

# The Transforming River of Blessing

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There was once, hundreds of years ago, a local church in a small city in a mystical and magical land in the Northern Hemisphere. The city was steeped in history and culture and its people were down to earth and friendly yet they did not know or worship God. The church was made up from people of every background and culture and nationality. There was a mixture of poor and rich, young and old and they went to school, college and worked in their city.

There were school kids, sportsmen and women, some worked in government and as local councillors, there were teachers and university lecturers. Some were out of work or retired but they all had a sense of purpose and lived on mission. There were those who worked on checkouts and at the local recycling centre. Some were doctors, nurses, midwives, and pharmacists while others were baristas and childcare providers. There were full-time mums, florists, artists, singers, actors and dancers who brought laughter and joy in the local theatre. Some worked on the local radio, were journalists for a national paper and designed websites and media to help local and national businesses. Some owned local businesses and designed new homes and extensions and others ran cafes, fishmongers and restaurants. Others were engineers designing off-shore wind farms or submarines for national defence.

This was a beautiful tapestry of people who were gifted by God with a whole variety of skills, gifts and talents. Yet, despite their incredible differences these people were known by their love for God and people.<sup>1</sup> They were incredibly different but they all had one thing in common. They burned with love for the God they worshipped and they shared one common goal – to love and honour Him with their whole lives.<sup>2</sup> They loved nothing more than to worship God. In fact, they worshipped God not only with their tongues but their whole lives.<sup>3</sup> They loved nothing more than to sing and praise and worship God whether

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<sup>1</sup> 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'<sup>1</sup>  
John 13:34-35

<sup>2</sup> 'And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."<sup>1</sup>  
Luke 10:27-28

<sup>3</sup> 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.<sup>1</sup>  
John 4:23-24

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.<sup>1</sup>  
Romans 12:1

alone in the shower, on their daily commute or in their homes. Their homes were constantly filled with worship. During their busy mornings getting ready for work and the kids getting ready for school, worship was constantly playing and the sweet melodies of children permeated their homes. The retired and those who lived alone permeated their homes with worship and this brought them great comfort and strength. They were not fully aware but as they sang, they were strengthening their souls and silencing the voice of their enemy<sup>4</sup>. When they gathered in small groups or as a large gathering, they loved to sing and worship.<sup>5</sup> But this was not just because they enjoyed singing, it was deeply spiritual and through it they encountered the very presence of the God they worshipped.<sup>6</sup>

When asked why they loved worship so much their common response was:

***“Worship is my happy place. I encounter the God of love and nothing compares to His presence<sup>7</sup>. His presence is everything to me and in His presence, I experience God, His love, compassion, kindness, grace, healing and peace. His love softens my heart and transforms me from the inside out.”***

They loved worship and were devoted to worship not only when they gathered weekly but daily in their lives. They worshiped their God joyfully with singing, with prayer, with meditation, with serving, with giving but they also all burned with a love and respect for their sacred Book they called the Bible. They valued this book more than anything on earth because they said it contained the very words of God itself<sup>8</sup>. They actually believed this book spoke to them still today so they memorised certain parts of it to keep them strong

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<sup>4</sup> 'You have built a stronghold by the songs of children. Strength rises up with the chorus of infants. This kind of praise has power to shut Satan's mouth. Childlike worship will silence the madness of those who oppose you.'  
Psalms 8:2

<sup>5</sup> 'But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.'  
Psalm 59:16-17  
“...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.”  
Ephesians 5:19

<sup>6</sup> 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'  
John 4:24

<sup>7</sup> 'Because of you, I know the path of life, as I taste the fullness of joy in your presence. At your right side I experience divine pleasures forevermore!'  
Psalms 16:11  
'And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. ’  
Exodus 33:15  
'The mountains melt like wax before the Lord , before the Lord of all the earth. '  
Psalm 97:5

<sup>8</sup> 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.'  
2 Timothy 3:16-17

and focussed<sup>9</sup>. They discussed the words of this book when they met together in small groups or as a large group.

