

# Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

July, 2008

## Spiritual Hunger

### Part 1

Has one of your children ever come to the kitchen while you are busy fixing dinner and exclaimed, "Boy am I hungry! I hope the food is going to be ready soon!"? You may get a chuckle out of this if that kid is really a lumbering teen-age boy with a non-stop appetite who ate a hearty lunch and has been snacking on goodies much of the time since then. When he refers to "hunger" he certainly doesn't mean "starving for nutrition." You can bet if you offered him a plate of beets to "calm his hunger" while waiting for the steak and potatoes to be done cooking, he'd likely exclaim he wasn't that hungry, and could wait a little while longer.

A child who is well-fed in a loving home seldom ever experiences the kind of hunger that may be felt by those in less fortunate circumstances. There really are people who go to bed physically hungry—some who even go to bed starving—in many places in the world. Most of us realize this.

But what we may not realize is that there are also people who really do go to bed spiritually hungry—some who even go to bed spiritually starving. And these people aren't all in far away places somewhere around the world. Some are right in our own community, some are in our own neighborhood, some may even be inside our own home.

God built into mankind a hunger to get to know Him. As some have

poetically expressed it, "There is a God-shaped hole in your soul that can only be filled by a relationship with Him." He sent prophets and teachers to reveal Himself and His plans to mankind. He eventually sent His Son as the ultimate revelation, and as the ultimate sacrifice to redeem lost mankind to Himself. The Bible records what we need to know to have that hunger satisfied and lead us into that fulfilling relationship.

But for most people, just owning a Bible doesn't satisfy that hunger. Something is still missing.

*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it*



Pam Dewey  
Michigan  
oasis777@comcast.net

to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:26-31)

The eunuch was hungry to know more about God. But even with his great learning, he could not clearly understand all that he read. He craved someone to "explain" it to him. And if he had not already possessed some of the Bible, he would have had to have someone bring it to him in the first place. As Paul noted:

*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:14-15)*

It is clear in the Bible that, although everyone can have access to the scriptures themselves, God has provided "teachers" to assist others in hearing about and understanding the things in those scriptures. The burden on those who have this calling is great:

*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1)*

And the New Testament contains a number of warnings about teachers (and preachers, and people acting in the role of prophets and apostles—those who would claim to be spokesmen for God in some way) who do not have a calling from God at all.

*But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false*

*teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-- bringing swift destruction on themselves. (2 Peter 2:1)*

In the animal kingdom, it is not the physically healthy and strong in herds and flocks who are easy prey for the wolves. It is the very young, the sick, the weak, and the starving who are easy pickings. And it is those weak ones wandering off by themselves who are in the most danger of all. An injured or sick dolphin that is with its family "pod" is encircled by its healthy family members, and is kept safe from the sharks and aided to the surface to breathe and so on until it regains its strength. A weak dolphin off by itself is also easy pickings for the ocean predators.

Thus it is in the spiritual realm also. The false teachers that Peter spoke of are not much of a danger to the spiritually healthy and strong and well-fed. They are a danger to those who are young in the faith, those who have been hurt by relationships within "religious" groups, those who are wandering off by themselves confused. And they are particularly a threat to those who are spiritually hungry.

Even Christians who were strong in their faith once upon a time can become weakened and hungry if they find themselves in a religious setting where their needs for good spiritual food and for opportunities to build up their "spiritual muscles" are not met. That food and exercise comes in a number of ways: from formal teaching, from interacting with others seeking to know God, from using one's own spiritual

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**Editor:**

*Jim O'Brien*

**Associate Editor:**

*Pam Dewey*

**Page Layout:**

*Dan Farnsworth*

*Jenee Zaydon*

**Peer Review Team:**

*Guy Swenson*

*Bill Jacobs*

*Ron Dart*

*Wendy Pack*

*Pam Dewey*

**Contributors:**

*Richard Allen*

*Lenny Cacchio*

*Ramona Leiter*

*Horst Obermeit*

*Bill Stough*

*Scarlett Stough*

**Contact Information:**

*P.O. Box 1811*

*West Chester, OH 45071*

*jimobri@gmail.com*

*(513) 755-0040*

**Cover Photo:**

*Clipart.com*


Donations are greatly appreciated; checks can be made out to Church of God, Cincinnati and mailed to the address above.

