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## What About Your Relatives?

When my parents came to the Lord, in no time at all we started to fellowship with those in the church which we had begun attending. They became our whole interest.

Do you know what our relatives said? "Since they got into that religion, we lost them."

It was the truth. We were so busy with the church that we lost all contact with our friends, relatives and former acquaintances. We saw our relatives only at funerals. The very ones we were meant to bring to the Lord were suddenly no longer a part of our lives.

Who are the ones who bring new people to the Lord?

Those who have themselves just been converted, because they still have friends in the world. But after a few months they won't bring any more new people because they will cut themselves off from all their friends. They will burn their bridges with the world and, instead, will come to prayer meetings and Bible studies, becoming totally absorbed in the church system.

I recall the time when our family belonged to an Italian church. We had meetings every evening except Friday. Six evenings out of the week we were away from our home!

Each evening at 6:30 we left home with our Bibles under our arms. We had no car at that time, so we had to walk seven blocks to take the train. We didn't return until around

10:30 p.m.

Imagine what our neighbors thought! Every day at 6:30 they watched us leave. They were sorry for us. "Poor people. What a religion they have!"

Of course, we had no time to make friends with them—we were so busy with the church. Even when there was a holiday, the church held a special meeting. We were always in church, so there was no room for our relatives or our neighbors in our lives. We thought that spirituality was to be in church continually.

God saved each of us to spread His kingdom in the place in which He put us, in the structure of life in which we find ourselves. We are responsible for the people who are around us. He wants us to reach them, to show them His love. He desires to love them through us. This is how the kingdom of God grows.

But the church has too often extracted us from the normal structures of the world. We have cut all connections with the people we were meant to spread light to. The result is that we are useless for evangelism.

We need to look afresh at the purpose for the church. It was never meant to be an institution separate from life. To become a Christian was meant to be the normal way to live.

When God called Abraham, do you know what He had in mind? "In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed," He told him. But what did the Jews do? They thought God's blessing was just for them; they wanted the privilege, but not the responsibility.

God has not put us in His church to be lazy. He expects a great deal of us.

We are the true seed of Abraham through Christ. God intends that through us all nations come into the blessing of Abraham. We are here to extend the kingdom of God into the whole world.

God spreads us out all over the place so that we can salt the

earth and light the world. Everyone is meant to shine in the place that God has placed him. This is how the kingdom of God invades the structures of society, like leaven spreading through the whole loaf of bread.

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom." So the first thing in our lives is the kingdom. Every single one of us is in the place that God means him to be for the extension of the kingdom.

This means that it is very important when we move that we ask God where He wants us. We should not just move for ourselves, but because God wants us as one of His representatives in a new location.

"Well, I changed my job because....," we say.

But that is wrong. We change jobs because God is taking us from one job to another, because He needs a missionary in our new work situation.

If you are studying at a university, you aren't there primarily to get a degree. You are there first and foremost for the kingdom. Obtaining the degree is part of your work in the kingdom, not simply so that you can fatten your intellect.

A boy came from Peru to study at the university in our country. After a while, he got saved. He came to our Assembly church. A few weeks later he told the pastor, "I don't want to study any more."

"Why?" asked the pastor.

"Because now I'm saved," he replied.

"What do you mean?" the pastor inquired. "You can't leave your studies because you are saved!"

"No, I was not really studying there."

"But we saw you studying there."

"Yes, I had to study; but I was not there for that purpose. The Communist party of Peru sent me to the Argentine university to spread Communism in the university. In order to do that, I had to become a regular student. My studies were a cover-up. When I had finished this degree, I would study for another, and another, staying as long as I could to spread

Communism."

If you are in a university, you are there first to spread God's kingdom. If you can't preach, you can shine as a light. You can love people, so that they see that Christ is alive today.

Suppose you work at Ford Motor Company. "Well, I'm there because they pay better, and because they have so many benefits," you tell me.

No, you are at Ford Motor Company because God needed a missionary there.

He simply uses Mr. Ford to support you in the mission field.

If you have two lives—a private life, and a religious life—you can work in a place for many personal reasons. But when you live only one life, God is in everything you do. And wherever you find yourself, you are responsible to those who are a part of the structure of your life.

First, we are responsible to our own family. The pastor isn't responsible; he is just a helper, a counselor. We are the responsible ones. Husbands are responsible to their wives and children.

