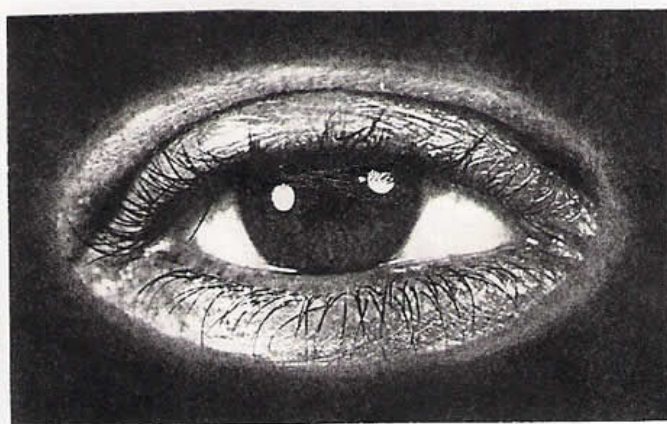


EYES WIDE OPEN



----- Ray Miller -----

Part 2

Where to from here open homes of grace

*'Are you tired ? Worn out ? Burnt out on religion ?
Come to me. Get away with me and you will recover your life.
I will show you how to take a real rest.
Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it.
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.
I won't lay anything heavy or ill -fitting on you.
Keep company with me and you will learn to live lightly and freely*

Jesus Matthew 11 : 28 - 30 TM

This is the second part of this BOOK

The first part of which is published separately as
I ONCE WAS BLIND

If you have not already read this first part, you are very much
encouraged to do so before reading this part

This book is also a follow on and a companion to another book
.. and to the church in Auckland write ...

by the same Author

If you have not already read this other book, you are very much
encouraged to do so before reading this one

Blessings

foreword

where are we at ?

From time to time people ask us - where are you at now, regarding 'Church' and meeting with other Christians ?

Well, the short answer is that we, like so many others, have been largely disappointed with what we refer to as the 'Present Religious System' of structured Christian denominations and local 'Churches'

And so, we try to 'keep it simple' as it was in early Church times of the first few centuries after Jesus death and resurrection, as portrayed in the book of Acts.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship (kononia), and in breaking of bread and in prayers *Acts 2 : 42*

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house ; did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart
Acts 2 : 46

We endeavour to meet with other like minded people, currently every second Sunday, at each others homes - in rotation.

We meet, chat, then share in a group whatever each one has to contribute that is edifying, sing, pray, share a pot-luck meal, and have communion. Usually the host 'kicks it off' with some topic or insight, and it goes from there, and before we know it, 4 - 6 hours have passed !

We get to know one another really well, and share / pray for each others situations - to Know and be Known ! Accountability to each other, giftings able to be contributed and endorsed in a loving group situation.

We pray specifically for each others circumstances, and the needs of others made known - and the answers are frequent and remarkable !

No offerings, but people individually can respond to whatever financial needs are made known - directly and without 'overheads' deducted !

No buildings to maintain. No agendas. No 'performers'.

No professionals or staff to pay. No boards. No 'overhead costs'

Fluid, adaptable, individual, satisfying -- and it works !
very much 'organic'

If you're in the area - pop in sometime !

This second part of the book, conveys something of what we have learnt over the past years, with our ups and downs, our visitors and their contributions, our insights, and our learning 'on the job'

as we go

as we are healed, restored

as we are blessed indeed !

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withdrawal / detox'ing 1

The first few years after leaving an authoritarian church, and what some refer to as 'the present religious system', was a period of a shift in our lifestyle, our habits, and our attitudes.

We had to un-learn so much, we had been so conditioned to being an attendee or spectator, or part time participant in the programmes of that particular Church assembly.

First there was the - 'what do I do on Sunday now ?' question.

We were so used to getting up on Sunday, taking a deep breath, getting dressed appropriately, getting the children ready, picking up others, and then spending the greater part of the day attending various services and Church programmes.

But now ? We listen to our neighbours getting their car out and going through the same performance that we used to, and reflected.

There was so much to unlearn, to withdraw from, to de-tox ourselves from, and then to learn afresh. Even some of the religious jargon that we had picked up needed to be dropped off and discarded.

And it wasn't very easy at all some days, to change our habits and attitudes.

We have heard so many people say, who have gone through the trauma of leaving an authoritarian control Church, that it took them several years to adjust and to get to feel relatively normal and free again. Even the apostle Paul spent 3 years in the desert, after having dramatically exited from a Pharasaical upbringing and indoctrination.

It is just like an addict de-toxing from their habit, experiencing withdrawal symptoms, even going 'cold turkey', sweating it out, getting it all out of the system, detoxification, as drug addicts go through.

Or even recovering from a case of abuse - in this case 'spiritual abuse', according to just how controlling the Church was that has been exited from.

You realize that all those years of religious culture and conditioning and Church programming had created a type of addiction in your life, and the putting on of 'a

religious mask' that concealed the real 'you' and your individuality, and that it all takes some getting over.

Some people cease all fellowship totally for a period of time - just to get their heads unscrambled, to give themselves time to breathe and think a few thoughts for themselves, to gather themselves together and get their identity and their individually sorted out, and to restore some tortured or fractured relationships within the family circle, and with some friends and contacts etc

And another very important if not an absolutely vital element - there is a need to be prayed for and prayed over, by someone who has 'been there, done that' and is spiritually aware.

Especially if the former Church was controlling or legalistic to the point of being Cultish.

There needs to be a release from any and all spiritual binding factors that permeated that particular assembly. So many people I know have said that such a prayer of release and unbinding has brought much inner freedom and release from spiritual baggage that they never even realized they had. For me, such a prayer brought immediate release from my own personal black cloud of depression, anxiety, spiritual inadequacy - a feeling that I would never be good enough, wasn't praying or doing enough.

And especially don't throw oneself into yet another structured Church scene in an effort to 'keep busy for the Lord' or to prove anything to yourself or the Church just left. This can just result in 'out of the frying pan, into the fire' and a continuation of the methods used in the former Church, with eventual devastating results (we have witnessed such happenings first hand)

So, take a break, give yourself some time to recover from the former conditioning.

And the many things to unlearn !

Formerly, most things had been done for us in the structured Church scene - all we basically had to do was to get ready, show up, and contribute when asked.

But now, things are different (and as the Master intended, I might hasten to add)

We are now (comparatively to our former Church attendance) 'on our own' and having to increase our learning of how to walk with God intimately and personally, albeit with frequent encouragement from others who had exited the religious system.

We are now dependent on getting our own guidance direct from God, and having to listen for the voice of the Shepherd , to seek our own counsel, to perhaps search the Scriptures more than we have ever done before, to stop 'doing' religious things, to focus more on 'being' a follower of the Lamb, to lead a simpler life style.

Withdrawing from all the religiosity and Churchianity and the religious masking that we had picked up over the years.

'Peeling the onion' I heard someone call it, and to me that is a pretty fair description of the process. Layer by layer, the religiously conditioned ways are shed, and some of them with tears, just as the onion produces as it is peeled.

But in its place is a priceless gift - a simple relationship with God and the Holy Spirit, and with those of 'a like mind', who have been through much the same process, and have many tips to share and encourage you with.

Meeting simply with another, or perhaps 2 or 3, over a cup of coffee, or meeting in an open home with a shared meal.

Then, learning how to network with other believers and to develop our own individual sphere of service in the community - its all so simple, and effective, and spiritually satisfying, and fruitful.

But it's also progressive - we are all 'works under construction.'

'Where there is a will there is a way' the old adage goes.

Bless you on your own unique and individual journey.

And do take some time 'to smell the roses.'

a covering

2

"But if we leave the religious system, what will we do for a covering ?"
my friend of many years asked.

I looked at him. "Just what sort of a covering do you mean ? I responded

"Well, we need someone to 'cover us', to be accountable to, an assembly to be under, a Pastor to watch for us !"

"Do we just ?" I asked him back "where does it say all of that in the scriptures ?
Our covering is Christ, alone - we don't need any man to get between us and God !"

He couldn't give me an answer, but he wasn't convinced - all of those years of religious conditioning have a great effect in moulding ones thinking

It would seem to be one thing to leave a legalistic controlling assembly, but yet quite another to escape from the attitudes and concepts that they promulgate and leave us with.

'Peeling the onion' of layers of religiosity and religiously founded ideas can take a while

'A covering' indeed - the concept has quite a hold in Christendom today

I can find only the one reference to 'a covering' in the Word *Isaiah 30 : 1*
Woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me, and that cover with a covering, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin

The Hebrew word *maccekak* 'covering' finds its meaning in the method of making a metal idol. Idols were used by the unfaithful as a false 'covering' instead of trusting in the Lord. Thus the covering is a false league or alliance, as interpreted by Strong's and other Bible translations. This is what many 'covering' relationships are in the Church today

My Bible says that *there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*
1 Timothy 2 : 5

Jesus blood is our sole covering. He alone is our mediator - our lawyer, our advocate, our high priest
Hebrews 4 : 14 - 5 : 6

The Holy Spirit is our teacher, our comforter (paraclete - one called alongside to help), our helper, advocate, intercessor, our power source, bringing true conviction
John 14 : 16 - 26 Amp our anointing 1 John 2 : 27

We are accountable to God Himself alone, not to one man or 'Pastor", and we need none other - just ask Martin Luther about that *James 5 : 16*

We are our indeed our brothers 'keeper' for support , caring and encouragement / correction - as Cain should have been of his brother Able back in the Eden family
Genesis 4 : 9

And that is just what open homes of grace can bring to pass - for what ever correction and adjustment, (just as the apostle Paul was of Simon Peter *Galatians 2 : 11 - 21*) and submission one to another, not as a formal thing, but spontaneously as and when the need arises.

This can arise quite naturally in the course of a normal conversation - no drama, no undue tension, no embarrassment or rejection, but occurring with love, acceptance and forgiveness, in a family setting. And those with a pastoral heart can perform their function within that atmosphere and setting. And any other personal giftings are free to move, with what ever experimentation, from what ever level of personal experience, and be absorbed and judged, all to the edification - the building up - of the body of Christ.

And so the group - the body of Christ - becomes self equipping, self supplying, self correcting, strong and healthy, vigorous, and then to move out to the community at large - to be salt and light and attract others to that light.

And we are blessed, and the body grows

And Gods name is glorified, and the Father is well pleased.

So - if any one wants 'a covering' - well here - take my umbrella !

But please - lay off suggesting that all believers need such.

Quote # 'The Bubble will Burst' Page 149 by D Newby

accountability

3

Let's get one thing straight from the very outset please - we are all accountable to God and to Him alone as our Creator and the Father of Spirits - not to any parent, relative, nor to any so called 'Pastor', Priest, Elder or brother.