To request Faith Networks, call 513-755-0040 or send your name and address to [jimobri@gmail.com](mailto:jimobri@gmail.com). Faith Networks may also be downloaded at [www.youall.com/faithnetworks](http://www.youall.com/faithnetworks).

gifts to build up the Body. An environment where any of these factors is missing can lead to a spiritual hunger and weakness—which can leave the weakened Christian as easy prey for false teachers and spiritually harmful religious groups. An extreme example would be the cult known as the “Moonies” which has long targeted lonely teens and young adults, often run-aways, who are hungry for love and fellowship and answers to their spiritual questions.

But one doesn't need to be a confused teenager to be targeted and lured by harmful religious movements, or attracted to and misled by false teachers claiming to be coming in Jesus' name, but who were not called or sent by Him. One only needs to be spiritually hungry. Do you have friends or family members who have become interested in or directly involved with religious groups about which you have serious concerns? Would you like to know how to help them avoid or escape such spiritually unhealthy entanglements? If so, you need to realize that the situation likely involves spiritual hunger of some sort. There are some needs that are being met by the new involvement that were not being met elsewhere. And thus any efforts of persuasion you attempt to use that do not take into account that hunger and those needs will be ineffective in the long run.

The next installment of this article will offer several sound steps you can take to help a loved one who may be in danger of being swept into an abusive spiritual relationship because of this kind of spiritual hunger.

*Pam Dewey's Field Guide to the Wild World of Religion website at [www.isitso.org](http://www.isitso.org) provides extensive information about a wide variety of groups, movements, and individual teachers which may present a threat to the spiritual well-being of those who become enmeshed in their teachings and activities. Particular attention is given to those teachers and groups which may use spiritual abuse and/or deception to attract and keep members.* 

## We Got Lucky

We heard what seemed to be a cat meowing as I waded in the creek together with my son and three-year-old granddaughter. We became silent and listened. At first everything was silent, but later we heard an intense meowing.

After we left the creek, the three of us walked along the nearby bluffs, following the sounds until we located the source. The meowing came from a huge boulder about six feet long in an area partially washed out under a bluff. The fervent meowing was that of a kitten which we assumed must be stuck behind that rock. We could not see it, but he was crying out for help.

We needed a flashlight so we went to our parked car to get one. When we walked back, we saw a small kitten on top of that rock. He was not stuck but was alone, frightened, and missing his mother. The kitten had been hiding in the dark recesses behind that rock and ran back into them as we approached. Those recesses were too small for us to get into.

We were really moved by the kitten's plight and wanted to save him. If he spent a night here, a wild animal would likely eat him. But the kitten was too scared to come to us no matter how much we called him. He desperately needed a savior but didn't know who to trust, so he meowed, but wouldn't come out.

It's difficult to describe the emotions

you feel when involved in a dilemma like this. We felt deep concern for the frightened kitten, but he had to come out to where we could help him. Although we tried, there was no way we could get to him behind that boulder. Three-year-old Sophia, my granddaughter, was really moved, too. We prayed, of course, but something would have to occur in the cat to bring him to us.

Next we went to a store and bought a can of cat food and put the food in various places on the rock. The kitten would now come to the area closest to the back of the rock, but stayed away from the front where I was. I still couldn't touch it, and he would run and hiss as I reached out. He just couldn't trust, but we genuinely wanted to save that kitten.

When we were finally forced to face the fact that we couldn't help, my son and granddaughter started to walk to the car. Then we saw the kitten edge out to the side of the rock, and I grabbed him. He was terrified; he scratched and bit me, drawing blood from my hand. I was not, however, about to let him go no matter what, because I knew that he would die there if I let go, and I did not want him to die.

While all these events were taking place, I was flooded with thoughts of



Bill Stough  
Missouri  
bstough@yhti.net







what all of this meant. I was experiencing how God feels about us.