Love was the defining characteristic of this church<sup>10</sup>. They overflowed in love for their God, one another and also the people of their schools and city who did not share their faith <sup>11</sup>. Not only were they marked by love but by humility <sup>12</sup>. No matter how much they earned or knew or what position they worked in, they all valued each other the same as children of God who were all made in the image of God <sup>13</sup>. This was a beautiful people not full of themselves or their opinions but incredibly humble, gentle, generous, peaceful and joyful. They were patient with themselves and others. They had learned self-control over their thoughts, words and actions.<sup>14</sup> They were passionate about goodness and justice and helping the poor and worked in their work places and city to bring justice and fairness to all.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'but his delight is in the law of the Lord , and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. '  
Psalm 1:2-3

<sup>10</sup> 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'  
1 Corinthians 13:13  
'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'" '  
John 13:35

<sup>11</sup> 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."  
Matthew 9:36-38

<sup>12</sup> 'Blessed are those who are humble. They will be given the earth. '  
Matthew 5:5

<sup>13</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/vinechurch/imago-dei-aaron-dowds>  
"The doctrine of man made in the image of God is one of the basic doctrines of the Bible and one of the most elevating, enlarging, magnanimous (generous) and glorious doctrines that I know."  
A.W. Tozer  
Genesis 1:26 (NIV) "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."  
'So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. '  
Galatians 3:26-28

<sup>14</sup> 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. '  
Galatians 5:22-23  
See also Matthew 5:1-16.

<sup>15</sup> 'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. '  
Micah 6:8  
'"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? '  
'

The incredible thing about this people though was how normal and down to earth they were. They were not perfect and knew it. They each had a weakness or struggle but had learned to depend on God's grace in their area of weakness and they allowed their weakness to keep them humble and dependent on God<sup>16</sup>. When asked they would admit they were not perfect and had struggles, they were a work in progress and they had their moments but would say they were on a growth journey and being transformed<sup>17</sup>.

This wonderful, diverse group of people had a shared vision. They shared the common understanding that they were made in the image of God in order to reflect the character and nature of God into this world. They understood this was their common purpose. To worship God and represent Him in the world<sup>18</sup>. And they understood this happened best the more they were transformed into the likeness and nature of the God they worshipped. They actually believed that God came to earth as a man called Jesus to reveal God's character and nature<sup>19</sup>. And they believed they could be transformed by something called the Holy Spirit into that character and nature<sup>20</sup>.

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Isaiah 58:6

Live58: The Film <https://youtu.be/D-GfxLOrnYM>

<https://www.spiritualityhealth.com/reviews/dvd/2012/03/31/58-film>

<sup>16</sup> 'But he answered me, "My grace is always more than enough for you, and my power finds its full expression through your weakness." So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for when I'm weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. '

2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>17</sup> 'We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus . We are being transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. '

2 Corinthians 3:18

<sup>18</sup> "What the Bible offers is not a "works contract," but a covenant of vocation. The vocation in question is that of being a genuine human being, with genuinely human tasks to perform as part of the Creator's purpose for his world. The main task of this vocation is "image-bearing," reflecting the Creator's wise stewardship into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker. Those who do so are the "royal priesthood," the "kingdom of priests," the people who are called to stand at the dangerous but exhilarating point where heaven and earth meet." NT Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began* p76

<sup>19</sup> ' He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. '

Colossians 1:15

<sup>20</sup> 'And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.'

2 Corinthians 3:18

'and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. '

Colossians 3:10

'For he knew all about us before we were born and he destined us from the beginning to share the likeness of his Son. This means the Son is the oldest among a vast family of brothers and sisters who will become just like him.'

Romans 8:29

As they met together, worshipped together, prayed together, learned together and worked with a spiritual mentor<sup>21</sup> they actually believed they could be transformed from the inside out to become more and more like the character and nature of God. Their God was kind, tender-hearted, patient, full of goodness and abounding in love<sup>22</sup> and they were growing in these qualities. They believed in spiritual transformation from the inside out and they called this the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the Beatitudes<sup>23</sup>. The fruit of the Spirit and the Beatitudes became the culture of this wonderful group of people. They called it Kingdom Culture because they worshipped Jesus as their King and His values shaped their culture; their language, beliefs and practices. Their highest value was love. Love for God and people<sup>24</sup>. The fruit of the Spirit enabled them to love all the more. They believed to help them love better the Holy Spirit would produce fruit in their lives: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and faithfulness<sup>25</sup>. Each fruit would be a gift to help them love better and hence improve every relationship in their lives.