We will all stand before God alone at the day of judgment to receive either our pardon and rewards or eternal condemnation. No other human person can stand between us and God - there is only one mediator between God and a human being - the man Christ Jesus. *1 Timothy 2 : 5 Hebrews 9 : 15 Ephesians 2 : 14 - 18*

In all of scripture I find that there is no instance of interim or ultimate spiritual accountability to any other person on this earth !

We have only the one mediator between us and God - the man Christ Jesus, *1 Timothy 2 : 15* and no other person on this fair earth can or should take his place or do the Holy Spirits work of conviction for Him. Jesus alone is 'our covering' so to speak to use a common religious term, and we are chosen as God's habitation. *Ephesians 2 : 22*

But we have been made as social 'animals', interdependent and needing each other for support, comfort, solace and at times correction through all the stages and incidents of life.

As humans, even though redeemed and born again - born from above, born of the Spirit of God, we are living in a fallen world society, with all our shortcomings, our sinful tendencies, our natural desires and disposition, our times of weakness in withstanding temptations, and subject to all of life's pressures and adversities.

We are indeed 'our brothers keeper' as far as watching out for, rebuking and correcting in season, (as Cain should have been of Able, *Genesis 4 : 9*), but still not as far as being spiritually accountable to any other.

God has ordained that our chosen lifelong spouse is our primary source of support, solace, and admonishment - no one else knows us as well as that blessed partner, who can correct us in love and kindness at whatever appropriate time and occasion befits.

Then there are our relatives, our neighbours, our workmates, our associates, our colleagues and our friends who observe our conduct and can speak in to our lives when and if necessary, and encourage, chide, censure, rebuke or correct us as situations arise.

But to the Christian there are yet others - our Christian brethren, who have yet another range of opportunities to say a word in season, even of rebuke and correction.

Scripture is full of such instances :

The apostle Simon Peter was rebuked by his fellow apostle Paul
who withstood him to his face before them all *Galatians 2 : 11, 14*

And even the all powerful King David after his affair with Bethsheba, was rebuked in wisdom and with courage by the prophet Nathan *2 Samuel 12 : 1 - 14*

Elders especially are able to rebuke another elder (after confirmation by at least 2 or 3 witnesses), and that publicly *1 Timothy 5 : 19, 20*

And Christian brethren concerning each other - we are all encouraged to
admonish one another *Colossians 3 : 16* *Romans 15 : 14*
and even to *confess your sins one to another* *James 5 : 16*
And please note that this is not just the responsibility of a so called 'Pastor' or Priest, or leader, but each one of other brethren

But human nature often sees the pendulum swing too far the other way on this subject of 'accountability'.

Beware the local assembly that has been founded and led by one person - and which in reality is a 'one man band' - a spiritual cowboy riding the range as an independent 'lone ranger'. Usually that founder / leader is articulate, with a degree of charisma, and some motivational and leadership skills (but usually quite insecure in themselves). Their elders are inevitably well chosen as 'Yes men' and not given to confronting the self-styled leader. These self-appointed and self-styled supposed shepherds are invariably not answerable to any one else, within or without their assembly.

"The only boards in this Church are the boards under my feet" is an oft repeated phrase, or a similar statement is uttered, clearly to convey just who is in charge and who has the last say on any matter within that assembly. Or even if there is a constitution, and a Board of Trustees or Elders, these leaders ensure that they (with their spouses and children) always have a majority or the casting vote.

But Churchianity and the structured Church scene with its bigger denominations have also established their own methods of supposed 'accountability' - the hierarchal and pyramidal structure operating downwards as in any other business structure, with admonishment, chastisement, humiliation, ostracizing and even excommunication to those who dare to disagree or fail to toe the party line in any matter.

But all of this in sharp contrast to Jesus methods and example - he was only against the religious establishment of his day, and which has continued in organization, structure, format and spirit to this our very own day and age.

So, please don't come at me with a need to have 'a covering', or to be 'accountable' to any other religious person - my spouse, relatives, colleagues, neighbours, friends and Christian brethren can and will do any rebuking and correction quite speedily enough thank you very much - but hopefully in love and kindness - and I will be accepting of that, and repenting, confessing and asking forgiveness where needed.

And what better scenario and environment for any of such to happen but in Open Homes of Grace, in free and open discussion, where iron can sharpen iron and keep the cobwebs and rust away. And where love can cover all and any of our human frailties

So let's leave accounts and accountability to the great eternal 'Accountant' that we all will one day stand before and give account to.

a private house

a 'house of God'

4

Most of the time, Jesus' activity during His 3 years of public ministry was outside of the temple and the 'religious establishment' of scribes and Pharisees who envied him, falsely accused his motives, and eventually sought to kill him. The wayside and the byways were Jesus parish, a boat pushed out from the lake-shore was his frequently used platform to speak to the throngs that followed and listened avidly to him. On so many other occasions he resorted to the houses of his followers and of those who sought his miraculous healing power.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <i>Luke 2 : 12</i> | Jesus was even born in a cow - house.
An animal's feeding trough was his basinet. |
| <i>Luke 5 : 29</i> | When Jesus called Matthew to follow him, he had previously been a publican / tax collector, and threw Jesus a feast / party in his own house to celebrate the occasion. |
| <i>Luke 5 : 19</i> | Jesus healed the paralytic let down through the roof of a house by his friends. |
| <i>Luke 10 : 38</i> | Martha's house (and Mary her sister, and Lazarus their brother) where Jesus often frequented. |
| <i>Luke 19 : 5</i> | Jesus even invited himself to a despised publican / tax collector's house - Zacchaeus, causing such dramatic changes to his host. |
| <i>Luke 7 : 36</i> | Jesus even visited the house of Simon the Pharisee who sought his company over a meal. |
| <i>Luke 14 : 1</i> | Another visit to a Pharisee's house, where he healed a man with dropsy. |
| <i>Mark 14 :14-16</i> | The 'Last Supper' was held in the 'upper room' of a man's house. |

Luke 22 :10-13 The man was identified to the disciples as carrying 'a pitcher of water' unusual because the fetching of water from the local well was woman's work.
Perhaps his wife was sick, or he was a widower.
His house obviously was of several storeys with a large upper floor space.

Acts 1 : 13-15 After Jesus ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and
'an upper room'

Could this have been the same room as where Jesus had his 'last supper'?
It is referred to exactly the same, and these 2 events were only 40 days apart.
The room must have been quite large, and had become the lodging of the 11 disciples, and of size enough to hold 120 persons.

Acts 2 : 1, 2 This meeting continued until the day of Pentecost, when *a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind filled all the house*

So, this momentous occasion of the filling of the disciples with the Holy Ghost, the very first Christian Pentecost, took place in the upper storey of a house.

So much of the ministry of the apostles, Jesus' disciples and followers of 'The Way' as they were then called was in their houses and homes - what an example for us today.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared on the shore of Tiberias where he provided and prepared a meal for his followers.

Was this the very first outdoor barbeque ? With Jesus as the host and chef ?
Jesus went to where the people were, he was mobile - wherever, however, his disciples went and did, Jesus was waiting the appropriate moment to appear with food and even to help prepare the serving of the meal - could this be not just a one-off example, but could it be an actual pattern of the future called out assembly to follow. Not for Jesus a static event in a special building, but an opportune, unique and special occasion as an example to us all.

Another fascinating point considering house churches and God's use of them is in *Acts 10*, when Simon Peter delivered his pivotal sermon and opened the door of salvation and blessing to the Gentiles.

And just where was this tremendously important meeting held and to whom was his sermon delivered ? Why, in the house of Cornelius, and to a small audience consisting of Cornelius and his kinsmen / relatives and near / close friends !

What a priceless occasion and a pattern that God arranged - a house meeting in the home of a person sensitive to God's voice, with only his relatives and his close friends

present. Without any trappings nor fuss, Peter delivered one of the most momentous and pivotal messages ever spoken on this planet, in further emphasis of the New Testament pattern that Paul utilised and to illustrate yet again exactly what God thinks of house meetings. (And so should we !)

Paul on his 3 missionary journeys caused small groups of believers to meet together in their houses, which Paul repeatedly referred to as ' the Church in your house'

Romans 16 : 5 'The Church that is in their house'

Collosians 4 : 15 'The Church which is in his house'

Philomen 2 'The Church in your house'

Paul was a tentmaker by craft and trade, *Acts 18 : 3* but he is never recorded as recommending a building programme to any local 'Church' or group of believers. To the further amazement of contemporary businessmen, he didn't even advocate buying a tent from one of his fellow craftsmen or business partners. He never seemed to even push the use of tents to make an ideal cheap and functional gathering place, as Billy Sunday, the talented American evangelist of the early 1900's discovered and utilised. Billy used massive tents for his crusades to the small towns of America with such amazing effectiveness.

Also to the chagrin of contemporary business folk, Paul also missed the absolutely ideal opportunity to make a bit of cash on the side by pushing his craft and trade as a business enterprise, or even start a Franchise chain.

Modern day tele-evangelists would never have been so likely to miss such a wide open business opportunity to help pay the groceries !

new wineskins

5

Jesus told them this parable

No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match (agree with) the old.

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out (be spilled) and the wineskins will be ruined.

No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.(and both are preserved)

And no one after drinking old wine (immediately) wants (desires) the new, for he says, "The old is better"

Luke 5 36 - 39 NIV, KJ in brackets)

(In Bible times, animal skins were used for storing wine in, superseded by the glass or plastic bottles of recent times)

Each and every time that I have heard these verses mentioned in the PRS (the Present Religious System) of structured religion, they were interpreted as referring to the infilling of a new born-again Christian by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (and that often happened remarkably soon after conversion). The analogy was that of the Holy Spirit being poured out into the new wineskin / bottle of a newly born believer, they said.

Now that seemed to be quite a legitimate interpretation of the first part of the verses - that of new wine being poured into a new wineskin / bottle, but what about the remainder of the verses ? Never did I ever hear a satisfactory interpretation of these - the old wineskins / bottles being burst and the new wine spilled. If and when these other verses were read they were left un-interpreted.

And so, as time has passed over the decades, whenever I chanced to read these verses, it seemed as if there were unexplored depths below a tranquil surface.

Until recently as we have ventured into life beyond the structured Church scene, and enjoyed the simple essence of Open Home group meetings, and observed other similar localized Groups struggling to 'keep it simple' and meet informally.

The new wine to us now, has quite positively become revealed as 'life beyond the confines of the structured Church scene' - the free and simple expression of small group fellowships.

Organic - without dominators, 'performers', titles, agendas, formats programmes, formulas, controlling clergy / leaders, time slots, etc

Where personal gifts are free to meet each need as they arise, where the 'ground at the foot of the cross is level', where a brotherhood of caring equals exists and is allowed to operate.

The old wineskins / bottles are quite evidently those of the structured programmed 'church' scene - the picture / type fits the parable perfectly.

And no one after drinking old wine (immediately) wants (desires) the new, for he says, "The old is better"

As commonly known, 'old habits die hard', and can take a considerable time to be changed or cast aside. The methods and attitudes of the old wineskin have been long learned and practised over a lifetime, and have become very comfortable and snug fitting, just like an old overcoat.