"But I am a widow." Then you are responsible. If there is no husband, you are the priest.

"We are orphans, and I am the only one who is saved." Then you are responsible to your brothers and sisters.

Whatever household you live in, you are responsible. God appointed you to that household to be the head.

By "head," I do not mean the person giving orders. I am talking about being the spiritual light in the household, the priest. If you live in a students' residence and you are the only saved person, you are responsible to those students who live with you in that household, whether you like it or not.

In every household where there is someone who knows the Lord, he is responsible. He is the light to that house, the priest. And God will ask each of us, "What did you do in the place in which I put you?"

Second, after our immediate family we are responsible to

our relatives—our uncles, aunts and cousins.

"But it is 20 years since I last saw them!" Yes, and that is very wrong; because you are responsible to them.

Third, you are responsible to your friends. Not just your close friends, but also your lawyer and your dentist. If God has saved you, it is because He wants to reach through you all of these people who are a part of the structure of your life. If not through you, then through whom?

Fourth, you are responsible to your neighbors. You are the priest in your neighborhood.

"Me?"

Yes, you are the pastor of that neighborhood. The church divides the world into provinces, the provinces into dioceses, the dioceses into parishes, and the parishes into homes. Every Christian has a parish.

Your block is your parish. You are responsible to that block. Do you imagine God is going to send an angel from heaven to evangelize your block so that you can go to meetings?

You are the pastor of your little parish, and the minister is your counselor. He is there to help give you confidence and to assist you in fulfilling your responsibility by providing guidance. But you are the responsible one.

You are also responsible to your fellow workers. You are a priest to those who work around you each day. They are a part of the structure which God wants His light to permeate through you.

So this means that you have something to do. Perhaps you should start by making a list of all the people you are responsible to.

But before you begin, I want to draw a very clear distinction between the concept and life.

If you have just the concept of being responsible as a priest in your parish, you will either find it a tremendous burden, or you will rush out and try to convert everyone by preaching to him. The letter kills. If your responsibility is just a concept

to you, it will either kill you—or you will kill those to whom you witness because you will turn them off!

I am not speaking about trying to do some great work for Jesus. I am talking about a life which so manifests love that it attracts people to the light. In other words, our life lived 24 hours a day in Him is itself doing the work of the kingdom of God.

When I am invited to speak in churches, I am afraid of one thing. Most of the invitations are to speak on discipleship, which is a subject I really like to speak about. But the danger is that we become more attached to the method than to the living Jesus Christ.

Humans find the mechanical part of discipleship very tempting. It is attractive to us. We get hold of the concept, but not the life; and it ends up becoming another system, another form of bondage.

In the situation in which discipleship arose, in the church fellowship which I pastored in Argentina, it did not come to us in a mechanical way at all. It came as life.

We did not know anything about discipleship. We were simply living as a fellowship and discovering things without knowing what we were really doing. Only after I came to the United States and started to teach was it labeled discipleship.

People said to me, "You are teaching the doctrine of submission."

For the first time we discovered that we were practicing discipleship! Until that time it had just been a flow of life, not a doctrine. When we discovered the doctrine of submission, we spoiled the life! So I am afraid of the label.

When I am invited to speak on discipleship, I now prefer not to speak on that subject the first visit. Rather, on the first visit, I prepare people for what is to come. Through my first visit they understand that I am not legalistic in any sense at all. Only when they understand this will I speak on discipleship.

You remember that when Paul visited Athens, he found that the Athenians liked to spend their time hearing new doctrines.

Sometimes I think that we are like that in our churches. We all like to hear what Brother Cho did in Korea, or what God did in our church in Argentina.

Those things are interesting. And they can be helpful. But we really don't need to copy them because we all have the same Spirit living within us to lead us in our particular church situations. The danger is that we take these things and create a new system out of them. They become a formula.

In this book, I am not trying to present you with a new system. I am simply seeking to present to you the living Jesus Christ who can tell you what to do in your local situation. This is not a new recipe on how the church should be. It is to point you to the Holy Spirit who can lead you 24 hours a day.

My purpose in talking about how we made disciples and how the kingdom grew in our situation is to make you think. I want to cause you to look again at the preconceived concepts you have of how the church should be and how to win disciples. You need to be free to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.