So, this wonderful diverse church was a group of people who loved to worship and were focussed on spiritual transformation of themselves and one another. They cheered each other on to worship more and grow more<sup>26</sup> and as they did their joy and enjoyment of life increased.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "The crying need of a generation and believers is for spiritual mothers and fathers. There is an overload of information, resources, coaches and mentors available. But very few spiritual mothers and fathers." Aaron Dowds, Spiritual Mothers and Fathers. <https://thevinechurch.com/spiritual-mothers-and-fathers/>

<sup>22</sup> 'You're kind and tenderhearted to those who don't deserve it and very patient with people who fail you. Your love is like a flooding river overflowing its banks with kindness. God, everyone sees your goodness, for your tender love is blended into everything you do.'  
Psalms 145:8-9

<sup>23</sup> See Matthew 5:1-16

<sup>24</sup> 'And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."'  
Matthew 22:37,39-40  
"For all the law can be summarized in one grand statement: "Demonstrate love to your neighbor, even as you care for and love yourself.""  
Galatians 5:14 TPT

<sup>25</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>26</sup> 'And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.'  
Hebrews 10:24-25

<sup>27</sup> 'A thief has only one thing in mind—he wants to steal, slaughter, and destroy. But I have come to give you everything in abundance, more than you expect —life in its fullness until you overflow!'  
John 10:10

One incredible characteristic that all these people shared was a very clear understanding of their mission and purpose<sup>28</sup>. Young and old, children, youth, adults, rich and poor, employed and unemployed all shared a very clear understanding of their mission. Their mission was their King's mission - they were blessed<sup>29</sup> to be a blessing<sup>30</sup>. They were blessed

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<sup>28</sup> John Ortberg: "The fact that you were made in the image of God tells you not just about your worth, but also about your destiny. The main point of "image of God" language in scripture is not about some ability or trait we share with God, its about the mission He has given us... Through our learning, our work, our culture, our relationships, technology, the arts, medicine; we are with humility to add goodness and beauty to families and societies and creation so that God's whole project becomes a glorious delight to all who see it; "For the earth will be filled with the glory of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Hab.2:14

"This people whom he named the Church, are called, not only to God, but for God's glory. We are, at our very core a missional people. This reality is the basic understanding of the identity of the New Testament church. It's the culture of the new Kingdom under Christ. Because he has redeemed us, we join him in His mission to bring redemption to others. The mission of God is for the people of God. You can't have a strong culture without a strong sense of mission."

Designed to Lead" Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck. Kindle loc. 510.

<sup>29</sup> 'Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm has already been lavished upon us as a love gift from our wonderful heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus—all because he sees us wrapped into Christ. This is why we celebrate him with all our hearts!'

Ephesians 1:3

See Blessings of Adoption: <https://thevinechurch.com/sermons/transforming-cities-week-1/>

"So how did God bless Abraham and how does he want to BLESS the families of the earth?

1. **Adoption into His family.** This is the favoured status with God as a son or daughter. This comes with the privileges of adoption which are true blessing. These privileges begin with adoption and therefore salvation. Benefits include: relating to God as Father, good gifts from Father including the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, riches in heaven, a new family, protection and provision, power to live in victory and freedom etc
2. **Abundant grace.** Because of the blessing of adoption and relationship to God as Father, we live in an abundance of grace that leads to prosperity and success. This abundance of grace is the special favour mentioned above that is intended to result in prosperity and success. Rom 5:17 "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." Part of blessing we receive is reigning in life and success in relationships, as a husband/wife or single; as a parent; as an employee or boss etc Jesus said he came that you may have life and have it abundantly. God's blessing wants to impact your whole life as we can see in the examples in Deut. 28:3-7: included towns, fields, children, crops, flocks, "wherever you go and whatever you do", victory over enemies etc"

<sup>30</sup> Gen.26:4 "And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed."