Many people may have been jolted into the new wineskin way of meeting together, often with trauma and bruising as they left or exited the old structures. To these people the new wineskin way of Christian living is welcomed and the old skin and methods are seen for what they are and over some time, discarded and shed.

But what for many has been a lifetime of habit, practice, programming, performance and methodology, and mental attitude is so hard to un-learn and cast off. It seems so like 'peeling an onion' as layers upon layers of these old PRS methods are firstly detected, and then discarded.

And so, by observation, some groups experience a continual battleground of dissatisfaction, as the new wine comes into contact with the old wineskin formats. And the result as stated in these verses, is that the old wineskin is burst, along with many groans, and heartache, and anguish as ***the new agrees not with the old***

The new wine of Open Home fellowship can never be a PRS Church in miniature - that is just a smaller version of the old wineskin.

Then, nothing has changed except the size of the gathering !

The methods are still the same - dominance, performance, agendas - just of a smaller size.

The performers still perform, the dominators still dominate, nothing has really changed except the numbers !

These verses surely convey that new wine must be poured into a totally new way of meeting and fellowshiping - a totally new and fresh wineskin / bottle.

The OLD	versus	The NEW
Clergy & Laity		Communality, an equal brotherhood
Titles		Respect, but no pre-eminence
Deference expected		Courtesy - Yes, deference - No
Dominators		Each one sharing / contributing from an equal basis
Microphone 'monopolizers'		Considerate, sensitive to others in the group
Platform 'showmen'		Genuine testimonies & sharing
'Pulpitering'		Individual reality, without showmanship
Performers		Forget the 'pentecostal platform' type antics
Spectators - non-participating		Each one contributes in whatever way or leading
'Performing prophets'		Any one who truly feels led to pray for another does so
'Hand layer on-ers'		Without imitating the Tele- Evangelist Healers
Personal Agendas		No agenda, but to see the Kingdom of God on earth
Building one's own Empire / Church		Willing to let God build his own Kingdom among us
Take - Overs		Resisted - His Kingdom - His way
Tradition		New and fresh, Spirit led, or NOT AT ALL !
'We have always done it this way'		Earnestly seeking His guidance, alone
Formats		Each gathering unique, original, fresh
Programmes		Seeking His original leading
Formulas		'Back to basics' - the Word of God alone studied
Law		Grace
Legalism		Individual freedom under God
Control		Where the Spirit of the Lord there is - liberty

The two methodologies are opposed to each other, and can never be allowed to mix. Those operating from the old wineskin format will inevitably be at odds with those operating from the new, and vice versa !

And unless the total group are like-minded in being well aware of the old wineskin trademarks and careful not to let them reoccur nor allow them to happen - watch out! The old wineskins / bottles will burst asunder, (with noise and trauma / effects !), and the new wine will get spilled, and everyone will wonder at the dis-satisfaction experienced by both parties !

And the group will be grievously affected - if not shattered
And people will have still more bruises on bruises.

the new agrees not with the old

no man straightway desires the new, for "the old is better"

How true are the words of the Master today as then.

For those of us who had long experienced the PRS structured format now find that some struggle and effort and time is required to cast it off entirely - 'the old is better' attitude and methods cling so hard to our religious self-life.

The new way of liberty needs some time to be accepted, experimented with, learned afresh and indeed 'put on' just like the 'new man'.

New wine must be poured into new (flexible) wineskins / bottles or the old (dry and hard) wineskins / bottles are burst and the new wine is spilled

Lord ... give us seeing eyes, to discern between the old and the new wineskins / bottles, and grace to keep it all new and simple, and enjoy the new wine, and preserve both wineskins.

Amen and amen

Yes - it says preserve both wineskins - even if we don't now consider that there is anything much worth preserving in the old wineskins ! But some people are familiarly content with the old and established structures and "order" and programmes, and formulas, and performers etc, and being spoon-fed weekly - so be it !

Eventually we will get well used to enjoying the new wine and the new flexible wineskins, and detect more readily the old dry hard variety that continue to exist in Christendom.

reform or re-build ? 6

Ask any experienced Architect, builder, or home re-furbisher - which is easier ?
To refurbish a dilapidated old building or build a new structure on a clean vacant site?
And then stand back and listen to the many anecdotes that will usually flow from their store of long and often bitter experiences.

Refurbishing, remodeling, making additions and alterations to any old building is a mission in itself - there seems to be no end to the discoveries of still more ancient materials to be replaced, defective services, rotten timbers, sunken floors, sagging ceilings, and all manner of disparities.

Many a person, enamoured with the potential of restoring an ancient 'treasure', when completed, would rue the day they ever started out on such a demanding, wearisome, frustrating and 'character forming' task.

And so it is spiritually - to reform, revive the old, or to re-build from scratch ?

God knows the problem, and Jesus expressed it

***No man puts a piece of a new garment upon an old, because both the new makes a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agrees not with the old
And no man puts new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles will perish, but new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved No man also having drunk old wine, then desires new, for he says the old is better***
Luke 5 : 36 - 39

But alas, so many sincere and well meaning people, seeing the deficiencies of the Church system, end up trying to reform it - Martin Luther for example, who spent a lifetime trying to reform the Roman Catholic Church, and centuries later, today, that Church structure and its methods continue basically the same, having survived with hardly a dent what the historians now refer to as 'The Reformation'.

So, one man ministries are encouraged to become Team Ministries, but still within the old structures, and new methods and formulas are encouraged to try and reform the old. Seminars, conferences, formulas are endlessly promoted, in efforts to bring new life to an old system. Tithes are now collected by Auto Payment, credit cards, or internet banking, when the whole system of tithing has been abolished with the Law, and replaced by Grace giving.

New wine must be poured into new wineskins / bottles for the new agrees not with the old

And this is what the reformers of history and down to the modern day, try and dodge the basic disagreement of the two conflicting system.

on the one hand - religion,

on the other hand - simply trying to follow God in homes and small local groups.

The reformers mistakenly spend their efforts trying to patch up the old, thinking that is less conflict than starting off all over again.

Jeremiah knew the problem and the conflict between the two opposing systems of religion and that of simply serving God in his day and generation.

His God given message and mission ***was to root out, pull down, to destroy, and to throw down, and then to re-build and to plant*** (from scratch !) *Jeremiah 1 : 10*

Jesus had the same problem with the Pharisees who ran the temple religious system, with many accounts of the conflict and disagreement between the two, (just read *Matthew 23*) and which eventually ended with his betrayal and death (but in Gods plan and purpose)

Paul had the same basic disagreement with the High priest and the religious system as recorded in Acts 23, and later evidenced in the believers at Galatia, and described in his letter to that city.

The new agrees not with the old - never can, never has, never will.

It's a hopeless mission to try and attempt it.

The basic disagreement between the two over-rides all else.

So why then do so many try to reform the old and spend their time, energies, and endless funds on what must surely be the most frustrating mission ever attempted on this planet.

Why would anyone ever want to preserve a rickety old derelict building beats me - except as a museum !

But as Jesus said, they say ***the old wine is better***

And that's the problem of tradition and sentimentality, and an inbuilt resistance to change, along with all the various facets of self exaltation and self promotion, I guess.

The old just 'feels' safer, and familiarity and tradition brings a measure of security, in spite of the serious deficiencies.

The new makes a rent - so often, the only way that people leave the old system of religion is by some incident of trauma, conflict and painful experience, as the motivating principles of the religious system are exposed for what they are. And this is why reformers do not, or rather will not, see the need for a new and fresh beginning - they are not prepared to ***make a rent***, endure the pain, and leave the comfort of the establishment to simply begin anew.

So, just let me, and us, and untold millions of people all over the globe, enjoy the new wine of small groups and open homes, as we seek to preserve that which we have found as a new and better way in its absolute simplicity.

But the basic disagreement between the old and new will always be there, as long as this age lasts !

But there's another view of all this as described in ***1 Corinthians 3***

From this Paul describes 3 basic types of people

Firstly, the **natural** man - the Adamic, unregenerated man of the world

Secondly born-again Christians, yes, but **carnal**, **babes in Christ** who follow men, and denominations, and charismatic leaders and man made systems of religion and divide the body of Christ into doctrinal schisms / factions - denominations
4 times in 4 verses Paul uses the term **carnal Christians**

(**Carnal** - my dictionary defines this as : of the flesh, worldly, earthly, non- spiritual, material, sensual)

Thirdly **spiritual** Christians, led by the Spirit of God alone, following the voice of the Shepherd.
active in their own unique calling and sphere and anointing meeting whenever, wherever, in true koininia fellowship

concerned not for the church establishment / the religious system of the day, but solely for the body of Christ, being prepared as the bride of Christ for the return of the bridegroom.

And then the dire warning to our various works and efforts, concerning the day of trial and examination - and that by fire !

But let every person take heed how they build upon the foundation (which is Jesus Christ)

Every persons work shall be made evident, for that day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try (test) every mans work to reveal of what sort it is

If any persons work which they have built shall remain, they shall receive a reward

If any persons work shall be burned they shall suffer loss

1 Corinthians 3 : 10 - 15

So every work will be tested, to see if it will withstand the furnace - scary thought !
When all the works of self-effort, of self-exaltation and self-promotion, of wood, hay and stubble, will all be tested and consumed.

When works prompted and inspired and led by God's Spirit, those works likened to gold and silver (these metals having been purified already, with the dross removed in a furnace) and precious stones will be tested and displayed to bring honour to God alone.

Jesus himself warned likewise

Every plant, which my heavenly Father has not planted, shall be rooted up

Let them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind

And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch

Matthew 15 : 13, 14

Surveying the present religious system in this day and age, and the fruit of various plantings, one can only muse as to just how full the ditch has become !

Lord, keep us simple, keep us true, to you, your Spirit, and your voice - alone (but with full accountability to mature and spiritual brethren)

Amen and Amen

agendas

7

As we continue our spiritual pilgrimage and journey, we meet and network with other like-minded fellow pilgrims as the opportunity arises. (and we believe as the Spirit of God guides)

Our meetings are simple - usually around a shared meal during which at some point we share the breaking of bread - the Lords Supper.

But the one essential element of these get-togethers is simply this - we have no hidden or secret personal agendas :

We are not meeting together

to impress anyone

to perform in any way

to promote ourselves in any degree

to draw disciples after ourselves

to 'sell' each other something

to seek donations, or have a collection

to promote any enterprise, belief, or organization

to convert or convince or persuade anyone to our way of thinking

to seek an increase in numbers

Again, we have no hidden or secret agendas

We are merely there as individual family members of God's universal family, gathering to share and encourage one another, to be ourselves, amongst hopefully like-minded people.

Our aim is simply to meet together and let God do His own work amongst us. We are there to make ourselves available, as servants of the living God, seeking to hear His voice, and to be sensitive to His leading - trusting Him to show up and to guide and work amongst us.