The three of us really cared about that little kitten. He was a lost creature and all alone in a world with no one to care for it. He was lost in a rural area where many wild animals live who would eat it. He was trying to find safety in a dark spot where there really was no safety. Now rescuers approached, but he was so frightened he did not know if we were there to help him or eat him.

*When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mat. 9:36).*

It's difficult to understand that God really feels deep love for all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, but we all find ourselves trapped and cast out. We all need a savior but have trouble approaching Christ. We find ourselves trying to survive in dark places. We are used to evil prevailing in everything in this world. I know that I am quite a cynic and distrustful of almost everyone, and I tend to feel that way about God. I can explain why I feel as I do because of my background, but I, like everyone, need to know God does not have the motives of some evil people. We can all learn by the way the three of us felt toward that helpless kitten, for that is how God feels about us. He desperately wants to help us in our troubles. Our sins and problems overwhelm us. We have to come to the

one who really does care and will help us. But we have to make a move out of our dark places, and let the savior grab us.

When my hands wrapped around that kitten, I had to pay a price with my blood to save him as he scratched me, but I did not resent it. I would not let go now that he was safely in my hands. Isn't God that way with us? Wasn't I experiencing exactly how God feels?

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand (John 10:27-20)."

Reading about God and Jesus in the Bible may not be enough to really know God. But he gives us experiences that teach us what we need to really know him. So it was with that kitten and how God feels toward all of us.

What happened to the kitten after we rescued him? My son Ryan and granddaughter Sophia took him home. Lisa, Ryan's wife, grinned from ear to ear when she saw him, and they are keeping him. Sophia spends a good part of her day petting him and playing with him. He now purrs, feels safe, and is completely accepted. His life is now good, and he doesn't face the threat of death. Ryan and Sophia named the kitten "Lucky."

We are all lucky, too. **FN**

# The Power of the Most High

*An angel was sent to Mary of Nazareth to tell her that she would give birth to a son. “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:26-35)*

By the power of God, the Son of God became flesh in the body of a human infant named Jesus. (John 1:1-3, 14) After Jesus had grown and had been tested in the desert (Luke 4:1-4), he “returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit....”

People were amazed, wondering what the source of his power and authority was. (Matthew 13:54-57) He ordered evil spirits to leave the people they were tormenting, and they obeyed. He ordered illnesses to leave the suffering, and even diseases obeyed. He went from town to town preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. (Luke 1:36, 38-39; 5:17; 6:17-10; 8:46; 4:43)

Jesus also sent his twelve disciples out with power and authority over demons and diseases. They were sent to preach and to heal. (Luke 9:1-2) Later, when he sent seventy-two disciples out, they returned celebrating because the demons had submitted to them through the name of Jesus. Jesus refocused their joy on the mission itself, rather than the power used to carry it out. He told them to rejoice because “their names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:17-24)

The power, manifesting in miracles, had a purpose—repentance.

*Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were*

*performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. (Luke 10:13-15)*

As Jesus rode toward the Mount of Olives on the back of a donkey, a crowd of disciples praised God for all the miracles (same Greek word translated power) they had seen. They were rejoicing, but Jesus was weeping because most of the people who saw that power “did not recognize the time of God’s coming” and would suffer for it. (Luke 19:28-44)

Jesus promised his disciples that at some future time he would return “with power and great glory.” He promised redemption. (Luke 21:27-28)

During his last meal with his disciples, “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” Although he had power and authority as the Son of God, he laid that aside to serve mankind by allowing himself to be executed to pay for all of our sins. (John 13:3-7)

After his death and resurrection, Jesus continued to teach his disciples. He promised them “power from on high.” (Luke 24:36-49) This power was given so they could accomplish the mission he gave them. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a



Scarlett Stough  
Missouri  
skstough@yhti.net

few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”


He continued: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:1-8)

Jesus returned to heaven; the disciples, about 120, remained in Jerusalem waiting and praying. (Acts 1:9-15) On the day of Pentecost they received the power that Jesus had promised. (Acts 2:1-4) The result was the addition of 3000 more disciples to their number. Their numbers continued to grow. (Acts 2:42-47)

When the religious authorities tried to stop the disciples from speaking about what they had seen and heard, (Acts 4:1-22) those who had repented (who had turned back to God) gathered together to pray for power to continue.