Gen 22:18 "And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me."

"Without contact there can be no impact." Larry Osborne

Isa 61:4 ESV "They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations."

Isa 61:4 MSG "They'll rebuild the old ruins, raise a new city out of the wreckage. They'll start over on the ruined cities, take the rubble left behind and make it new."

Jer 29:7 ESV "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Jer 29:7 NLT "And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

to be good news to the broken and hurting<sup>31</sup>. They clearly understood and believed they were a blessed people who were commissioned to bring flourishing to people and cities.<sup>32</sup>

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Jer29:7 NIRV “Also work for the success of the city I have sent you to. Pray to the Lord for that city. If it succeeds, you too will enjoy success.”

<sup>31</sup> 'And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” '

Luke 4:17-19

The Greek verb *euangelizo* (to evangelise – literally –to good news – or –to bring the gospel) appears about 50 times in the NT.

Luke 4:18-19 is one of Jesus’ most important statements and we can think of it as his ‘manifesto’ or ‘mission statement’

18) “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, (19) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

“Luk 4:18 The Spirit<sup>G4151</sup> of the Lord<sup>G2962</sup> is upon<sup>G1909</sup> me,<sup>G1691</sup> because<sup>G3739 G1752</sup> he hath anointed<sup>G5548</sup> me<sup>G3165</sup> **to preach the gospel**<sup>G2097</sup> to the poor;<sup>G4434</sup>

G2097

εὐαγγελίζω

**euaggelizō**

yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo

From G2095 and G32; to announce good news (“evangelize”) especially the gospel: - declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel).

Total KJV occurrences: 55

In this passage Jesus summarises the purpose of his anointing as proclaiming/preaching/bearing/bringing/spreading good news to the poor. Jesus then provides 5 examples of what ‘evangelising the poor’ means in practice: this is his definition of spirit-anointed evangelism. We can say that according to Jesus, biblical evangelism includes:

- Healing the broken-hearted
- Liberating the captives
- Restoring sight to the blind
- Releasing the oppressed
- Proclaiming God’s message of freedom and favour

Jesus came to bring good news, ‘to good news’ the POOR. The Greek word is *ptochoi* and means ‘the afflicted’ or ‘the hurting’”

Aaron Dowds “Reaching the Lost 220917”

<sup>32</sup> Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

“Christ Has No Body

“Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks

Compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,

Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.”

They viewed work not as a curse but as a blessing. In fact they loved their work. They enjoyed and appreciated their work and viewed their work as worship.<sup>33</sup> Their gifts, skills, talents and abilities were given by God to love and serve people and as they did it with love, they felt deep contentment and purpose. This people clearly understood their worship and service of God was as real in the workplace on a Monday morning as their singing in church was on a Sunday morning. They had been blessed with the very presence of God and viewed themselves as children of God called to represent God and make visible the invisible God. They knew that as children of God they had special privileges and benefits that flowed into their lives like a river. And they believed this river of blessing was to flow to them and through them to everyone they came into contact with. The river was a river of God's presence, blessing, love and kindness that would bring flourishing wherever it flowed.<sup>34</sup>

As they blessed others with love and mercy and kindness, they believed they were making visible the invisible God. As they worshipped, they encountered God and were transformed and filled. They then flowed as they went to their workplaces and daily lives. This river of blessing was flowing from heaven to earth through ordinary vessels and the river then split and flowed wherever the people went.

Through the week as the primary teacher went to school the river flowed where she flowed. She met with children some of who were recovering from trauma and very difficult lives. But the teacher smiled, made eye contact with the children and shared love, compassion, kindness and empathy. For some children this was the only kind words they heard in a week and those words would shape and remain with them forever, reshaping and healing traumatised brains<sup>35</sup>. The teacher believed she was blessed to be a blessing.

