

STRATEGIC LEARNING ZONES

BY JOE BECKLER

THE DEFINING MOMENT FOR ME, AS A CHURCH PLANTER, REPEATS ITSELF ALMOST WEEKLY. I CONSTANTLY MEET PEOPLE IN MY TOWN WHO ARE LIVING WITHOUT THE HOPE OF JESUS CHRIST. THEY ARE NOT GOING TO SHOW UP AT A CHURCH SERVICE. FOR THAT MATTER, THEY DON'T WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH CHURCH; YET, GOD LOVES THEM. AS SUCH, I FEEL COMPELLED TO SEEK OUT WAYS TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE THESE PEOPLE IN MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH THE GOSPEL. THIS IS OFTEN DIFFICULT BECAUSE MY OWN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT A SUCCESSFUL CHURCH LOOKS LIKE DOES NOT WORK WHEN IT COMES TO REACHING THE PEOPLE WE ARE ENCOUNTERING IN SOUTHWEST COLORADO. HOWEVER, GOD IS SHOWING ME THAT HIS CHURCH CAN INDEED REACH THE HARD-TO-REACH CROWDS IN MY TOWN.

MY WIFE AND I CAME TO DURANGO, COLORADO IN JUNE OF 2003. THE LOCAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION INVITED US TO COME AS CHURCH PLANTERS WITH THE INTENT OF STARTING A CHURCH THAT WOULD CONNECT WITH THE LOCAL COLLEGE CULTURE. WE HAD A YEAR TO PREPARE FOR THIS NEW ADVENTURE, AND IT WAS A PRODUCTIVE TIME FOR LOGISTICALLY GETTING READY. HOWEVER, NOTHING COULD PREPARE US FOR THE CHALLENGE OF CLEARLY UNDERSTANDING OUR NEW CONTEXT UNTIL WE PHYSICALLY MOVED TO DURANGO.

THE ONE EXCEPTION THAT DID HELP ME WAS A BOOK I READ IN PREPARATION FOR OUR CHURCH PLANTING ENDEAVOR. A GOOD FRIEND AND SEASONED MISSIONARY RECOMMENDED THAT I READ *THE CELTIC WAY OF EVANGELISM*, BY GEORGE HUNTER.

HUNTER'S WORK IN *THE CELTIC WAY OF EVANGELISM* TRACKS THE HISTORY OF THE CELTIC CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT. THE CELTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, ORIGINATING IN WHAT WE CONSIDER IRELAND, INITIATED A BRILLIANT MISSIONARY MOVEMENT THAT GREW WITH AMAZING MOMENTUM INTO PARTS OF EUROPE. THE METHODS OF THE CELTIC CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES WERE INSPIRING AND INGENIOUS.

AS THE STORY GOES, WHEN CELTIC CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES FELT THE CALL TO REACH OUT TO A NEW VILLAGE, THEY WOULD GO WITH A MINDSET OF LEARNING THE CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE THEY SOUGHT TO REACH. THEY WOULD TYPICALLY ESTABLISH A CAMP (MONASTERY OF SORTS) ON THE OUTER FRINGES OF THE COMMUNITY. OVER TIME, THEY WOULD LEARN ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE—WHAT THEY ATE, THEIR TRADITIONS AND STORIES, THEIR PERCEPTION OF SPIRITUALITY, THEIR WORK HABITS, LIFESTYLE RHYTHMS, AND SO FORTH. AS THEY STUDIED THE COMMUNITY, THEY WOULD BEGIN TO DETERMINE WAYS TO BRIDGE THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL INTO PEOPLE’S LIVES. THEY DIDN’T COMPROMISE THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST. INSTEAD, THEY STRATEGICALLY FOUND WAYS TO USE THE CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY AS A PLATFORM FOR SHARING THE MESSAGE OF JESUS IN TERMS THAT COULD BE EASILY GRASPED.¹

THE CELTIC CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES LOVED THE PEOPLE THEY LIVED WITH. THEY LEARNED AND RESPECTED THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY AND, AS A RESULT, THEY WERE EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL IN PROPELLING THE GOSPEL INTO UNREACHED TERRITORIES.