By not meeting to impress any one, the strain and stress is removed.

By not trying to perform or influence any one, any tension is gone.

By not trying to sell anyone something, others can relax and be themselves also.

By not having any hidden agenda, God can do His own work amongst us, we can share and relate and encourage each other from pure hearts.

And if any people do come along with some of their own agendas, these will be made apparent in the due course of sharing, and any one - any one at all, can comment and gently correct that attitude, all being done communally without embarrassment or discouragement - body ministry at its simplest and most powerful.

Ah - the liberty and simplicity and power that such a group of people can find.

And if someone does indeed have some trouble or burden and need a listening ear, there will be someone else with whom they can find a quiet spot and confide and pray.

And after sharing such a meal and the Lords Supper, there may well be collective prayer from anyone or everyone about some of the topics freely discussed.

And the clock may well cease to play a part - time can pass in His presence so quickly.

And all are edified, built up, encouraged, even purged.

And trust grows amongst each other, and God is glorified, and His Holy Spirit can freely move, and His Kingdom is extended.

Its all so simple and powerful if a group of likeminded people can meet together without agendas of any sort.

Lord - may we have no agenda but yours !

pass pulpit please

8

I readily recall my first encounter with a Home Church style meeting

We had been invited to a neighbours home for a house meeting, and it was quite personal and informal in their lounge, until a time when the host vanished temporarily and returned with a small but real lectern / Pulpit. This was placed at one end of the room, where-upon the whole tone of the meeting changed. With this simple but monumental action, the intimacy of the home group was changed, and we were back again in a typical format Church setting - being preached at.

Those present had again been divided into Clergy and laity, with exactly the same format as in a bigger Church assembly. They had simply exchanged a big hall for a house / home setting, and reduced the numbers.

The memory of that experience lives on in my memory

I recall thinking - surely this is not what 'Open Homes of Grace' are all about.

Surely not just the same 'Churchy' format but in a smaller venue, with fewer people !

You are brethren Jesus said *Matthew 23 : 8*
or **brothers** as we would say today

Brethren - Crudens Concordance says are

- 1 The sons (children) of one father or mother, or of either of them
- 2 Those neighbours or kinsman who are closely bonded together
- 3 Those who have made profession of the same faith and religion

To my count, the word Brethren is used about 300 times in the New Testament, mostly referring to the third definition above - those of the same faith - brothers / brethren in Christ.

'The ground at the foot of the cross is level' , the saying goes.

No hierarchy in the kingdom of God, just a King and his subjects.

Connected, individually led and guided directly by the Spirit of God himself.

Jesus left a brotherhood - albeit each person with a personal gifting.

And elders, who were simply the elder / older ones - older by account of years on this planet and therefore (hopefully) with experience and wisdom to pass on.

(The idea of a pulpit and preaching is attributed to John Chrysostom (John the Goldenmouth) who lived in Antioch about 400 AD.

John was a great heathen orator, then became a believer, and from Aristotle rhetoric developed the Sunday morning sermon, continued to this very day)

So, the contemporary style of service of Churches has evolved to the familiar - song, prayer, more songs, announcements, songs, perhaps some 'worship', (and some prophecies if a Pentecostal assembly), then a sermon, songs, benediction, smiles and handshakes.

And this has brought about, for want of a better term - the 'performing preacher' - just turn on your TV to most any TV evangelist or Church service, to witness that. And this is how it has evolved and has even become "accepted" and formalized by Christendom at large.

But it was evidently not this way in the early Church.

Old habits die hard ! The old Adamic nature is dead, but often wont lie down.

And so preachers often become 'pulpiteers' - those who get quite enamoured by the pulpit, even intoxicated by and addicted to the holding of a microphone and people's attention, and the response, and the applause, and the recognition, and the esteem that it brings.

Someone has observed that some ministers **start of as servants**, but with prominence, **end up as celebrities**. The glare of the spotlight can blind the eyes, with dire personal consequences.

Alas, the pulpit and preaching habit seems to develop a hold, not easily broken or yielded.

The allure of the pulpit is subtle and remarkable to behold, and it can be evident in all of us oft-times without us being aware of it - that's where wives or close friends can, or rather should be able to, say a word in season.

By observation, it is one thing to take the preacher out of the pulpit, but quite another to take the pulpit out of the preacher.

Preaching of course has its place, but does not fit within an 'Open Home of Grace' scenario, except by mutual consent, perhaps on special occasions.

And so 'Open Homes of Grace' can be affected detrimentally, when one person, any one at all, especially those who have been 'pulpiteers' - those used to public speaking, and occupying a pulpit, are permitted to dominate.

I well recall the funeral of a local prominent man, at which 4 Auckland past and present regional Mayors were invited to speak without a time limit ! After 2 hours many of the attenders started leaving - we left after 3 hours when the fourth and last Mayor was still in full voice. It takes a very strong chairman indeed to prise the microphone out of the hand of most politicians,

'Open Homes of Grace' can and should be quite different.

We meet as equals, with equal speaking rights - only let it be edifying, fresh, and as brief as possible. Not with preaching, but sharing, not as clergy, but to equal brethren, not talking down to others, not presuming nor assuming, not 'holding the floor' unnecessarily, but with empathy, consideration and humility.

With visitors coming and meeting and sharing on the same equal terms, but with courtesy, and consideration.

And with another aspect - each speaker able to be interrupted, at any point, but obviously with courtesy, if anything which is said needs questioning, or needs to be explained or amplified.

And thus the whole meeting is self-correcting, accountable, without domination, without control or influence.

Or otherwise we are back into the religious system which divided an equal brotherhood into clergy and laity - the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes in *Revelation 2 : 12* of which it plainly states that God hates !

May God forbid !

You are Brethren as Jesus said **brothers**

How is it then brethren when you come together ... let all things be done unto edifying (to the building up of the body) *1 Corinthians 14 : 26, 5, 12*

But there is yet another dimensions to all of this

For the length of time that one person speaks for is sometimes only one facet of the problem....

Generally no-one really minds if the person and the topic are anointed, riveting, edifying, with unction, etc

After all, the crowds followed Jesus often for days at a time, listening to his messages.

And Paul at Troas, continued speaking until midnight (although this was his last night with them before departing the following day) where upon one young man fell asleep and fell from the third storey level - Paul prayed for him, he was resuscitated, and they continued talking until sunrise
Acts 20 : 6 - 12

So, the length of time for which one person holds the floor is only one dimension.

There is yet another dimension, that of domination and 'a prating tongue' for
out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks *Matthew 12 : 34*

It is important to note here that the beloved Apostle John was probably Jesus closest friend among the 12 disciples - he leaned on Jesus chest at the last supper *John 13 : 25* and was 1 of the 3 who accompanied Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration *Matthew 17 : 1*

He had the reputation of being the Apostle of love, and wrote much about love and TRUTH.

And we are encouraged likewise to speak with the combination these 2 sides of the one coin, ***speaking the truth in love*** *Ephesians 4 : 15* for each of these on its own can yet create problems of imbalance.

So, it was this loving and gentle old man who had a problem with one person in a local Church.

The person with the problem, he even ventured to name - Diotrephes
(no generalities here)

He records that Diotrephes loved pre-eminence or prominence - to the point of rejecting John himself and any visiting brethren, and even rejecting those who received such. *3 John 9 - 11*

John was quite upset about Diotrephes actions, and says that he would ***remember his deeds which he does***, and obviously John was very concerned for the effect of Diotrephes words on others in that assembly.

John records Diotrephes as ***prating against us with malicious words***

The Oxford dictionary meaning of the word prating is - childish chatter, inconsequential talk, gabble, babble, jabber, twitter, drivel on, to go on and on,

(This is possibly the word from which prat comes, which is defined as a silly or foolish person)

Proverbs 10 : 8 & 10 repeats the same statement that - ***a prating fool shall fall***

But John, in this context, indicates that a dominating speaker, can lead into malicious words - words of malice, accusation, disparaging, slander, *against us* that John in verse 11 says are evil.

Here John appeals to the brethren in love - *Beloved, follow not that which is evil but that which is good, He that does good is of God, but he that does evil has not seen God*

The beloved Apostle John saw past the person and personality of the man Diotrefes to a spirit of evil within that surely was not of God. Indeed John claimed that such a person has not really seen God - in his true character as portrayed by Jesus.

And it is most interesting to note that John does not write this epistle letter to the Church as a whole, - he says that he had already and previously done that, but to no avail, verse 9,

but instead he writes to one faithful and well loved man - Gaius, to make him aware of his concerns, and perhaps even for him to do something about if he is able !

The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy
James 3 : 17

If the opposite fruits to these listed are being manifest, then it obviously means that such 'wisdom' is not coming from above, but from beneath.

And that is the very same conclusion that the Apostle John has reached - evil words, are not of God, and the speaker, even though that person may have much knowledge of scripture, or vast religious experience, but still they have "not seen God" in his true character, at all.

Scofield notes *3 John* ' as marking the beginning of that clerical and priestly assumption over a local Church in which the primitive Church order disappeared.'

So 'there's nothing new under the sun' as the saying goes - what John saw and recorded, must have been repeated on countless occasions since that time over 2000 years, and still continues down to the present day.

To me, this represents one of the great tragedies of the Present Religious System - the effect it can have on those perhaps gifted, even charismatic people, who get to love the platform, the pulpit, and pre-eminence, who will not give it up, and are allowed to dominate a Church or group.

For the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets

1 Corinthians 14 : 32

Does a fountain send forth at the same time sweet water and bitter . so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh

James 3 : 11, 12

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks Matthew 12 : 34

Someone has wisely said - it took God one night to get the children of Israel out of Egypt, but 40 years to get Egypt out of the children of Israel.

Likewise, it may take a short while to get someone out of the religious system, but it's quite another mission to get the religious system out of some of us.

koinonia

9

Whatever is this word KOINONIA ?
and whatever could be its relevance to the local Church scene today ?

Koinonia - it's derived from the Greek word Koinos I'm told

And it simply means - held in common, a common sharing,
a commitment to another person, even a covenant with another person
or to use a biblical word - fellowship.

Fellowship - not just a shake of the hands, and a "How are you today brother or sister ?" or if you're very spiritual - you might get a hug, or even a kiss on the cheek.

Fellowship - spirit to spirit, heart to heart, a sharing of our common faith with another pilgrim as outworked in our daily living, and a commitment to the welfare of the other person

The beloved Apostle John refers to it in *1 John 1 : 3, 4, 6, 7*

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship (koinonia) with us, and truly our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ

If we say that we have fellowship (koinonia) with him and walk in darkness, we lie and practise not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship (koinonia) one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Fellowship - the true one -to -one spiritual sharing of a common faith and the experiences of life and our daily walk

Not just the ritual of attendance and listening to a sermon, and all the while looking at the back of someone's head. Then a perfunctionary shake of the hands, an exchange of greetings and a brief conversation - usually about the family or the job. True koinonia fellowship is so rarely found in religious circles today.