*“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your*

*hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:29-31)*

The power Jesus sent to his early followers is still at work today. Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. The gospel, that good news of redemption from the power of sin and death, “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 1:17-18) This power of the Most High does not usually impress with amazing healings and miraculous signs and wonders. This power can even be counterfeited (2 Thessalonians 2:9). But for those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that power can turn a mundane existence into a life of significance now and for all eternity. 

## Lexington Winter Family Tournament Dec. 24th - Dec. 28th 2008

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!** Lexington Kentucky is again hosting the Winter Family Tournament. Beginning with the opening night dance on Wednesday, the Winter Family Tournament will include good food, fellowship, spiritual education, and fun for all ages.

Activities will include basketball, volleyball, and soccer...as well as lots of games for the kids. Additionally, there will be seminars, discussion groups, a youth service, and a Congregational Conference dedicated to strengthening congregations in the Free Church of God. For more information contact Jim O'Brien at (513) 755-0040.

Rooms at the Griffin Gate Marriott are a steal at the flat rate of \$53 per night. Call the Marriott at (800) 228-9290 to reserve yours.

## Report: Paris Landing

The 2007 Christian Educational Ministries Memorial Day Family Weekend was such a smash hit last year, featuring the exciting and bustling Bible Times Bazaar for all the kids, that many no doubt wondered if the 2008 weekend could come up to that standard. The consensus by the end of the weekend was—indeed it could and did!

Activities began on Friday evening with a sub-and-chips meal provided for all at the outdoor pavilion at the Paris Landing State Park, Tennessee convention center. Food and fellowship led directly into a rousing sing-along of contemporary Christian praise music, led by Skip Martin on his guitar. An inspiring and stimulating series of seminars for the weekend began at 9 AM Saturday morning with a Brainstorming Session. More seminars, and YEA classes for the youth, followed at 10 AM. A Sabbath service began the afternoon, with a sermon by Ron Dart. Then families headed off for their own informal activities while a staff of volunteers finalized preparations for the highlight of the weekend—the “Meet Me At the Fair” gathering that was to be held that evening in conjunction with the Pie and Ice Cream Social.

The theme was a “turn of the last century” county fair. Although several weddings and other conflicting activities around the country had cut the Family Weekend attendance considerably this year, there was still a crowd of over 100 enthusiastic Fair goers.

Scott Joplin ragtime piano music





set the mood for the evening as folks arrived. Kids twelve and under enjoyed a selection of crafts, games, face-painting, oodles of prizes, and more. The highlight of the evening was “Dewey’s Astounding Believe It or Don’t Sideshow.” Adults, teens, and children all roared at the antics of a bearded lady, a snake charmer, a tattooed lady, an Egyptian dancer, a catwoman, a Strong Man, a sword swallower and his lovely assistant, and the fearsome WildMan of Borneo. A photographer was available to take pictures for free souvenir postcards which superimposed the faces of fair goers on the bodies of a man and lady dressed in 1900s costumes. Photo opportunities were also provided for those who wanted their pictures taken with one or more of the side show performers.

More seminars and YEA classes continued on Sunday morning, with free time in the afternoon for naps or outdoor fun. A Family Dance followed in the evening on Sunday, where the dance floor was full of folks from 5 to 85 dancing to a wide selection of styles of music and dance steps from the 1940s to the 2000s. Seminars and YEA classes ended on Monday morning. An open forum with Ron Dart at 9 AM was followed by Mr. Dart’s farewell message, and tearful hugs and smiles followed as everyone headed back home.

You can see a photo album of the Fair and Sideshow at [www.yoall.com/parislanding2008](http://www.yoall.com/parislanding2008). 



# The Woman Who Rides The Beast



Lenny Cacchio  
Missouri  
cacchio01@aol.com

Getting frustrated with things in general is a normal response to much of what we see in this old world. I'm no exception, and as I told someone not long ago, "You and I should run for Congress, and we'll solve everything once we get there."