STRATEGIC LEARNING ZONES

AS FAR AS OUR INTENT TO SEE A CHURCH REALIZED IN DURANGO, MY WIFE AND I AGREED THAT IF WE WANTED TO UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE OF OUR NEW COMMUNITY, THE CELTIC STRATEGY WAS CRUCIAL. FOR MYSELF, I BEGAN TO LOOK FOR LOCATIONS THAT REFLECTED THE CULTURE OF THE PEOPLE WE WERE CALLED TO REACH. EARLY ON, I IDENTIFIED A COFFEE SHOP ON MAIN STREET IN DURANGO, WHICH I CONSIDERED A *LEARNING ZONE*. I HAD NO FORMAL CHURCH OFFICE TO GO TO (THANK GOODNESS!), SO I WOULD SPEND A REGULAR AMOUNT OF TIME WEEKLY AT THIS COFFEE SHOP. MY INTENT WAS TO LISTEN AND LEARN FROM THE PEOPLE I INTERACTED WITH ON A DAILY BASIS.

AS I OBSERVED AND LISTENED, I REALIZED OUR TARGET AUDIENCE WAS EXTREMELY POST-CHRISTIAN. THEY WERE HAPPY LIVING IN ROCKY MOUNTAIN “PARADISE.” CHRISTIANITY WAS SUSPICIOUS TO THEM—MOSTLY DUE TO POLARIZING ISSUES, WHICH THEY ASSUMED ALL CHRISTIANS UPHELD. PEOPLE IN MY LEARNING ZONE ALSO SEEMED ANTAGONISTIC TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY. WHEN SOMEONE FOUND OUT I WAS A

¹ HUNTER, GEORGE G. *THE CELTIC WAY OF EVANGELISM* (NASHVILLE: ABINGDON, 2000), 39-40, 70, 92.

“PASTOR,” HIS OR HER ATTITUDE TOWARDS ME OFTEN CHANGED. AT FIRST, THIS WAS FRUSTRATING, BUT I EVENTUALLY GOT PAST MY HURT FEELINGS AND TRIED TO UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE HAD SUCH GREAT DISTASTE FOR THE CHURCH. OFTEN, I FOUND THAT THEIR ISSUES AND STRUGGLES RESONATED WITH MY OWN STRUGGLES.

IN STUDYING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF DURANGO, I REALIZED THAT PRESENTING THE GOSPEL USING CONNECTION POINTS, SUCH AS ENVIRONMENTALISM, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LOVE FOR CREATION AND RECREATION, WERE GOING TO BE EFFECTIVE BRIDGES. I ALSO REALIZED THAT OUR CHURCH HAD TO BE A “SAFE ZONE” FOR PEOPLE WHO FELT THREATENED BY ORGANIZED CHURCH/RELIGION.

OTHER STRATEGIC LEARNING ZONES ... JOIN THE WORKFORCE

I AM A FIRM BELIEVER THAT AS A PASTOR, I MUST INTERACT CONSTANTLY WITH PEOPLE IF I WANT TO HAVE A GOOD SENSE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE COMMUNITY. EARLY ON, I REALIZED THAT THE MORE I UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES IN DURANGO, THE BETTER EQUIPPED I WOULD BE TO COMMUNICATE THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE.

THUS, THE COFFEE SHOP WAS JUST ONE PART IN GOD’S EDUCATION STRATEGY. ANOTHER COMPONENT WAS WORKING PART-TIME IN A LOCAL SKI RESORT. ONCE AGAIN, THIS JOB WAS AN EASY WAY TO LEARN ABOUT A PARTICULAR GROUP OF PEOPLE OUR CHURCH NEEDED TO REACH. THE RESORT EMPLOYEE CULTURE IS TOUGH AND GRITTY. YET TO THIS DAY, SOME OF MY BEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT JESUS HAVE OCCURRED WHILE SHOVELING SNOW, HELPING A LIFT OPERATOR, CALLING IN MEDICAL HELP FOR AN INJURED GUEST, AND SO FORTH. WORKING AT OUR LOCAL SKI RESORT OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS AS BOTH AN EMPLOYEE, VOLUNTEER, AND CHAPLAIN, HAS PROVIDED A GREAT WAY TO ENGAGE THE CULTURE AND GET A SENSE OF HOW TO REACH PEOPLE WHO ARE CAUGHT UP IN THE RESORT LIFESTYLE.