The symbol of Christianity - the Cross, consists of 2 elements - one vertical, the other horizontal. Either by design or fluke, it is the simplest and most concise way of expressing the Christian faith and its 2 vital relationships.

The vertical element is the line joining a person (at the bottom) with God (at the top) And this is the most vital element - why Jesus came, to die and allow the re-establishment of a relationship between mankind and God.

Then the horizontal element - the relationship between one human being and another. But this horizontal human relationship crosses the vertical spirit to spirit relationship of man and God, and from that crossing human relationship gains reality, truth and authenticity - koinonia in real terms, a common sharing.

And the early Church went an additional step even beyond spiritual fellowship and sharing - they brought their goods together and shared their earthly possessions also.

Those who had surplus houses and lands, sold them and shared their wealth with the needy - that was the extent of their commitment to each other - a sharing of material possessions - WOW, imagine that.

And the mighty deeds and consequences of the book of Acts unfolded from that point on, with miracles and Gods visitation, with revival and riots, with conversions and martyrdom, with outreach and missionary journeys, with all the manifold results of people in true and actual relationship with God and his people - true koinonia outworking in society.

And then came the intrusion of the ugly head of legalism, resulting in Paul's letter to those at Galatia, (one of his first prison letters) and his warning to them about legalism's deadly effects, and those advocating it.

But, as our spirits crave for that spiritual sharing and fellowship, to meet and fulfil our deepest innermost being, we likewise in this century, yearn for and seek that true koinonia that the early Christians experienced even under such adverse conditions.

And so, simple chance meetings in two's or threes, or informal home / house meetings, provide the occasion for such koinonia in this day and age.

And then the blood of Jesus Christ will truly cleanse us from all sin and impurity.

Let such **koinonia** be our constant quest - with God and then with our fellow pilgrims.

Encourage one another 1 Thessalonians 5 : 11 Hebrews 3 : 13, 10 : 25

Admonish one another Colossians 3 : 16 Romans 15 : 14

Confess your sins one to another James 5 : 16

Forgive one another Ephesians 4 : 32 Colossians 3 : 13

Accept one another Romans 14 : 1, 15 : 7

Serve one another Galatians 5 : 13 Romans 12 : 10

Build up one another 1 Thessalonians 5 : 1

Be hospitable to one another 1 Peter 4 : 9

Someone observed that....

The surest mark of a believer in Christ is not faith, nor even love, but JOY

of like mind

10

There is one important aspect of meeting in open homes that very soon emerges - not all people are either ready or prepared for it.

The main criteria for open home fellowship to happen and bring blessing would seem to be that the participants agree and have **a like mind** on leaving and going beyond the present religious system, and meeting / fellowshipping in such a simple (and I believe Scriptural) way, without agendas, formality, custom. or Church tradition.

The conditioning of the religious system has to be seen for what it is - religious conditioning.

Unfortunately, painful experiences, spiritual abuse, the emotional bruising of Legalism and authoritarian control Churches, and in some cases excommunication, have been the catalyst for eyes to be opened and a step forward to be made.

The opening of eyes and understanding of the present religious system, is always progressive - and was so for the Apostle Paul (3 years in the desert after a dynamic conversion experience)

We are all 'works in progress', and at different stages on the journey.

Leaving the security of an established Church / religious group has to be got over - outside the religious system it is basically over to the individual to foster and develop their own experience in God, albeit with the real fellowship and sharing of a small group.

Each person needs to know their own personal identity in God, and to have developed their own ability of seeking God, studying the scriptures, learning to recognize and hear the voice of the Shepherd, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, with some degree of discernment.

The gains are tremendous - the picture to my mind is that of a yacht on the open sea, with the wind in its sails, able to speed away at the Masters bidding in any direction. But the supposed security of an enclosed pond and merely sailing round and round in circles is very enticing.

A hankering for the old religious ways, structure, routine, programmes, and a social focus, can undermine agreement in spirit and what God is bringing about - with the

result that an invisible but real 'tug of war' can be sensed.

Just like Israel of old - 'give us a King that we may be like the other nations', when all the time God was their King, And why Roman Catholicism holds many - it is the secure established rock of ages to 'the faithful' (when all the time Jesus is supposed to be just that to us)

So, where there is '**a like mind**' about these things, and a will to leave behind and go beyond the present religious system, there is much blessing, spiritual growth and true fellowship possible.

But if a person is not really convinced about it all, and isn't of a like mind on the subject, it may well be best for all concerned if they continue within 'the structured system' until the time comes when they can indeed happily leave it all behind and live and worship in true simplicity.

May the Lord richly bless us each one on our individually chosen pathway and journey through life.

With Grace

networking

11

"But how can any group of people work together without some form of structure, some organization ?" I have been asked "Its surely not possible"

Well that's surely how people view it naturally, from a humanistic point of view - any working together on this planet takes order, structure, agendas, planning, organization, to coherently perform any task efficiently.

But the true Church - not necessarily the plethora of assemblies that call themselves such throughout Christendom, the present religious system, but the true Kingdom of God on earth, invisible, unseen, - needs no such mans organization or structure to be added.

God is perfectly capable of running His own Kingdom, Church and any and all of its matters and effect, and needs. He certainly didn't need any help from us when he formed the universe or this fantastic planet, or us !

And He doesn't seem to do much by way of a committee !

And He certainly doesn't look for or require any interference in the running of his Kingdom.

Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Zechariah 4 : 6

In point of fact, just about all of the true moves of God, and true spiritual awakenings and revivals, have suffered or extinguished, from the moment that some well meaning person tried to organize or structure them - just read any page of Church history down through the ages !

God is running a Kingdom, as a King seated on a throne - not a democracy !

He is the all powerful - omnipotent, omnipresent potentate.

We are His servants - in waiting, as the Queen of England has her ladies in waiting - ready to fulfil her every order, or desire - waiting for her voice to command, not daring to move without her express instruction.

The early Church that was birthed into existence soon after Jesus death and resurrection, had no buildings, hierarchy, programmes, committees, professionals, - they just met together at one another's houses daily or whenever. They were only identified, by their way of living - as followers of 'the way' Some used the sign of the outline of a fish on the doorposts of their house to identify themselves as followers of such.

And as recorded and illustrated in the book of the Acts
they NETWORKED together.

Their very lives and existence depended on it.

Oft-times, if you became a follower of Christ on Friday, there was no job on Monday, or even worse, there were lions to be fed in the Coliseum at Rome !

Networking - personal one to one contact and fellowship, staying in touch with like-minded people in the same locale, the 'word of mouth' transmittal of information, caring for each other in times of need, getting to know personally those of your neighbourhood - much as small villages did in centuries past, long before the age of the car and phones.

And that is the method by which the underground Church in China has expanded during terrible times of persecution - networking together - keeping in touch, caring, sharing one to one, helping, small group meetings - but without organization, and structure.

And a method which is amazingly aided by the computer and the web - retired people and the elderly able to stay in contact with many others in spite of distances and infirmities, and share experiences and keep a network going.

In many countries where Christianity is a minority belief, and suppressed, with persecution, comes the many reports - Networking sustains, encouraging and supporting individual believers It always has been the primary and simple method by which the invisible Kingdom of God permeates society.

Networking - the concept that Tupperware and Amway, and the Direct Marketing world have usurped - for the simple reason that it works so powerfully -- with little overhead costs, from peoples houses, home style industries - networked together.

Synergy - The total is greater than the sum of its parts

United we stand, divided we fall

As in the Garden of Eden - God Himself looked in on Adam and Eve each day - he ran the whole show Himself - they were directly accountable to Him on a daily basis.

Each individual linked to the hub - vitally joined to the 'Managing Director' Himself - directly and personally 'grafted into the vine'.

But it takes personal commitment to the other members of the body - its not just a once a week show up at a building, watch a performance, listen to a sermon, join in the singing if you're so inclined, shake a few hands, say a few hullo's, and then vanish until next week to repeat the whole deal.

God's Kingdom on earth - as it is in Heaven, created, empowered, personally directed and governed by His Spirit - Networked - each part fitted together by Him and for Him *Ephesians 2 : 21, 22*

Wow, What a concept !

What a Kingdom that God personally governs through His Spirit.

What a foretaste of heaven !

Lord let it be !

breaking bread

12

Here it is - Jesus, on his last night before His crucifixion, choosing to have one last meal with his close mates - his chosen and frequent companions, with whom he had travelled for 3 years, and who had witnessed and shared his ministry.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat, this is my body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink you all of it: For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.
Matthew 26 : 26 - 28

So, in the course of that final meal with them, he pauses, reaches for what was already there on the table - the bread and wine that were there as a part of their usual meal (probably along with the fish and honeycomb that he later ate before then as a proof of his bodily resurrection).

He uses both and bequeaths them as an eternal symbol of what Christians hold most precious - one of the 2 (and only 2) sacraments that He instigated and left us to follow - what Paul later called the Lords Supper (the only other sacrament being water baptism by immersion as John the Baptist performed and Jesus endorsed).

Not as a part of a overtly religious meeting or service.

Not a separate religious iconic act to be theatrically performed by clergy.

Not transubstantiation as the Roman Catholics would have us believe.

Not with a special wafer, nor special liquid.

Without any particularly religious setting, or drama, or theatrics.

Not anything more than pausing in the course of a normal Jewish type meal, shared by fellow believers, *as they were eating*, to use what was ordinarily on the table, to break the loaf and dip it in the customary fashion, but this time to illustrate and institute a memorial in remembrance of his death and sacrifice - in a house setting - the large upper room of a persons home, used on this occasion as a dining room to share a meal.

And how about the 2 instances of his bodily appearance after his resurrection, both concerning a meal and the sharing of food, and the breaking of bread.

The first example occurred when Simon and Cleopas were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus towards evening on the day of Jesus resurrection, and talking about recent events.

Jesus himself drew near and went with them and joined in their conversation but their eyes were holden (blinded) that they should not know him They were hungry and asked him to share a meal with them *Luke 24 : 15, 16*

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and broke, and gave to them just as the disciples had watched Him do 3 evenings previously.

And their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight

v 30, 31 They returned to Jerusalem, found the other 11 disciples

And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread v 38

Some days later, 7 disciples including John and Simon Peter, decided to take the boat and spend the night fishing, (Peter's old trade) but the fish were not co-operating at all and they caught nothing. The next morning the boat was not far from land, and Jesus appeared on the shore, but they did not recognize him.

Then Jesus said to them, Children, have you caught anything ? They answered him, No *John 21 : 5*

Jesus gave them some specific instructions, which they followed, and caught so many that they could not pull in the net. John now recognised that it was Jesus, told Peter, whereupon Peter jumped into the sea. The others brought the boat to land, dragging the full net.

As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said unto them, Bring of the fish which you have caught v 9, 10

Peter brought the fish - 153 in all (who counted them ?)