That, of course, is not true. First, we could never be elected in today's political environment, and secondly, we must not be naïve about the power of the establishment. I'm reminded about a not-so-obscure prophecy in the Book of Revelation, the interpretation of which has been horribly skewed. Brace

impressed with her. In most quarters where this prophecy is discussed, one particular church gets beat over the head with it. That interpretation, however, is much too narrow, for the passage is addressing a larger deception than the traditional explanation allows.

Take a look at what this woman is doing. She is riding the beast, which means she is trying to control it, but as we learn later in the chapter, she doesn't

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*The Founders of our nation understood history and the danger that an officially state sanctioned church...poses to both church and state.*

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yourself, as I am about to give you a different understanding of this passage:

*Then the angel carried me away by the Spirit to the desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a red beast. It was covered with names against God written on it, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and red and was shining with gold, precious jewels, and pearls she was wearing. She had a golden cup in her hand, a cup filled with evil things and the uncleanness of her sexual sin. On her forehead a title was written that was secret. This is what was written: "The Great Babylon, Mother of Prostitutes and of the Evil Things of the Earth." (Revelation 17:3-5 New Century Version)*

Whoever this woman is, God is not

really control the beast at all. The beast is the one in control and hates the woman to the point of destroying her (17:15-16).

And therein is the source of the problem. A religious organization trying to use the political structures of this world runs the grave risk of prostituting itself to the whims of the state. History has not been kind to the illegitimate marriage of church and state that dominated Europe from the time of Constantine to the Reformation. And let us not forget that the Reformation saw Protestant unholy political alliances and atrocities that, to a visitor from Mars, would look just like any other garden variety Inquisition.

Theocratic governments in the hands of man become tyranny. The church

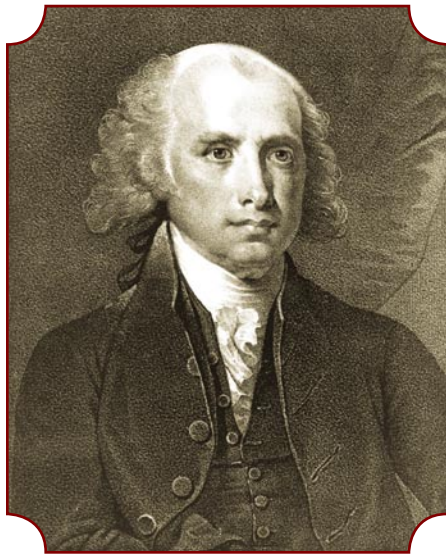
becomes corrupted and drunk on its own power, and in the end the church prostituting itself to one political movement or another causes the church to suffer.

The Founders of our nation understood history and the danger that an officially state sanctioned church (which the establishment clause of the First Amendment prohibits) poses to both church and state. In 1785 James Madison wrote,

*During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution. (Memory and Remonstrance, June 20, 1785)*

In an 1822 letter to Edward Livingston, he wrote that “religion and Government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed.”

Lest this essay be misunderstood, I




James Madison

make a distinction between “church” and God, and I also make a distinction between individual people of faith running for office vs. a specific denomination or theocratic hierarchy sitting in tribunal as happened in Europe in ages past and is happening in Iran right now. The concept is to keep two highly political structures away from each other in order to preserve the greater liberty.

One evangelical leader lamented during this election cycle that he felt the Republican Party had treated the Christian Right like a mistress. The party courted them, promised them everything, but once they got the money and the votes, the party asked them not to be an embarrassment by showing up at the ball. I don’t know if he realized how apt his metaphor is in light of Revelation 17.

Having said all of this, there is a place for religion in politics. People of faith have served faithfully in government from the time of Joseph in Egypt to the many fine public servants today. But their task is not to bring utopia to this earth. Rather, they serve to do what the Constitution says: “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”

And there is also the prophetic function of the church, to “cry aloud, spare not, and show my people their sins” (Isaiah 58:1) as would a Jeremiah or an Isaiah. But let’s not expect signs and wonders from mere human beings who too often are tempted to believe that they can solve all problems. That job belongs to Somebody else, who hasn’t yet seen fit to intervene. 



## The Park City Feast of Tabernacles

# Imagine...



- Participating in practical spiritual educational experiences.
- Having a choice of which spiritual lessons you learn.
- Acquiring spiritual skills that you can use in your family, work, school, congregation, and community.

