closer to the centre.

//102. shortcuts are cheating.

I really wanted to skip some of the path. I wanted to jump the lines. It frustrated me to stay on the trail. One of my friends did. She went into a frenzy of activity trying to get to the centre as fast as she could and ended up at the start again! It was really funny. And it's also really true. I feel like our spirituality has a rhythm and when we mess with it - when we try to speed the lessons up and skip ahead because we don't like God's timing or the long-suffering required for some deeper lessons, we actually don't end up closer to the centre - we end up at the beginning. "Let's try this again" I can hear the spirit saying. Needless to say we all laughed until we almost cried - which is what I do in real life to. How many lessons will we have to re-learn because we want to skip them altogether?

//103. it takes time.

I keep learning this. I'm sure you do to. We live in an instantaneous world. If my email takes longer than ten seconds to load I open another browser window. I'm not kidding. I can't take slow. And that's a spiritual problem. Because it takes time to get to the place where we are ready to connect with God. It takes some time to empty ourselves of ourselves. It takes time to listen, to pray, to hear, to learn, to try. It all takes time. And it's worth the time too. Time is the most valuable commodity we have. I need to learn to waste it on God. It's His after all. I need to allow myself to take the time to experience God.

So, the long and winding road of prayer is frustrating and rewarding. Those things go together a lot if you think about it. Let's just say, it bothered me in all the right ways! It reminded me that we are all on a journey, all the time, with a lot of amazing people. I'm trying to pay more attention - not to just 'get somewhere' but to enjoy the path there .



"You know you're surrendered to God when you rely on God to work things out instead of trying to manipulate others, force your agenda, and control the situation."

– Rick Warren