I would like to be a disturbing element. Before we can be open to hear what the Spirit is saying to our churches, we need to be brainwashed from our lifeless forms. We need to abandon our fixed concepts of the church so that we can experience the ever-fresh life of Jesus on a continual basis.

When I speak of being a light in our communities, and of being priests to those who are a part of the structure of our lives, you have a picture of what I mean. But I don't mean what you picture. Those concepts are not part of the life of Christ. They are part of our church system.

I am not talking about trying to get your relatives, work-mates, friends and neighbors to come to church. Nor am I speaking of giving them tracts with Bible verses to convince them that they need Christ. That is all part of our system. Most of them are not interested in those things, because they are religion and not life.

I don't know how to say this... I don't think there is an easy way to say it. I think I just have to say it, even if it seems hard.

I believe there is coming a time of great shaking of all of our systems, and only that which is unshakeable because it is the life of Christ will not be torn down.

Times are coming when we are not going to have pipe organs, and when we may not have hymn books and Sunday School materials.

We even may be without Bibles! But the primitive church didn't have any of these things. The New Testament hadn't been written yet. And most believers didn't have access to the Old Testament. All they had was the Holy Spirit. But because they had Him 24 hours a day, they had the kind of faith that cannot be shaken.

As a result, they turned the world upside down!

You see, a church system may become a hindrance. It ought to be something that helps us bring people to Christ, but instead it ends up being a problem. We have added so many things that we are caught up in, and we don't know how to get rid of them. We even think that they are essential.

Let me illustrate what I mean by a hindrance. Our church in Argentina is charismatic. We raise our hands when we sing. (Well, sometimes we do and sometimes we don't.)

Now that doesn't appeal to everybody, so the system has become a hindrance for many people. Once we invited a certain family to our church.

"No, I don't think we want to come. We don't fit into your atmosphere," they said.

Some people feel better in a Baptist atmosphere, or in a Catholic atmosphere, or in an Episcopal atmosphere. I'm not justifying the attitude, but I do wonder if sometimes the things we do in our churches aren't a major reason why the world doesn't want to come to them. Most of these things are just not normal: they are religious.

You know, most of the people you are responsible to will

not come if you invite them to church. But did you ever think of inviting them to your house? They will come there.

If you bring a person to a Pentecostal church, or a Baptist or Episcopal church, he has to overcome many things in order to get to Christ.

Perhaps he is anti-catholic, anti-charismatic, or anti-liturgy... But he is not anti-ice cream!

So you bring him to your house. Your home, not the church building, now becomes the center of your Christian activities. When the church is centered in a home, it is more likely to be centered in people than in a building.

The key is that every home starts to function fully as a center. Every home, and every individual.

I am not talking about taking your car out of the garage and driving to someone else's home for a church meeting. No, that is just like going to a church building. I am speaking of bringing to your home all who are a part of your structure of life—your relatives, friends, neighbors and fellow workers.

Now I don't mean holding meetings in your home with gospel songs and Bible study. Some churches do that. They have a hundred members, so they divide them into four homes. But that is just another church of the kind that we have in buildings.

I am talking about staying in your house to fulfill your duties of priesthood. You begin with your wife. I was the pastor of the First Assembly of God, but my wife was neglected. Start by evangelizing your wife.

What do I mean by evangelizing?

To evangelize is to have complete love. It is to have fellowship, communion, full understanding between each other.

So evangelize your wife. Love her and meet her needs as the Holy Spirit prompts you. Then check your relationship with your children. How are you getting along with them?

What about your relatives?

How are you doing with your cousins and aunts? How long is it since you last saw them? Start to rebuild those burned

bridges. I did it, and it is amazing how many we won to the Lord without speaking a word.

I wrote them, making friends with them again. I didn't preach. I shared love with them. I repented of neglecting them, rejecting them, because I had let the church system take all of my time. I won them just by loving them.

Those women whose husbands don't know the Lord—how many of them go to all the church meetings? No wonder their husbands don't come to the Lord. The church is their rival! They need to evangelize at home by showing the love of Christ as the Holy Spirit leads. He will tell you how to love if you listen to Him and do what He tells you to do.

An incident occurred in our church in Argentina which touched me deeply.