Now imagine doing all of it in the most awesome mountain town in the West – that's what the Feast of Tabernacles is like in Park City, Utah.

This Feast of Tabernacles will be a family retreat with hands-on spiritual learning, shared meals, exciting activities and numerous workshops. Even with all these educational events, you can still find time for hiking, biking, the alpine slide and the zip line!

In addition to all this, we will be initiating some public service projects and will be learning the process of effective community outreach.

Park City, Utah offers an incredible array of housing – everything from lovely hotel rooms to very affordable condominiums.

Park City is relatively low in elevation compared to other mountain towns (6300 feet) and is only 35 minutes from the Salt Lake City airport. Fares into SLC are relatively low.

If you are interested in something different and spiritually rejuvenating, plan to attend the Feast of Tabernacles in Park City, Utah sponsored by LifeResource Ministries. You can find all the information at [www.liferesource.com](http://www.liferesource.com). Address questions to [FOT@liferesource.org](mailto:FOT@liferesource.org).



[www.liferesource.org](http://www.liferesource.org)

PO Box 66540, Albuquerque, NM 87193  
[info@liferesource.org](mailto:info@liferesource.org)

# The Healthy Congregation: Holistic Small Groups

The population of Israel was an estimated three million people when God led them out of Egypt. Where did this mass of people get their beginning? Well, most are aware that it started from one family. Not exactly a traditional family. It was one man, two wives, and two concubines. Thirteen children later, add a few generations of grandchildren, and there is a nation.

God called them the “children of Israel,” the name given to Jacob. The children grew into clans and the clans became tribes. A tribe is simply a family grown large.

For all of Israel’s flaws, there is a principle in this story for church development. That one family could grow into a large and powerful nation which has influenced the world ought to be a case study for congregations.

If we can glean one underlying principle from Israel’s growth that will serve as a model for us today it is the value of holistic small groups. In Israel family was just such a group. For a congregation the family serves as a metaphor for small groups within it. It’s also a principle that is fundamental for any healthy organization from the Boy Scouts to the United States of America.

The benefit of small groups can be felt in many ways. One of the landmark studies in alcoholism which took place over a half century ago was a comparison of two countries which had very similar rates of per capita consumption of alcohol and very different rates of alcoholism. What was the difference? In a word, family.

The two countries studied were France and Italy. France had a high rate of alcoholism while Italy had a rate

that was relatively low. Researchers attributed the difference to the strong family structure in Italy. In Italy people drank

at festive events such as weddings where family enforced sobriety. Furthermore, Italians were encouraged to drink only at meals and with other people, never alone. It wasn’t government, the police, television commercials, or civic minded individuals who prevented the vice of drunkenness. It was family.

The family was a small intimate group that exercised strong influence over each member preventing the misuse of alcohol.

One of the interesting characteristics of family is that it grows. But how it grows is important. Parents encourage children to start families of their own. That’s how clans and tribes develop. Humans are genetically engineered to “be fruitful and multiply,” but part and parcel of family is that “a man shall leave his mother and father” to perpetuate the process.

We would think it strange if a parent resented his child for getting married and starting his own family. Good parents support it. Yet churches sometimes resent the development of small groups within the congregation. Some even consider it divisive. A parent who took that attitude would put an end to his own lineage. Could it be the same for a church?

Large churches offer many advantages. Yet strangely enough we often fail to recognize that people don’t connect on a personal level with hundreds of others. Cherished relationships are formed in




Jim O'Brien  
Ohio  
jimobri@gmail.com



small groups. People can feel lost in large groups. The larger a church becomes the more important for the small groups to multiply within the congregation.

Of all the characteristics of congregational development this may be the most important and most underrated. Christian Swartz, founder of Natural Church Development said, “If

we were to identify any one principle as the ‘most important,’ then without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups.”

Inclusion of this one principle may be the most exciting change your congregation can make. And it may improve every other activity within the congregation. 