Jesus said to them Come and dine. And none of the disciples dared to ask him, Who are you ? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took some bread, and gave to them, and fish like-wise. *v 12, 13*

Was it a coincidence that at both of these post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, food was involved, and bread was broken, or was it intended to be the illustration of a fundamental point and example of new testament get-togethers - that sharing a meal with fellow believers is one of the most important ways to aid fellowship, koinonia, and brotherly love.

In many cultures, sharing a meal is to signify that a deal of trade, commerce or business, has been made - a covenant, like the Western culture's signature on a piece of paper.

It also signifies friendship and acceptance of the guest by the host, creating a bond between the participants. In contemporary times and cultures many business deals are discussed and finalized over a shared meal, (a 'business lunch', we Kiwi's call it)

The early Church, soon after Jesus resurrection, shared meals and fellowshiped on a daily basis.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread. and in prayers

Acts 2 : 42

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart

Acts 2 : 46

In the Corinthian Church, it was just that - a part of a meal shared by believers, possibly a love feast for the poor as noted in *Jude 12* - only they went too far and forgot their manners, didn't wait for latecomers but overate and went to excess, even getting drunk, for which Paul rebuked them.

When you come together, instead of eating the Lord's Supper, you bring in a lot of food from the outside and make pigs of yourself. Some are left out, and go home hungry. Others have to be carried out, too drunk to walk. I can't believe it ! Don't you have your own homes to eat and drink in ? Why would you stoop to desecrate God's church ? Why would you actually shame God's poor ?

I never would have believed you would stoop to this. And I'm not going to stand by and say nothing

I Corinthians 11 : 20 - 22 TM

So my friends, when you come together to the Lord's table, be reverend and courteous with one another. If you're so hungry that you can't wait to be served, go home and get a sandwich. But by no means risk turning this meal into an eating and drinking binge or a family squabble. It is a spiritual meal - a love feast.

I Corinthians 11 : 33, 34 TM

So let's remove the theatrics from its usage, and restore the simplicity of a shared meal by fellow believers around a dining table or meal place, or even at a Pub - Tavern,

or at a BBQ on the beach, as Jesus did. Using the common bread and drink available and provided, but with a pause and gratitude, as the loaf is broken and the wine partaken in remembrance of Him that we love, serve and follow. This we can do, as often as we will, until Jesus returns or we share a meal with him in Heaven at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

But I say unto you, I will not drink any more (henceforth) of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom

Matthew 26 : 29

Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb

Revelation 19 : 9

sharing scripture

13

We all know the Sunday morning sermon - the one person monologue, with its classic format - introduction, subject and pithy ending. Quite a task for a fulltime professional, and most onerous and even stressful. To most clergymen, the main inescapable mission task of the week is to come up with an anointed, timely, punchy, even witty, helpful yet inoffensive, sermon each Sunday ! And pity help the poor man if most of his audience didn't find it so also, or there will be murmurings and mutterings in the pews, and less to speak too in his audience the next week ! And some clergy are better at it than others, as a look at the Televangelists will show.

But in the open home small group fellowship setting how different !

The stress of constant preparation and public delivery and the performing art aspect is gone.

Each can share what they have received spiritually from God, scripture, or what ever source He uses to speak to us - personal studies, daily readings, circumstances and experiences, fellowship with others, etc , etc And it's fresh !

How is it then brethren ? When you meet together, every one of you has a Psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation,

1 Corinthians 14 : 26

Could we add to this list -- one a verse, one a song, one a saying, one a comment, one an experience, each fresh and encouraging to both the speaker and the hearers, adding to the whole understanding of the group.

Body ministry quickens the whole body of which we are all members,

and each members one of another

Romans 12 : 5

But there is another angle to small group get-to-getheres that has emerged - and that is of a group sharing of scripture - the living Word itself.

There is something about a consideration of the Word in a small group, where each person can add something to a verse or passage, that is so very refreshing and satisfying within.

It may start with one person mentioning how a passage has encouraged or helped them, or how an insight into a passage has come, and before you know it, another person comments on that passage with a slightly different focus, and yet another person connects it to another passage.

Like the study of a diamond with all of its different facets, each a slightly different focus and angle of viewing the self same gem.

And so it frequently rolls on, like the sharing of an enriching meal, the sharing of the living Word of God quickens and nourishes the spirit.

As each person takes it in to their spirit, mulls upon it, digests it, 'chews the cud' with it (as a farm cow does), and then adds to the impact of the understanding of that topic - wondrous to behold !

Like an orange is sucked dry, so scripture nourishes as it is likewise sucked of its content.

There is something about a small group contemplation of scripture that feeds like nothing else does, and which is so absent from a formal Sunday morning sermon / monologue.

Scripture evidently was meant to be shared, and considered in a group setting, and discussed, and commented on, and even debated ! Old time Jewish families knew all about that, and the early synagogues of a past era.

As iron sharpens iron

Proverbs 27 : 17

Synergy - the whole is greater than the sum of the parts

Go ye ...

14

Go ye into all the world Matthew 28 : 19 is a very well known scripture verse, perhaps one of the most widely known ever.

Certainly known by countless missionaries down through the ages and centuries, as they have heeded the call, left creature comforts, careers, family and friends behind to answer it, and take the precious message of redemption to the uttermost parts of the globe.

From the 12 apostles, St Paul on his 4 trips around the Mediteranean, down through the centuries to Livingstone, Wesley, Finney, Cowman, Sadhu Sunda Singh, Wigglesworth, Billy Graham ... the list is endless
Bless them indeed, we honour and praise them, as will our God on that great day when we stand before him.

And yet, as we love in suburbia, every where I turn I hear other pleas

Come hear ... from those who have not heeded the call to go, but have built an empire in our midst instead.

Come hear ... our local vicar, our latest overseas speaker (with all expenses paid !)

Come hear ... and contribute to maintaining our little empire (but all in Gods name of course)

So what about the **Go Ye** message that Jesus left us ?

We cant all be missionaries to a foreign field can we ? Certainly not.

But there are still plenty of opportunities to follow his injunction and

Go ... To Bible in School programmes

Prison visitation

Hospital visiting - to the sick

Hospice visiting, Nursing homes

Retirement Village

Plus what about

our next door neighbour

those new arrivals in our street

Just consider the opportunities that surround us.

in the community

15

To me, the absolute antitheses or opposite of the Christian way of life would seem to be living in a cloister, or to become a hermit, however religious the motive.

Sure there are times for periods of reflection, meditation, solitude, and contemplation, even spiritual preparation (as Jesus himself did, and Paul soon after his conversion), with fasting and abstinence even.

But to live constantly like that is not what Christianity is all about.

Christian believers - ***You are the salt of the earth*** *Matthew 5 : 13*

Salt is good, but if it is left in the saltshaker for too long it will clog and eventually rot, ask any housewife !

Salt must be gotten out of the saltshaker, and onto the food.

And a salt-shaker oft-times needs a sharp jolt to get it running freely.

Salt has an influence exceedingly far in excess of its amount.

The history books of this world bear testimony to countless Christian people who have gotten out of the salt-shaker and influenced their community and indeed the whole world.

To attend a Church - and shine a few years after year, and continually hear about it, to continually sing about it, to even continually pray about it, is not where it's at.

The parable of the sower In Matthew 13 speaks of a sower who went forth to sow seed in the field. In the interpretation of the parable the seed is shown to be the word of God, but

Matthew 13 : 38 shows that **the field is the world - not the Church.**

The purpose of a local assembly or group of believers is not to become a religious cloister, a little empire, a private religious club, owning land and buildings, engrossed with its own being and existence and status in the community.

The only purpose of a group of Christians is to fellowship and encourage each other, share what they have received from God and their experience in God, share the Lord's Supper, and then to network in whatever way that will bless one another and help each other to spread the word in the community - not to spend their energies to help keep a little Church empire ticking over.

Jesus life and ministry was to move around from place to place. He *went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil Acts 10 : 38*

Sure He visited the temple occasionally, to read the scriptures, and to pray, but also to drive out the money changers and to cleanse it, and to strongly rebuke the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.

A local assembly or Church was never meant to be an end in itself, it is never portrayed as 'the field'

The field is the world - the community around us - our neighbours, our schools, our kindergartens, our prisons, our local sports clubs and groups, social agencies, whatever local grouping and interest is in our neighbourhood - and whichever, whatever, direction (and God's leading) our talents and interests lead us to..

I even noticed a sign over the exit door of a local Church which proclaimed to attenders as they left the building - 'You are now entering the field' ... good stuff !

A Christian friend of ours is the Chaplain of a top senior Rugby League sports club. Another Christian friend, ex fulltime minister, is very much involved in Grey Power - an organization for senior citizens which has considerable influence.

Many Christians I know are involved in Bible-In-Schools teaching regularly, as I am. Some Christians I know visit local prison regularly, as my wife and I do.

Another married couple friends of ours have joined a local dance club with much influence.

Other Christian friends are on the Boards of Trustees of local schools and colleges. Other Christians are in local politics and hold elected positions on local government bodies, exerting much good influence.

Other Christian friends have joined local sports clubs and have influence and impact.

Another Christian friend helps provide meals and meetings for 'down and outs.'

Another Christian friend helps at the local Marae.

Other Christian couples open their homes as home stay hosts for Israeli tourists with much effectiveness.

My wife as a massage therapist through her Clinic, continually has opportunities to minister to clients and visitors.

Salt and light in the community - influencing, permeating, impacting, adding much to the 'flavour' of society.

I have been very interested to listen to business acquaintances and other non-religious contacts, about their perception of the religious world, and hear the common comment - 'the Sallie's (the Salvation Army) are the only Church group worth a toss, because at least they are active in the community helping the less fortunate,' not just building an Empire.

So, the non Church goers pick it up and see it correctly - community involvement is where 'the rubber meets the road' and not the running of a religious club - just as Jesus did.

Thank you Lord for those missionaries who leave their domestic comfort zone and go overseas. But, you don't have to go overseas to be a missionary, just go out your front door, then out the gate, across the street, or along the road.!

There are so many local clubs, organisations, schools, hospitals, prisons, institutions in 'the field' - the community and world around us, which can be influenced and impacted by the presence of godly followers of the Son of Man. Jesus went where the needy and the multitude were, and set us His supreme example. And ***the ordinary people of his day received him gladly*** Mark 12 : 37 but not so the religiously titled and garbed rulers of the temple - they actively opposed him for His frequent association with the so called 'sinners' that the religious establishment looked down on and would not get involved with.

You are the salt of the earth You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, (bucket) but on a candlestick, and it gives light to all that are in the house.
Matthew 4 13 - 15

Keep open house, be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you will prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in Heaven v 16 TM

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has !

Margaret Mead, Sociologist

Good men must do their good deeds in the minute particular,
any who talk of the general welfare are scoundrels, flatterers and rouses

William Blakely

mobile ministries

16

Reading the scriptures, one aspect of Jesus and the early Christians soon becomes quite evident - they certainly moved around a lot !