WHY LEARNING IS CRUCIAL

JUST LIKE THE CELTIC MISSIONARIES, I AM CONVINCED THAT WE, TOO, MUST INVEST OURSELVES IN A PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY. THIS IS A NON-NEGOTIABLE! THE CHURCH-DISCONNECT COMES WHEN CHURCHES LOOK NOTHING LIKE THE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY. THAT IS A STARK OBSERVATION IN DURANGO. I LIVE IN A TOWN FULL OF PEOPLE WHO LOVE THE MOUNTAINS, ENJOY ADVENTURE SPORTS,

TAKE ON RUGGED CHALLENGES, STAND UP FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CAUSES, TRY TO LIVE “GREEN,” AND ENJOY EXTREMES. WE UNDERSTOOD THAT IF OUR CHURCH FAILED TO CONNECT WITH THESE ISSUES IN A RELEVANT WAY, WE WOULD MISS THE TARGET. THE MORE I LEARN ABOUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THE PEOPLE IN MY TOWN, THE MORE BRIDGES I CAN BUILD INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH. IT DOESN'T MEAN I HAVE TO EMBRACE ALL THE OPINIONS AND VIEWS OUT THERE. I SIMPLY NEED TO LISTEN, LEARN, SEEK TO UNDERSTAND, AND LOVE.

I GENUINELY WANT PEOPLE WHO FEEL ESTRANGED FROM GOD TO RECONSIDER WHAT FAITH MIGHT LOOK LIKE. TO GET AT THIS, I MUST UNDERSTAND WHERE THESE PEOPLE ARE COMING FROM. THE ONLY WAY TO UNDERSTAND IS TO BE IN THE MIDST OF THE COMMUNITY. THIS IS AN ONGOING CHALLENGE FOR ME, BECAUSE IT IS EASY TO SLIP INTO A COZY GROUP OF CHRIST-FOLLOWERS. YOU MUST INTENTIONALLY FIND WAYS TO GRAFT YOUR LIFE INTO THE *LEARNING ZONES*. YOU NEVER BECOME AN EXPERT OF YOUR COMMUNITY. YOU MUST CONTINUALLY BE A STUDENT.

I FIND IT FUN TO INVEST MY TIME CONTINUALLY LEARNING ABOUT MY COMMUNITY. THE KEY TO LEARNING IS ADMITTING THAT YOU NEED TO BE TAUGHT. WHEN PEOPLE THINK YOU ARE EAGER TO LEARN, THEY BECOME EAGER TO TEACH YOU. THE MORE TEACHABLE YOU ARE, THE MORE APPROACHABLE YOU ARE.

THIS QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE CAN BE FUN! ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CAN “MINE” PEOPLE FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE YOUR CHURCH FOR THE THINGS YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND. MY FRIEND JAMES, WHO IS A PART OF OUR CHURCH, HAS TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT MUSIC AND ENVIRONMENTALISM. IN FACT, THOSE CONVERSATIONS HAVE ENRICHED HIS SPIRITUAL JOURNEY, TOO. ANOTHER GOOD FRIEND, ANTONIO, WHO IS NOT YET A CHRIST-FOLLOWER, HAS TAUGHT ME THE ART OF TELE-MARK SKIING, WHICH HAS CREATED ALL KINDS OF RECREATIONAL INROADS FOR ME WITH PEOPLE IN THE WINTER SEASON. I COULD GO ON AND ON. THE LEARNING PROCESS IS RICH WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW IN UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE, ALL OF WHOM GOD LOVES!

I SUPPOSE WE COULD HAVE ARRIVED IN DURANGO, COLORADO, AND TRIED TO START A CHURCH THAT SIMPLY LOOKED LIKE OTHER SUCCESSFUL CHURCHES IN THE AREA. WE COULD HAVE ALSO COME TO THE AREA AND ATTEMPTED STARTING A CHURCH THAT

EMPLOYED TRENDS THAT ARE WORKING IN SOME OTHER PART OF THE WORLD. I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT BOTH OF THESE APPROACHES ARE PROBLEMATIC AND INADEQUATE, ESPECIALLY IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT REACHING PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT YET CHRIST-FOLLOWERS.

RE-DUPLICATED CHURCH MODELS ARE DENYING GOD THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATIVELY BUILD BRIDGES INTO PEOPLE'S UNIQUE LIVES. FOR US, WE DISCOVERED THAT OUR CHURCH NEEDED TO BE UNIQUE IN REACHING OUTDOOR-LOVING, ATHLETIC, SPIRITUALLY-MISGUIDED PEOPLE. AND THE BEST WAY TO BECOME THAT UNIQUE EXPRESSION OF CHURCH REQUIRES CONSTANT LEARNING, STUDYING THE SPECIFIC TRENDS OF OUR CULTURE, AND LOVING EVERYONE ... ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO DISLIKE CHRISTIANITY.