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King David knew this very well during his life. He wrote in Psalms (103:15-16),

*For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

Moses had a similar cry to God, knowing that despite all that was given to him in power and authority to lead God's people, his life also had to come to an end, and he would not be able to see the long-awaited Promised Land. He exclaimed with an urgent heart concerning his fragile life in Psalm 90:12, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.”

Moses knew that taking each second of life and making it count for good was man's real purpose. I work full time as a machinist, and I often find myself doing equations and calculations. So as I continued to think about that number of 19600 days that I had relatively left to live, I realize that I don't even have that amount considering many other factors.

First of all I subtracted all necessary hours that I would need to sleep and work. So let's systematically do the

calculation. You have 19600 days to live, subtract at least half of that for sleeping and working, you come to roughly 9800 days. I would assume that realistically the average person in North America drives at least 1 to 2 hours per day, which is what I do regularly. So let's say for sake of argument that we do 1.5 hours per day, multiplied by 365 days a year, divided by 24 hours a day, multiplied by 53 years of life remaining, and you finally get 1220 days of driving. So then we can take 9800 days, subtract 1220 days, and we get 8580 days remaining to enjoy life. And considering other factors, depending on your lifestyle, you can easily see how quickly life passes by.

It's not a surprise that King David could utter these words in 1 Chronicles 29:15:

*For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.*

We are all obviously at different ages in our lives, but you can clearly see the picture that I'm painting about the short span of our existence. We also must remember that it could end at any moment in time, according to God's plan

and will for our lives. Solomon knew this also. He said in Ecclesiastes 9:12,

*For a man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in a net, and as birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.*

Despite not knowing when we will breathe our last, we can find great assurance that our heavenly Father knows, and holds all of our lives in his hand. In Job 34:14 Job makes a profound statement pointing us to the One who knows each moment. He said,

*Who hath given him a charge over the earth? Or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.*

Let me bring you back the question that I asked earlier: How would knowing the number of our days influence us in the way we lived our lives today? You often hear the famous cliché “What would you do if you had 24 hours to live?” But what if that truly became your full reality in this moment. How would you respond, in the way you treat God, and the way you treat your neighbor? Would you come to see what truly matters in each moment that you spend?

I believe that this is the key to redeeming our time—remembering what the purpose of our life is. Solomon, a man of abundant wealth, wisdom, power, and fame, still came to only one conclusion for the purpose of man during his lifetime. He said in Ecclesiastes 12:13,


*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

A famous country singer by the name of Tim McGraw came out with a song called “Live Like You Were Dying” in which he makes some good points. He says, “...and I loved deeper, spoke sweeter, and gave forgiveness I was denying.” May we learn as we are on this earth to love those unlovable and forgive those unforgivable. Then we can live with a clear conscience and allow our hearts and minds to be free and enjoy life to its fullest.

Although our years of life are few, and our days as a shadow fading away, may we rest and find comfort in the fact that Jesus assures us this life is not the end, but the beginning. Jesus said to Martha, before he raised Lazarus from the dead,

*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?(John 11:25-26)*



We must always remember that we can never get back or replace each moment that has passed, so let us therefore learn from yesterday and hope for the future, but most importantly live in the beauty of this present moment. May we surrender all our days to him so that he may exchange them for all of eternity. 

# The Number of Our Days

What if we knew the number of our days? How would that influence the way we lived our lives?

I recently received an e-mail which asked you to fill out this series of questions in order to determine relatively what your actual age should be in comparison to your biological age. This was based on questions about your lifestyle and habits in order to give you a rough idea of your real age and your life expectancy. As I completed the questions I finally got to the screen where it gave me the results. It said that my real age was 20 years old compared to my biological age of 26, and my life expectancy was 78 years.

Granting that God would allow me to even live as many years as that, what I found more interesting was that it converted the remaining number of years expected to live into the amount of days. It said, "You can expect to live approximately another 19600 more days." When I focused on that amount, I was clearly reminded that our lives on this earth don't last forever. A sense of urgency seems to come to us in different ways as we realize that each moment of breath is so very fragile.



Kodesh Gagnon  
Canada  
kodesh\_gagnon@hotmail.com

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*Faith Networks  
P.O. Box 1811  
West Chester, OH 45071*

Presort Standard  
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