The river split and flowed into the homes of the lonely and hurting as those who were retired and unemployed, dads and kids visited, loved and served their neighbours. The lonely and hurting were comforted as the river of blessing flowed into their homes and brought blessing of children, laughter, tears, flowers, scones and warm soup to warm their souls. They were made in love and served in love. Children played and smiled and laughed

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"The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence."  
Ephesians 1:23

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.jordanraynor.com/books>  
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Anointed-Business-Ed-Silvoso/dp/0800797140>  
<https://thevinechurch.com/sermons/called-to-create/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/vinechurch/the-transforming-river-pastor-aaron-dowds>

"And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."  
Ezekiel 47:12 ESV

<sup>35</sup> "What maltreated and traumatized children most need is a healthy community to buffer the pain, distress and loss caused by their earlier trauma. What works to heal them is anything that increases the number and quality of a child's relationships. What helps is consistent, patient, repetitive loving care."

— The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook -- What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love, and Healing by Bruce D Perry, Maia Szalavitz  
<https://amzn.eu/gWcp0aK>



with lonely, elderly neighbours. For some it was the only human connection they would get that week. Prayer was offered and a tear trickled down the grieving widow's cheek as the river flowed and brought comfort and healing. The Presence of God flowed into homes all across the city bringing flourishing wherever it flowed.

The river split and flowed into schools. The young school girl was surrounded by all her classmates quizzing her about her faith. She answered with wisdom, kindness, humility and grace beyond her years<sup>36</sup> and brought words of hope, healing and love to her confused and hurting friends. One young girl started to write on her page words to describe herself: "ugly, useless, failure, stupid". The river flowed and this a young girl from the church scored every word out and replaced it with: "beautiful, clever, loved, wanted, accepted".

The river flowed into homes and hospitals through midwives visiting young mothers with their new babies. The midwives showed love, patience, understanding and encouraged the young mothers giving them confidence and peace. The mums felt loved, understood and supported and had their fears and worries relieved by the river. The elderly were treated with dignity, respect, empathy and patience and their little chats with the friendly nurses and doctors made their stay not only bearable but enjoyable. The river was flowing and bringing flourishing into homes and hospitals.

The river flowed into courtrooms and judges judged with justice but also with great wisdom, empathy and compassion. Some of those convicted would even experience grace within the law and be overwhelmed with generosity.

The river split and flowed into café, bars, fishmongers and restaurants. As people were served, they were met with a smile and friendly service and a listening ear. Many in the cafes shared their pain and struggles and the river flowed into their lives to bring a listening ear, empathy, comfort and strength.

Wherever the river flowed it brought flourishing.<sup>37</sup> The river flowed into offices, businesses, government meetings and spoke up for justice on behalf of the poor and vulnerable<sup>38</sup>. The river served and loved and listened with humility. This shifted cultures in businesses and

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<sup>36</sup> 'This superabundant grace is already powerfully working in us, releasing all forms of wisdom and practical understanding. '

Ephesians 1:8

<sup>37</sup> 'There will be swarms of living things wherever the water of this river flows. Fish will abound in the Dead Sea, for its waters will become fresh. Life will flourish wherever this water flows. '

Ezekiel 47:9 NLT

<sup>38</sup> 'Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living. '

Amos 5:24

'No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. '

Micah 6:8

workplaces where people listened to each other and served each other<sup>39</sup> with humility to replace the power struggles.

The river flowed was a river of blessing and blessing flowed all over the city. A river of love and justice and kindness flowed through checkouts, telephones, home visits and wherever this river flowed it brought flourishing. The river was one of wisdom which flowed into every sphere of influence throughout the city and nations impacting them with kingdom excellence and justice<sup>40</sup>. The influence of this river and kingdom culture was as powerful as salt in preserving meat from rotting. It was as powerful as light in brightening the darkness.<sup>41</sup>

As people all over the city experienced the river, some started to enquire about it. What was this river? What motivated it? And how could they experience more of it? The people all over the city who were far from God and not religious had all kinds of struggles, pain, fear, anxiety and challenges. They experienced and felt some hope and wisdom in the river and started to be warm and friendly.