ABOUT OUR CHURCH AND SOME WORDS CONCERNING THEOLOGY ...

MY PERSPECTIVE HAS CHANGED A GREAT DEAL SINCE I STARTED LIVING THE CHURCH PLANTING LIFESTYLE MORE THAN FIVE YEARS AGO. OUR CHURCH PLANT STARTED MEETING REGULARLY AFTER SIX MONTHS OF PREPARATION, RESEARCH, AND CORE GROUP DEVELOPMENT. WE WERE A SMALL GATHERING OF PEOPLE FOR EIGHT MONTHS—ON AVERAGE 12 REGULAR ATTENDEES (INCLUDING OUR INITIAL CORE GROUP)! THIS SEASON PROVIDED A SORT OF INCUBATION PERIOD WHERE WE WORKED OUT WHO WE REALLY NEEDED TO BE AS A CHURCH. IT TOOK A LOT OF TIME, PRAYER, RISK, AND PERSEVERANCE.

OUR CHURCH IS CALLED MATTHEW'S HOUSE. WE NAMED OUR CHURCH WITH MATTHEW 9:9-13 IN MIND. IT IS THE STORY OF MATTHEW, THE TAX COLLECTOR, WHO INVITED JESUS OVER FOR A PARTY WITH HIS FRIENDS—TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS. THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WERE SCANDALIZED BY JESUS' WILLINGNESS TO ASSOCIATE WITH THESE "SINNERS." JESUS TOLD THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS THAT HE CAME SPECIFICALLY FOR THE "SINNERS." THE "WRONG CROWD" NEEDED JESUS, AND HE WANTED THEM.

ONE OF MY BIGGEST, ONGOING STRUGGLES HAS TO DO WITH THE FACT THAT MANY "SINNERS" OF TODAY'S WORLD (ME INCLUDED) SEE CHURCH AS THE LAST PLACE THEY WANT TO GO TO FOR HELP. THIS BOTHERS ME. I AM GRATEFUL THAT OUR CORE GROUP

DECIDED THAT WE NEEDED TO BE A “SAFE PLACE” FOR PEOPLE TO LEARN ABOUT FAITH AND GOD.

EVERY SUNDAY WHEN WE GATHER FOR CHURCH, WE SAY, “MATTHEW’S HOUSE IS A SAFE PLACE FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.” WE EMPHASIZE THIS BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WHO ARE COMING ARE OFTEN APPROACHING WITH A SENSE OF ESTRANGEMENT TOWARDS GOD. CREATING A SAFE ZONE ALLOWS PEOPLE TO SHOW UP, HEAR ABOUT GOD, AND HOPEFULLY MOVE TOWARDS A GENUINE FAITH DECISION. IT TAKES TIME, BUT WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR CALLING IN DURANGO IS TO BE A SAFE PLACE FOR GOD TO DO HIS WORK.

I MUST ADMIT THAT MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE BOOK OF ACTS HAS CHANGED AS A RESULT OF THIS CHURCH PLANTING EXPERIENCE. I USED TO THINK THAT THE BOOK OF ACTS GAVE US A PUNCH LIST OF CHARACTERISTICS FOR WHAT CHURCHES SHOULD LOOK LIKE. I’M RETHINKING THAT. INSTEAD, I SEE THE BOOK OF ACTS AS A HISTORICAL LOOK INTO HOW GOD SPECIFICALLY AND UNIQUELY CREATED CHURCHES TO MEET THE SPECIFIC ISSUES OF DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES. EACH OF THE CHURCHES DESCRIBED IN ACTS WERE DIFFERENT. NO TWO WERE ALIKE! THE COMMUNITIES DESCRIBED IN ACTS REQUIRED LOCAL CHURCHES THAT WERE DESIGNED TO MEET SPECIFIC VILLAGE DYNAMICS. ACTS IS AN AMAZING ACCOUNT OF HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT BROKE BARRIERS, LEFT AND RIGHT, TO UNIQUELY ADDRESS EACH COMMUNITY WITH AN INDIGENOUS EXPRESSION OF THE GOSPEL!