We brought a very nice family to the Lord. They were a wealthy family. He had been an atheist. But because of the healing of their daughter, the whole family was saved, and they became fully committed to the Lord.

This man started bringing people to his home. Eventually he had 30 of his friends and relatives meeting there. It took about a year and a half for this group to grow to that size, but when it reached that number the multiplication stopped.

After they had finished witnessing to all their friends, they couldn't win anyone else to the Lord. It's like when you start to sell encyclopedias in your spare time. After you sell them to your friends, you don't sell any more.

The same thing was happening with many other families. My wife said, "Johnny, those who are going to come to the Lord have already come; and those who haven't won't come."

There seemed to be a limit to growth, and we couldn't break through this limit. We decided to ask the Lord how we could keep on multiplying.

We asked this former atheist and his family, "Wouldn't many more of your friends and relatives come to the Lord if it didn't involve being linked with a church system?"

He thought about this, and the next day he told me, "Pastor, I am sure that many more would come, but our church system is the problem. It is a hindrance."

This started us studying.

If the church system is essential for salvation, let's push people into that system. But if the pipe organ, the hymns, the choir, the church calendar, the board, the deacons and Sunday School materials are not essential, then maybe we should ask the Lord if there is another way.

So we began to pray. And as the Lord directed us, we made radical changes. I am not suggesting that everybody should do this today, but it came as life to us. It was not a concept or a doctrine; we weren't trying to create a new kind of system.

This brother and his family had a large apartment. Instead of trying to bring more people to church, we encouraged him to make his own disciples at home. So he invited them to his apartment, not to a church service.

Six months later I visited him. He now had a church in his home of over 200 people! Some 250 of his relatives had been saved, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and fully committed to the Lord. But not one of them was coming to the church services.

Before we can win people to the Lord, we have to build relationships. Often they have been broken, so they must be repaired. Where there is a birthday, I give a little gift. Or perhaps I give a plant to my neighbor and start to build a friendship. I take every opportunity to win people as friends. Then the gospel will be passed on quite spontaneously through relationships.

Perhaps by now you imagine that I am against church buildings and all that goes with them. No, I am not against them. I believe that if we were to change the center of our activities from buildings to people in their homes, we would find a new use for the buildings.

If I could, I would add a few things to the buildings, ac-

tually.

I would add a swimming pool, a racquet ball court, and perhaps a sauna. Not everyone in the community can have a swimming pool or sauna at home, so there is a place for these in the community center of the church. The existing church buildings could be used for conferences when needed, as well as for special times of praise.

If we would get rid of the bondage of the building, we would begin to increase numerically. For the sake of the people, perhaps we need to close the building some Sundays. We don't need to hear a new message every Sunday. Once a month is quite adequate; then we have a month to put it into practice.

So the other Sundays, we can do the Lord's work. Instead of having a service next Sunday, everyone could invite some friend or relative to his home. Not to a religious meeting, but to build a relationship.

Take a church body which consists of 800 members, representing 200 or 300 homes. That means all of those families are evangelizing. When we use the church building, only the wife comes in many cases. But when we use the home, the husband, wife and children can all be together. So each Sunday 200 or 300 people are evangelized.

We would not be closing the church building down for three weeks out of four so that the people could stay home watching television, but so they could be involved in furthering the kingdom of God. They would open their homes—not to have advertized meetings—but to love their cousins, their aunts, their neighbors, their friends and those they work with.

After a month, when we returned to the building, it would not be large enough because of all the additional people who would have been won to the Lord through the month of evangelism. So the pastor would have to say, "The north side of the city will come in the morning, and the south side will come in the evening."

The following three weeks would be spent in the same kind of activity, so that after the second month the pastor would

have to say, "The north side will come in the morning, the south side in the evening, and the southwest on Saturday evening."

Eventually, the building would be packed every day with different people from different areas of the city.

This was the way the primitive church functioned. You can see it in the New Testament. Every day, both in public places and in every home, they didn't cease the work of the Lord. We are forever talking about *starting* work for the Lord, but they *never ceased*.

We are a royal priesthood, to show forth the love of God to the world. We are ambassadors for Christ, sent to bring good news to all nations. It is time we make our church buildings serve us, instead of us serving them. When the church is centered in the person of Jesus Christ instead of in a religious system, the kingdom of God will spread throughout the whole earth as Jesus commanded.