This church longed for others to experience the river of God's blessing and love. They were so in love with their God and His presence and blessing in their lives they longed for others to find and discover the rich and abundant life they were experiencing<sup>42</sup>. As they met people in their everyday lives who warmed to them and felt peace around, they started to pray for them<sup>43</sup>. They prayed for their city, they prayed for their neighbours, they prayed

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<sup>39</sup> 'But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. '

Luke 22:26-27

<sup>40</sup> *"The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes. Because God is interested in good craftsmanship."* Martin Luther

**"because an excellent spirit**, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation." (Dan 5:12)

"I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and **excellent wisdom** are found in you." (Dan 5:14)

"Then this Daniel became **distinguished** above all the other high officials and satraps, because **an excellent spirit was in him**. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom." (Dan 6:3)

<sup>41</sup> ' "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. '

Matthew 5:13-16

<https://thevinechurch.com/sermons/transforming-cities-week-1/>

<sup>42</sup> 'When he saw the vast crowds of people, Jesus' heart was deeply moved with compassion, because they seemed weary and helpless, like wandering sheep without a shepherd. '

Matthew 9:36

<sup>43</sup> <https://discipleshippath.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/Finding-a-Person-of-Peace.pdf>  
<https://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2010/11/24/understanding-jesus-and-persons-of-peace/>

for opportunities, they prayed they would be used to be and share good news and they prayed for questions. They then invited them to eat in their homes. They became friends of those far from God<sup>44</sup> and became wonderful empathetic listeners. As they listened, they learned how they could serve them and bless them and help these people with their needs<sup>45</sup>. Meals were made for pregnant mothers. Dogs were walked to help elderly neighbours. Hospital visits were made to sickly neighbours. Lonely widows who had recently lost their husbands were visited for tea and cake. Mountains were climbed, sports were played, football was watched to connect and serve people far from God. Children were babysat for to allow neighbours a date night. Schools were served by joining the parent-teacher councils. You name it, people in villages and towns far and wide were served in all their various needs.

And they waited for the moment. They knew the moment would come. They had prayed for it. They were prepared for it<sup>46</sup>. They expected it and knew God would show them when the moment was. The moment was the “My Story” moment. At the appropriate time they would share their story of how the God of love came to them and blessed them. Some would share their story in person. Others would give them their “My Story” card. Every person in the church carried a “My Story” card in expectation of this moment. It was a business style card with a QR code. They had prepared it ready to share it when they got the God nudge. The other person would scan the QR code it would take them to a personalised page on their church website. Each had a 3 minute “My Story” video which

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'Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' '

Luke 10:5,8-9

“Here Jesus calls for us to do four things for the lost: Speak peace to them. Fellowship with them. Take care of their needs. Proclaim the Good News.”

— Prayer Evangelism: How to Change the Spiritual Climate over Your Home, Neighborhood and City by Ed Silvano

<https://amzn.eu/bZuUVJq>

<sup>44</sup> 'The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' '

Luke 7:34

“Sharing the good news can be as simple as being a good friend.”

— BLESS: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World by Dave Ferguson

<https://amzn.eu/5nPmyqn>

<sup>45</sup> “To go along with the five B.L.E.S.S. practices, I will give you a simple tool for each. The tool with each practice is something that you can use immediately to love your neighbor. They are: Simple Tool to Begin with Prayer: “Who Is My Neighbor?” Map Simple Tool to Listen: Listening Questions Simple Tool for Eating: Meal Calendar Simple Tool for Serving: R-P-M-S Simple Tool for Storytelling: Three-Part Story”

— BLESS: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World by Dave Ferguson

<https://amzn.eu/5Yj3AqT>

<sup>46</sup> 'But give reverent honor in your hearts to the Anointed One and treat him as the holy Master of your lives . And if anyone asks about the hope living within you, always be ready to explain your faith '

1 Peter 3:15

was clear, concise and compelling. Underneath was a longer video with “My Longer Story” for those who wanted more.<sup>47</sup>

There was details of how the person came to know God and how the person could also. There was a prayer the person could say and some basic instructions beneath how to get started with links to more videos and questions and answers about their faith.

This beautiful church saw many people watch their “My Story” videos. Some ignored it. Some found them interesting but would not return to it for many years in their moment of need. Some however were immediately impacted and started their journey of faith and joined the river<sup>48</sup>.