CONCLUSION ... LEARNING TURNS INTO PRACTICAL EXPRESSIONS OF UNIQUE CHURCH

I BELIEVE THAT OUR WORST MISTAKE AS CHURCH PLANTERS IS FAILING TO ALLOW GOD THE CREATIVE RIGHTS IN DEVELOPING SPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH IN OUR SPECIFIC VILLAGES. WE RISK BEING MOTIVATED BY WHAT LOOKS SUCCESSFUL IN OTHER CONTEXTS. WHETHER DRIVEN BY NUMBERS, BUDGET, INNOVATION, OR SOMETHING ELSE, WE FAIL TO SUBMIT OURSELVES TO WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO SPECIFICALLY WHERE WE LIVE AND SERVE.

THIS MEANS THAT MATTHEW’S HOUSE IN DURANGO IS NOT MEANT TO BE RE-DUPLICATED SOMEWHERE ELSE. OF COURSE, ALONG WITH ALL GOSPEL-CENTERED CHURCHES, WE HOLD COMMON ELEMENTS THAT ARE BOTH SACRED AND BIBLICAL. YET

EACH CHURCH IS A CREATIVE EXPRESSION OF GOD, DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY TO REACH SPECIFIC GROUPS OF PEOPLE.

FOR US, OUR ONGOING PROCESS OF LEARNING IN DURANGO HAS HELPED SIGNIFICANTLY. OUR RESEARCH LED US TO PRACTICAL EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH THAT FULFILL OUR UNIQUE CALLING. HERE ARE SOME OF THE WAYS OUR SPECIFIC CALLING IS FLESHED OUT IN DURANGO:

1. WE MEET ON SUNDAY NIGHTS BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WE SEEK TO REACH IN DURANGO LOVE TO PLAY DURING THE WEEKEND. WE DECIDED THAT SUNDAY MORNING WOULD POSITION US TO BE A SOURCE OF COMPETITION FOR EXISTING CHURCHES. WE WANTED TO COLLABORATE, NOT COMPETE. THUS, WE CHOSE SUNDAY NIGHT. THIS HAS ITS CHALLENGES, BUT IN THE END, IT REACHES THE PEOPLE WE LONG TO INTERACT WITH; AND HONESTLY, I LOVE TELLING PEOPLE THAT THEY SHOULD PLAY DURING THE WHOLE WEEKEND THEN CONSIDER TOPPING IT OFF WITH A CHURCH GATHERING ON SUNDAY NIGHT. WE WANT PEOPLE TO WALK IN COVERED IN MUD AFTER MOUNTAIN BIKING, WEARING THEIR SKI PANTS, DIRTY FROM ROCK CLIMBING, AND SO FORTH. WE ARE CONVINCED THAT OUR CHURCH GATHERING NEEDS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO PLAY!
2. BRAND RECOGNITION IS CRUCIAL FOR OUR CHURCH. IN DURANGO, COLORADO, THAT MEANS WE COMMUNICATE AT EVERY REGULAR WORSHIP SERVICE THAT WE ARE A “SAFE PLACE FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.” WE BACK THIS STATEMENT UP BY STRUCTURING OUR GATHERINGS SO THAT PRE-CHRISTIANS CAN COME AND INTERPRET WHAT IS HAPPENING AROUND THEM, AS WELL AS WALK AWAY WITH SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT.
3. OUR CHURCH PREDOMINANTLY TARGETS COLLEGE-AGED ADULTS AND RESORT/LEISURE ENTHUSIASTS. WE DON’T EXCLUSIVELY REACH THESE GROUPS, BUT THEY ARE A DOMINANT PART OF WHO GOD HAS CALLED OUR CHURCH TO CONNECT WITH.
4. THESE GROUPS ARE HIGHLY TRANSITIONAL. THUS, WE SEE ANYWHERE FROM 50-60% TURNOVER IN OUR CHURCH ANNUALLY. WE HAVE TO LITERALLY

REBUILD OUR LEADERSHIP CONSTANTLY. THIS ISN'T BAD; IT IS SIMPLY REALITY IN A MOUNTAIN-TOWN LIKE OURS. AS WE STRATEGICALLY REACH GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ON THE MOVE, WE MUST STRUCTURE OUR MINISTRY TO FIT OUR CONTEXT. IN A SENSE, WE BELIEVE WE ARE TRAINING UP BELIEVERS FOR OTHER CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES—WE ARE A SENDING AGENCY.

5. WE REACH PEOPLE WHO ARE TYPICALLY WALKING INTO OUR CHURCH WITH A LOT OF ISSUES—SUBSTANCE ABUSE, LIFESTYLE DILEMMAS, BITTERNESS TOWARDS CHURCH, AND SO FORTH. SOMETIMES IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO SEE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION, BUT WE'VE GOT SOME EPIC STORIES TO TELL! IT JUST REQUIRES PATIENCE.