Jesus was particularly mobile throughout his ministry - for disciples to follow him absolutely meant leaving everything and all behind, including any business affairs, and family and friends besides. He was always on the move from town to town around Israel, and not always welcome as for instance at Bethsaida and Chorazin.

I remember hearing about one person, who took it upon himself to piece together Jesus movements and travels as recorded in the gospels and then actually re-walked Jesus exact itinerary - his surprising conclusion was that Jesus must have been very fit and muscular from the amount of walking exercise he got - and well tanned from a life on the move from town to town in the great outdoors.

Jesus and his 12 close mates would no doubt have been reasonably easy to put up for the night if they split up in to pairs or triples. After having watched His example first hand, he then sent his 12 disciples out to preach and to heal on their own. Later he appointed 70 of his followers to tour around the provinces, in pairs for companionship and mutual support.

Again, these pairs would have been comparatively easy to put up for the night and to feed, without undue strain on a host.

No structure, no buildings to maintain or lease, minimum travel expenses for these pairs of itinerant missionaries - what a model he gave us. (And how unlike many of the modern day evangelist / healers with their first class travel / air fares and their accompanying entourage)

The book of Acts after the day of Pentecost also portrays so much mobility and movement, some of it Holy Spirit personally directed, some directed by visions, some by prophecy, some even by angels !

The angel of the Lord spoke to Phillip saying Arise and go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza which is desert. Acts 8 : 26

And there he divinely met and spoke with the Ethiopian Eunuch, a man of great authority, saw him converted and then baptised him on the spot.

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the Eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself (divinely transported ?) at Azotus, and passing through, he preached at all the cities till he came to Caesarea v 39, 40

So much for staying in the one place - and please note that this was the Spirit of God and an angel personally directing Philip !

God in his providence ***used a great persecution against the Church that was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles Acts 8 : 1*** and so became the first Christian missionaries, ***therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word v 4***

God at work personally engineering and implementing what has been referred to as the Great Commission ***Go you therefore, and teach all nations of Matthew 28 : 19***

If this persecution had not happened, undoubtedly the Christians in Jerusalem would have become settled in their ways, and there would have been only one Christian Church on this planet - at Jerusalem. If that had indeed happened, then believers would have had to do a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to see and attend the one and only true Church on earth.

Paul in ***Acts 16 : 6 forbidden of the holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia***
Instead, ***a vision appeared to Paul in the night - there stood a man of Macedonia, and beseeching him, saying Come over into Macedonia, and help us v9***
And off he went, taking the gospel into Europe for the first time.

And so through the book of Acts -- a continual story of divine personal guidance and leading, action, travel, mobility, adventure, revival or riots, what exciting stuff.

Paul was constantly on the move. He was in fact converted on a roadside while on a trip to Damascus. The book of Acts records his 3 extensive missionary journeys around the Mediterranean in thrilling detail - the riots and shipwrecks he experienced, and his escapes from harm were extraordinary. In between several terms in prison, some historians say that he also travelled to the British Isles, taking the Gospel there, eventually ending up at Rome, where he died.

His last recorded written words spoke of his companions and their mobility

Timothy, come soon to visit me,.... Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia, Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus,Erastus stays at Corinth, Trophimus have I left ill at Miletum ***2 Timothy 4 : 9, 10, 12,***

Paul's companions were certainly not 'stay at homes', there is plenty of evidence here of their considerable travel and moving around.

Thomas travelled to India, many of his fellow apostles likewise travelled widely - Paul caught up with Peter in Antioch years later *Galatians 2 : 11* and there is historical evidence that some ventured as far as China and Japan.

And how about the life of John Wesley as he went on his circuit around Great Britain. What a mobile man of God !. He just about lived on a horse - 250,000 miles, almost 400,000 kilometres on horseback over 50 years as he visited the far-flung homes of his hearers.

Probably, no one man has wrought such a change to the social and spiritual state of a nation - impossible for him to be a 'seat shiner' at a local church !

So where is all of this leading ?

Well, certainly against a common ploy of many legalistic and authoritarian Churches that say - "you found Christ here, so stay here and serve God in this place - faithfully"

God calls us to be faithful to Himself, not to a place or local Church

Any advocated and so called 'faithfulness' to a man or place is mis-placed, and often advocated merely to get help to pay the bills and keep some man's empire ticking over. God's invisible true church is universal - He sees the total picture and as Managing Director, he can and does move people around wherever he pleases.

Now this of course doesn't discount having a base of fellowship with the Christians in our locale, of forming relationships, kinship, and mutual submission, of growing spiritually in whatever local grouping of like minded Christians.

The exhortation of *Hebrews 10 : 25* to ***not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as we see the day*** (of Christ's return?) ***approaching*** is only to warn against 'hermit' type Christians preferring isolation, who didn't meet with other pilgrims at all, not to rivet us to the one spot for a lifetime.

For where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them said Jesus in *Mathew 18 : 20*

By observation, pew shining in the one Church long term can eventually bring inertia, stagnation and frustration instead of spiritual growth, plus a false sense of 'security'.

Moving on as He guides can bring the joy of trusting God in whatever situation, and can use us to give and receive blessing amongst many others of God's family.

In the old Testament, the children of Israel used a tent as their travelling tabernacle during their journeyings - it was a mobile temple, useful and fully transportable.

But, there is still another point to be made - with local 'open homes of grace' that meet in believers homes with whatever regularity, there is still a need for mobile ministers each with their own particular gifting, to move around and bless these small cells and networking groups. Their encouragement and giftings can bring fresh stimulus and ministry to these cells, which could then combine for whatever reason and occasions.

Heaven forbid yet another religious structure to be formed, but such mature and gifted mobile people can bless and encourage local groups as they pass through a district for what ever period of time - and so the book of the acts of the apostles will live on in endless chapters.

Is that a knock on the door I can hear ?

Hope it's not a pair of Mormons this time, but a mobile couple of God !

serving

17

by love serve one another

Galatians 5 : 13

Without competition, without strings attached, without agendas, without reward seeking, without attention, without any ulterior motive Wow

With a willingness to be unnoticed, unrewarded, unthanked even, if that so happens.

From a willing servant heart that seeks only to follow and serve the Master and His example.

But to do this, we need to know our identity in Christ, for only then can we serve others humbly.

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things in to his hands got up from the supper table, took off his robe and put on an apron He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron

John 13 : 3 - 5 TM

Jesus knew who he was in God, therefore he could humble himself, He didn't have a need to prove any thing to any one else.

For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, the servant is not greater than his Lord (boss) neither is he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them

John 12 : 15 - 17

But I am among you as one who serves

Luke 22 : 27

What an example to follow !

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ... who made himself of no reputation, but took upon himself the form of a servant *Phillipians 2 5, 7*

And Paul .. for though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might gain the more
1 Corinthians 9 : 19

Serving - the exact opposite of the common and prevailing religious system and Church scene with its titles, robes, prominence and performance.

Not seeking the limelight, fanfare, reward or recognition.

Not domineering, manipulating, or controlling, or with a hidden self-seeking agenda.

Serving in whatever role or place the Master has put us, knowing that we are doing it all as unto God himself, that He will see and reward as it pleases Him, in His own time and way.

Serving from a servant heart, simply, honestly, sincerely.

For it to be displayed first of all in our family circle, then in open homes of grace, then to flow out into the local community.

Simple, powerful, Christ-like

Life changing, world changing

And it starts with us, from within

Wow

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can

John Wesley's rule of Life

giving

18

Just because the law has been fulfilled, finished, and all the ordinances with it - including the tithe, doesn't mean that we can stop the practice of giving altogether. It simply means that giving is not stipulated as being a fixed and mandatory 10% percentage of our increase, the motivation has been changed to match that of the heart.

Under grace we find that giving is changed to the same basis as how the rest of our lives should be - to be led by the Spirit, and as occasion and His inner prompting decrees.

Under the Law tithing was a mandatory $10\% + 10\% + 3\% = 23\%$

Under Grace, giving is voluntary, as being led by the Spirit, giving according to need, and a test of sincerity and love.

But living under grace in liberty, is not to be used as an excuse to let our giving wither up and diminish.

Every person, according to the purposes of their heart, so let them give, not grudgingly nor of necessity, for God loves a cheerful (hilarious) giver
2 Corinthians 9 : 7

With open home fellowship, there is no fulltime professional clergy requiring a salary. And there is no land, nor expensive buildings to be bought, maintained and fed. Jesus did not appear to make any effort to get into property development nor get bogged down by the 'things of this world '

But Jesus did give to the poor, out of their common purse that Judas held and was in charge of *John 13 : 29*

Jesus also paid his taxes, once by a miraculous extraordinary account of fishing and finding the money in the mouth of a fish ! (The Tax Department don't seem to mind by which way or however you could produce the coin !)

Indeed giving to the poor is a common thread that has run down through Scripture fro the beginning of time, and a valuable study in itself, summarized and commended

by Jesus *for you have the poor with you always and when ever you will you can do them good* Mark 14 : 7

The elderly, and the sick, and those disadvantaged for what ever reason (apart from laziness which is widely rebuked throughout Proverbs and also by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3 : 10) can be touched and aided.

(In western style countries, the government does most of this through taxes and social welfare spending) At the other end of the spectrum, as any traveler to the third world countries becomes aware, is the fact that 'human need is a bottomless pit, which can devour all you can offer, in money, time and energy.' Somewhere between the 2 ends is a balance that only God can direct us to met in our own limited capacities.

Under grace, and with open homes of grace, and true koininia fellowship, we read that in the early Church groups, there was sharing of all things both spiritual and temporal - to the extent that those with multiple houses and lands would sell them and distribute the proceeds to the needy. What a concept!

But one which has been well tried by the communists, and many communes over the centuries, with varying degrees of success - but most have foundered on the innate greediness and perversion of the human heart and our inherent fallen Adamic nature. This was even manifested in the early Church - as Ananias and Sapphira found out tragically Acts 5 : 1 - 11 as they did good but withheld part then agreed to lie about it.

One laconic commentator has said - 'when a believer is baptized, make sure that their wallet is immersed with them' Alas - this does not always appear to be done, and frugal giving by believers is so common and mean spirited. (One commentator has said that how we use your money will be one of the biggest issues we will face on judgement day.)

But, giving is a grace, (a disposition created by the Spirit of God within) and should be apparent as any other grace or fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5 : 22, 23

Tell them that are rich in this worlds goods ... that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate (share with others) 1 Timothy 6 : 18

We read that Paul encouraged the local believers of Galatia and other districts for a collection of the needy believers at Jerusalem, which was then delivered to them

There is a time to give, as well as a time to receive.