As this church of ordinary people lived their lives their impact on the city was not noticed at first. Their impact seemed as small as a mustard seed but it grew and spread.<sup>49</sup> Slowly and surely, like yeast which invisibly causes the bread to rise<sup>50</sup>, the influence of this church on their city was causing the city to rise out of the ashes.<sup>51</sup> The culture started to change. The

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<sup>47</sup> “By simply telling your story in the three parts we suggest—who you were before you met Jesus, how you met Jesus, and what your life has been like since you met Jesus—you will include all five components of a great story and share yours in a way that is clear, concise, and compelling.”

— BLESS: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World by Dave Ferguson

<https://amzn.eu/0UbTEeX>

<sup>48</sup> ““But what was sown on good, rich soil represents the one who hears and fully embraces the message of the kingdom. Their lives bear good fruit—some yield a harvest of thirty, sixty, even one hundred times as much as was sown.””

Matthew 13:23

<sup>49</sup> “ENGAGEMENT WORKS LIKE YEAST

“As we have already seen, Jesus also likened the Kingdom of Heaven to yeast that works silently but surely to completely transform the dough. This is exactly the way the Kingdom principle of engagement works. In fact, yeast has several interesting characteristics that illustrate how Kingdom engagement operates.

First, yeast is inactive when it is sealed in the package. It cannot do its work until it is released into the dough. It is the same way with us. We cannot exert our Kingdom influence if we isolate ourselves from the world by staying within the four walls of our homes or church buildings. We have to inject ourselves into the “dough” of the world if we are to do any good.

Second, yeast by itself looks helpless and insignificant. Once released, however, its influence far exceeds its initial outward appearance. In the same way, the most effective way we can be yeast in our culture is not to be loud, flashy, and flamboyant, but quiet and unassuming, yet faithfully, consistently, and steadily living and promoting the Kingdom day by day. After all, as the hare in Aesop’s fable, “The Tortoise and the Hare” learned to his chagrin, “Slow and steady wins the race.”

[Reclaiming God’s Original Purpose for Your Life: God’s Big Idea Expanded Edition By Myles Munroe.](#)

<sup>50</sup> ‘Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.” Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.” ‘

Matthew 13:31-33

<sup>51</sup> Isa 61:4 ESV. “They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”

Isa 61:4 MSG. “They’ll rebuild the old ruins, raise a new city out of the wreckage. They’ll start over on the ruined cities, take the rubble left behind and make it new.”

city began to smile again. Joy was found in the homes and schools and workplaces once again. Marriages and families flourished and the health and crime statistics of the city began to change incredibly beyond words or human explanation.

As this beautiful church continued to faithfully worship, be transformed and BLESS their city they slowly but surely started to see cultural transformation all over their city and many came to know God and love and worship Him and the church went from strength to strength<sup>52</sup> and when they gathered, they were soon bursting at the seams.<sup>53</sup>

See video: <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMYNyG8es/>

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' And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in. '

Isaiah 58:12

'When right-living people bless the city, it flourishes; evil talk turns it into a ghost town in no time. '

Proverbs 11:11. MSG.

“Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things TOW Collage - This video shows a glimpse of some of the amazing things God is doing to bring transformation to various regions across the globe. Let hope rise in you that you are the solution to the darkness around us. Singapore - Indonesia - Juarez, Mexico - Brantford, Canada - Newark, NJ - Vallejo, CA - Hong Kong - New York - Hawaii - The Philippines”

<https://youtu.be/af4AP5jrJms>

<sup>52</sup> Tim Keller’s Vision: “WE WANT TO SEE

New York City—and the people in it—flourish.

If more New Yorkers embody the gospel in how they live and work, it advances the common good. It will catalyze growth in philanthropy, mercy, justice, racial reconciliation, more humane workplaces, arts that promote hope, and less crime and institutional corruption.”

<sup>53</sup> ““Enlarge your house; build an addition. Spread out your home, and spare no expense! For you will soon be bursting at the seams. Your descendants will occupy other nations and resettle the ruined cities. '

Isaiah 54:2-3