6. OUR FINANCIAL STRATEGY IS UNIQUE AND CREATIVE. WE RELY ON A BASE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS TO COVER OPERATIONAL COSTS. OVER TIME THIS WILL LIKELY EVOLVE, BUT TO REACH LOW-RESOURCE CROWDS, WE HAVE TO THINK CREATIVELY. WE DON'T WANT TO BUILD A CHURCH THAT TARGETS PEOPLE FOR THEIR MONEY. IF YOU LOOK AT OUR SITUATION FROM A PURELY LOGICAL APPROACH, WE SHOULDN'T EXIST. RESOURCES ARE SO LIMITED! BUT GOD IS IN CONTROL, AND HE HAS BUILT THIS CHURCH OUT OF IMPOSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES. WE ARE A LIVING TESTIMONY TO THE FACT THAT GOD WILL SUSTAIN HIS WORK IN THE WORLD.

7. OUR LEARNED MINISTRY STRATEGY IS SIMPLE—WE TELL PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR PASSION THEIR MINISTRY. IF YOU LIKE CLIMBING ROCKS ... MAKE IT YOUR ORGANIC VENUE FOR MINISTRY. IF YOU LIKE BACKCOUNTRY SKIING, MAKE IT YOUR STRATEGIC VENUE FOR BEING THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD. WE DON'T MEASURE SUCCESS BASED ON HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE AT CHURCH ON SUNDAY NIGHT. WE BASE EFFECTIVENESS ON HOW MANY UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLE IN REPRESENTING CHRIST IN THE PLACES THEY LIVE, STUDY, WORK, AND PLAY. TO FACILITATE THIS STRATEGY, WE CONSTANTLY SEEK OUT WAYS TO NATURALLY BE IN THE COMMUNITY. THIS MEANS EVERYONE, INCLUDING MYSELF. I MUST MODEL AN INCARNATIONAL APPROACH IN THE WAY I LEAD.

8. WE SPIRITUALLY NURTURE OUR PEOPLE THROUGH ONE-ON-ONE DISCIPLESHIP, SMALL GROUPS, WORSHIP GATHERINGS, AND HANDS-ON MISSIONS (BOTH LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY). OUR CROWD HAS A UNIQUE INTEREST IN MISSIONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. WE SEE THIS CLEARLY AS A WAY GOD IS WORKING IN OUR COMMUNITY OF CHRIST-FOLLOWERS. THUS, WE MAKE IT A POINT TO ANNUALLY EXPOSE OUR PEOPLE TO MISSIONS, BOTH ABROAD AND IN OUR TOWN.

THE ABOVE CHARACTERISTICS ARE SPECIFIC, LEARNED EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH FOR MATTHEW'S HOUSE, A CHURCH IN DURANGO, COLORADO. DO NOT RE-DUPLICATE! SURE, WE CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, BUT NO COOKIE-CUTTER APPROACHES ARE ALLOWED IN GOD'S KINGDOM MOVEMENT! EACH CONTEXT, EACH TOWN, EACH CITY IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A UNIQUE, RELEVANT EXPRESSION OF CHURCH. WE MUST NEVER SLACK ON DOING THE HARD WORK OF LEARNING WHO THE PEOPLE ARE IN OUR COMMUNITY. OTHERWISE, WE CHEAT OUR COMMUNITY WHEN IT COMES TO SHOWING THE MIRACULOUS, UNIVERSAL, AND RELEVANT NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

MY CONCLUSION IS THAT WE MUST PRAYERFULLY ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITIES IN WHATEVER WAYS WE CAN. WE MUST CONSTANTLY STUDY IN ORDER TO APPRECIATE WHERE PEOPLE ARE COMING FROM. WE MUST RELINQUISH CONTROL TO GOD, TOO. GOD WILL WHISPER TO US AS WE LIVE, WORK, PLAY, AND INTERACT WITH THE TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES WE SEEK TO REACH. WE, THEN, CAN BE PART OF HIS CREATIVE GOSPEL REVOLUTION, WHICH IS MOVING FORCEFULLY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD!

JOE BECKLER ~ JOE AND HIS WIFE, CHERI, LIVE IN DURANGO, COLORADO, WHERE THEY ARE PLANTING MATTHEWS HOUSE.