Ecclesiastes 3 : 6

Some one has observed that one quarter of Jesus parables were about money, and that one sixth of his total words recorded were on the subject.
Remember Jesus words to the rich young ruler who came to him seeking eternal life
sell all that you have, and distribute to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow me
Luke 18 : 22

And Zaccheus attitude to money corresponded to the change in his life after he met Jesus and had him as a guest at his house - ***the half of my goods I give to the poor***
Luke 19 : 8

Where and how a person spends their discretionary funds would seem to reveal the true inward heart and motivation of that person - we can always find the funds for what is important to us - just observe any addict, or even a casual shopper.

But from the open homes of grace, as needs become apparent, and true occasion arises, with common consensus and agreement, giving to personal or local needs can be made, to the glory of God alone, from whom comes all increase, and who is the sole source and sustainer of life.

Only let it be done from willing hearts - ***in simplicity*** *Romans 12 : 8*
without any strings attached, and to direct and specific needs.

To needs, not greeds.

To needs, not deserts, for no one is truly deserving

With GRACE for God is watching

**Money is like manure pile it up and it stinks
Spread it around and it acts as fertiliser .. and makes things grow)**

" What, Giving again," I asked in dismay,
" And must I keep Giving and Giving away ?"
" Oh No !" said the angel, looking me through,
" Just Give, till the Master stops Giving to you !"

our body, our temple 19

Now I am extremely conscious that this subject is a very touchy one, as there are so many factors that contribute to our health and wellness – genetic and hereditary, our upbringing and the diet attitudes of our culture and family, our economic situation and income, our age, previous accidents, and the things that happen to us quite beyond our control, etc, etc
These words are absolutely NOT for those situations, but for the personal attitudes and choices that we each can and do make along life's journey.
So please note and read on with grace !

A part of my usual daily morning routine is to listen to Derek Prince for his 10 minute message on a local radio station. He died early in 2005, and what was probably to be his last interview recorded in 2004 was recently aired.

The interviewer asked him a leading question along these lines "In summary of your vast experience and world wide ministry over many decades - what would you have to say as a last word to Christians today ?" My ears pricked up, to catch the final summary of this amazing Man of God, this spiritual champion, much travelled and probably the worlds leading Christian expositor of the last several decades.

How would he answer ? Would it be about his constant exhortation on spiritual warfare, deliverance, spiritual gifts, some deep teaching on prayer, sanctification, evangelism ?

My ears keenly awaited this last final summary !

"My word to Christians world wide is this" he answered, along the lines of

"Christians should take better care of their bodies"

What, no word of the usual spiritual topics, no exhortation to personal holiness etc, just a simple statement - **"Christians should take better care of their bodies"**

How simple, but how profound !

What an amazing statement !

And this spoke to me, about what is constantly evidenced in Christendom on every hand - the burn out rate of Christians in 'Ministry', the exhaustion rate amongst those involved in Youth work, emotional and physical breakdowns, etc etc. as Christians struggle to find the balance between "working for the Lord", personal and family priorities, and proper rest and recreation

How often have I heard the phrase - *better to burn out than to rust out!* as people try to burn the candle at both ends, only to have the wick eventually protest !

What, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, which you have of God, and that you are not your own. For you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods
1 Corinthians 6 : 19, 20

Your spirit has to have a vessel - container - body, to live in.

For a living dog is better than a dead lion *Ecclesiastes 9 : 4*

But this is no excuse for sluggishness, and being lax and lazy, and a sluggard, as the book of Proverbs constantly reproves against.

Both extremes would seem quite wrong - to burn out, or to rust out .
There is a middle ground !

Jesus said ***For My yoke is easy, and my burden is light*** *Matthew 11 : 30*
(Someone said, that if we are not finding it so, guess who put that load on to you !)
The God we seek to serve is not a hard master, nor should we portray him as such in any way.

Jesus, who was constantly about his Fathers business, meeting and ministering to every variety of human need, to the extent of them having no time even to eat, enjoined his disciples who accompanied him to ***come aside to a private place and rest awhile***
Mark 6 : 31

I recall reading that someone took it upon himself to retrace Jesus itinerary, journeys and programme around Israel for the 3 years of his public ministry as recorded in the Gospels.

Jesus of course walked everywhere, and this person following Jesus trail, found that he must have been very active and physically fit, and was probably quite suntanned from spending so much time in the open. He would have been a choice physical specimen of manhood at 33 years of age.

(Question - why did the Jews estimate his age at being under 50 ? when it should have been quite obvious that he was only about 30 ish)

A healthy body and a balanced lifestyle would seem to be just as great a 'testimony' for the Lord as any other spiritual gifting - the first impressions that we convey are lasting, and back up and endorse our spiritual work and giftings.

A marathon runner knows only too well the necessity to pace themselves to complete the full course, and the final burst to the tape. And any athlete knows full well the importance of balance in training, diet, rest and recovery.

But this in no way is to bring condemnation to those who suffer from a congenital disability, or a debilitating sickness, or the consequence of an accident or some other misadventure - Helen Keller (born blind) Joni Erickson / Lada (paraplegic) and countless others have experienced misfortunes and yet ministered amazingly in spite of major disabilities and handicaps. The goodness of God to people in their afflictions are mighty and wondrous testimonies beyond compare - each one an amazing account of the spirit and God's grace conquering over ones circumstances, whatever.

But, back to the many choices of our own lifestyle

Whatsoever you eat and drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God
1 Corinthians 10 31

Surely God would not be glorified by an unhealthy diet or unbalanced lifestyle.

But how to do this in a fallen world, based on profit, as our planet is slowly being poisoned, our rivers and lakes polluted and dying, our oceans and fish life contaminated by mercury, our land and vegetation badly affected by toxic chemicals and fertilisers, our food chain inundated with artificial additives, sweetenings and colourings, the stress brought upon us by our society and urbanisation etc etc Ah, the insight and wisdom needed to make countless wise choices in our personal lifestyle.

But so it has been for ever and a day.

Caleb was one who wholly followed God, and at 85 years of age was strong in body and mind and keen to have his portion of the promised land and to possess it
Joshua 14 : 7 - 13

Moses at the time of his death at 120 years old - ***his eye was not dim (his eyesight was not diminished) nor his natural force (bodily strength) abated***
Deuteronomy 34 : 7

Scripture is full of good examples (and bad) as to the mix of faith and works with a healthy lifestyle.

When Israel was led out of Egypt, God said ***that he would take away all sickness from them, and would put none of the diseases of Egypt which they had known there upon them***
Deuteronomy 7 : 14 Exodus 23 : 25
Psalms 105 : 37 records that ***there was not one feeble person among their tribes***

What an amazing testimony to Gods protection.
Has he changed his desire for us ?

Someone has quipped that after the age of 40 your face is what you yourself have made it, and your body likewise, by your own choices of diet, exercise, and personal habits.

Often have I heard quoted the passage from *1 Timothy 4 : 8* that ***bodily exercise profits (benefits) little***, as some sort of excuse for Christians not paying much attention to physical recreation or sport. But, on a closer reading, in the margin, the words 'for a little' are inserted - this passage should read ***'bodily exercise does indeed profit (benefit) for a little***. And that little is well worth having. So, this passage actually supports physical exercise, not diminishes it - it is actually an encouragement to exercise, not the other way round as commonly thought!

Interestingly, Paul records Timothy in *Timothy 6 : 23* as having ***often infirmities*** evidently prone to sickness, and advocates ***drinking not only water but also wine for his stomachs sake*** - Paul recommends him to pay attention to his 'intake' of fluids, (and beyond that - his diet) Someone has commented that the water in that region was either not fresh nor pure, as is a colossal problem in the world in these times - hence the use of bottled water in developed countries.

And then Paul comments in *1 Corinthians 9 : 27* ***I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection;*** (margin = ***I buffet my body and lead it captive***) ***lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be disapproved.***

Personal restraint and discipline that is so at odds with the old nature !

Ask any livestock farmer - what goes in comes out ! The attention to the diet and health of their animals is absolutely paramount to success or failure. And so with us - our bodies are just like the animals - our diet is the first thing we should look at when considering our health, then exercise (or the lack of it) and proper sleep, rest and recreation

Recreation - an interesting word - really 2 words - RE - Creation, to be created anew.

And we ***shall still bring forth fruit in old age, and be fat*** (but not too overweight!) ***and flourishing - green***

Psalms 92 : 14

So fellow pilgrim - to consider our bodies - our temple (of the Holy Spirit), and the balance of our lifestyles.

To learn from whatever source - the animal and insect kingdoms and nature itself, past generations, countless forerunners and contemporaries, as well as from the example of Jesus the perfect man, as we all seek to serve him to our full potential

And to consider again Derek Prince's final comment that **Christians should take better care of their bodies !**

Excuse me, I've just been reminded to book in with my Doctor for another regular Check - Up !

There is one thing on a par with divine healing

and to me that's - divine health

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship (koinonia), and in breaking of bread and in prayers *Acts 2 : 42*

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house ; did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart *Acts 2 : 46*

open homes of Grace

An attempt to recapture the simplicity and the spiritual benefits of a return to the basics of the early church and Christianity of the first 3 Centuries after Jesus death & resurrection.

Remembering that for about 300 years

There were no established or structured Churches, no traditions.

There were no clergy or priests, no ritual nor format, no formalism, no denominations.

There was generally no 'sermon' as such, and no tithing.

Just a brotherhood of local believers of 'a like mind' who gathered together regionally at various homes as and when they could.

Also remembering that the 'Church' is not a building, nor an institution, but a 'called out assembly' of believers, of any number above 2 *Matthew 18 : 20*

There were just 2 observances for believers -

Baptism by immersion (once)

and the '**breaking of bread**' which was done as often as possible - daily (as *Acts 2:46*), certainly weekly (usually Sunday)

These gatherings were in the homes of believers, obviously limited in numbers only by the size of the house or dwelling.

A shared meal was usually partaken of - again in memorial of Jesus 'last supper'

The heart to heart fellowship of believers was obviously prized, and a caring for each other's welfare (even to the ultimate extent of sharing possessions in those early Church Bible days)

Prayer was an essential element of the gatherings.

Gifted people with callings - *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers* *Ephesians 2 : 11* were mobile amongst the various local Home gatherings

A thought that perhaps

Different homes, on a rotational basis, perhaps fortnightly initially

Any format of the gathering could be guided by the 'host' or home owner.

When numbers increase, another home gathering to be simply formed.

Occasionally the local 'home gatherings' could meet for larger scale gatherings for whatever reason or occasion.

Each gathering sought to be 'Spirit led', with each person able to share and contribute, 'body ministry' as possible.

Personal giftings able to be encouraged - with one criteria - for each to build up (edify) the other believers present.

Music and songs as gifted people could contribute.

Leadership not to be an issue, (just a brotherhood) the older people (elders) perhaps to give advice from their experience.

Non believers, and children able to join in and benefit as and whenever they desired.

Open Homes Open Hearts Kononia - Fellowship Brotherhood

Dear Lord, may it happen again, in this day and age, in our midst

Amen & Amen