

The Unsteepled Church

Self-Supporting Faith Communities



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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Earliest Church As An Economic One-Another	5
Mainstream Christianity: Plato's Cosmic Dualism	7
The Relational Priorities of the Earliest Church	9
Seven Faith Practices of the Earliest Church	12
Restoring Justice and Economy	20
The Gates of Hell Will Not Withstand It	23
Justice and Economy In Evangelism and Missions	29
Evangelism and Missions in the Future	31
More Considerations for Evangelism and Missions.	35

Introduction

How Did the Hebraic Understanding of Family Uphold Dignity Among the Earliest Followers of Jesus?

All human beings are given an innate dignity because each person was created in the image of their Creator. God very specifically chose the Hebrew Abraham to be His friend, the man through whose son Isaac and grandson Jacob He would choose a people to be His treasured possession. From Genesis onward you see a repeated reference to those three — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — because it was through their generational lineage that the Messiah would come as a descendant of Jacob's fourth son Judah.

Awareness of that kind of *family connectedness* is strikingly absent among many today who follow Jesus as Lord. Who have you encountered who introduces themselves as So-and-so, son or daughter of So-and-So? Yet that distinction of your heritage establishes you as a very specific individual who is connected to a specific family and clan. There's an essence of connection there that's essential to seeing yourself within the universal Body of Christ as belonging to one another.

- 👉 It's the Spirit of Christ in you Who stamps His ownership on you and on every other person in whom He indwells.
- 👉 You are not only connected to our Lord Jesus and our heavenly Father through that Spirit. You are also connected to every other Spirit-indwelled follower of Jesus!

It's that *communal identification* of belonging to the Chief Shepherd which makes you part of His flock. But in the limitations of our humanity, none of us can enact the family responsibility that multiple thousands of sheepfold-relationships would entail! So out of His mercy our Father is restoring to His own the intimacy of relational connectedness through *extended spiritual family fellowships*. Individuals, couples and families actively participate in the 54 one-anotherings which permeate the Newer Testament — not just on Sunday mornings but all throughout the week! This means having the heart of Jesus

toward others in your faith family, upholding their value and dignity through whatever means our Lord would have you as His representative.

The Book of Acts clearly makes known this sense of *mutual provision* and dedication to *helping one another* in any way they could. Those who had much shared with those in need, a pattern set by Father Himself in providing manna in the desert according to the need of each Israelite household. The past decade in particular has seen a growing disparity in the standard of living among the few very wealthy and the many living on the edge of poverty. How essential it is that we today who follow in Jesus' steps recognize our communal responsibility. That responsibility extends to not only care for the needs of one another but also to rely on the spiritual gifting apportioned to each of us to participate together in realizing our Father's purposes for each individual and fellowship family.

With this in mind we have updated this document because of the increasing darkness and tolerated wickedness in our land. The need has only grown greater for those who are walking in the Light to be the light of Jesus to one another as well as to a desperately needy world of unbelievers. As the prophesied Dark Days of Chastisement draw nearer, will the followers of Jesus react with the self-protective cloister response of the rest of the world? Or will we who love and serve Him follow through by deed as well as word and BE the heart and hands of Jesus to our family in Him?

This means not only what would *Jesus* do, but what would Jesus have ME do in His name? There's a big difference in scattering charity to some needy and anonymous individuals, and coming alongside to validate the worth of those in our faith family in ways which uphold their dignity as brothers and sisters in Jesus. So in this article we are addressing the mutual responsibilities of belonging to each other in the manner that the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus did. The dignity of being a part of His "WE" far supersedes the individualistic ME-first, SELF obsession which has become the national standard. And one way we can look to be an answer in times of darkness and deprivation is to examine living examples of collective and cooperative endeavors which bless your whole extended spiritual family.

The Earliest Church As An Economic One-Another

In the fall of 1982 Ralph Winter, founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission, joined us for dinner in the small cottage we were renting by the seaside in Gloucester, Massachusetts. This meal marked his introduction to a whole lobster. Ever hospitable, Mike's mother sat next to Ralph to demonstrate the finer points of cracking apart the crustacean. As we ate and chatted, Ralph spotted two small wooden chairs in the corner of the porch. Drawing our attention to them, he flipped one over to examine its design. The congregation he had planted as a missionary years earlier in Guatemala had produced this same type of chair to earn desperately needed income. Key to its simple design was the chair's strength, durability and comfort. Equally important was the economy of wood used in its construction. The fabrication and sale of these chairs enabled the faith community to support itself and to have funds available for anyone in need.

For years Mike retold Ralph's story about his congregation and their self-supporting chair industry. Most who heard marveled at the novelty of the idea. It seemed to us an appropriate way for believers on the mission field to provide for themselves. But even as we related this story, we were unaware of how "early church" the practice of *economic self-provision* within a faith community really was.

A decade later in 1993-94, we spent several months in Jerusalem as we began to research the early Church. Much of what we found resulted in our book, *Restoring the Early Church*. <<https://restorationministries.org/books.html>> We discovered practices that God had been developing for generations among certain segments of the descendants of Abraham. They, like Abraham, loved and trusted their God, and as an outflow of this relationship, they kept Torah, God's teaching.

These people were "*Hebraic*": they wholeheartedly sought the God they loved, and responded to Messiah Jesus when He revealed Himself in their midst. An obedient trust relationship with God existed *before* Pentecost. The outflow of that trust are the practices described by the New Testament writers.

Abraham, the Father of the Followers of Jesus (Romans 4:16)

The Hebraic community followed the steps of Abraham, understanding that *his trust in God* caused him to be declared righteous. But unlike the Hebraic stream, the Judaizers both before and after the time of Jesus sought justification by meticulously observing Torah, a legalistic perversion that was criticized by Paul. As the apostle emphasized, no one can earn a righteous standing in God's sight based on their own merits. Note Paul's admonition in Galatians 3:12: "Furthermore, legalism is not based on trusting and being faithful, but on the misuse of the text that says, 'Anyone who does these things will attain life through them.'" (Jewish New Testament)

Legalistic perversion encourages religious domination by the powerful few who are seeking position and power. But woe to the masses who find their burden of law keeping growing heavier and heavier! Hammering the leadership for not following the Hebraic path of Abraham, Jesus lamented, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spice—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" (Matthew 23:15,23). The Judaizers were zealously evangelistic. Their "gospel", however, had been perverted into stiff obedience to traditions added on to the pure standards of God's instruction.

An Important Point: The faith practices which were written about in the Newer Testament had already been part of the faith enactment of "Hebraic" synagogues for generations. God had been preparing His people for some time. All that was needed was the atonement of the Messiah and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Sadly for us today, centuries of vindictive, Christian anti-Semitism have caused the church to discard as "Jewish law" the Hebraic writings and practices that offer a clear picture of the foundational practices of the early church. In their place, students of the Bible have focused on the variety of meanings of the Greek and Hebrew texts with little thought that they are words which are describing a *way of life*!

Mainstream Christianity: Plato's Cosmic Dualism

The Hebraic view regards the *spiritual and physical worlds in continuity*, one no higher than the other because God has a part and a purpose in both. The Hebraic perspective recognized God as the Creator Who declared the world good. Even though sin resides in the nature of man, the world is still considered “good” by God.

One of the most destructive teachings that the church adapted from the Greek philosophers was Plato's *cosmic dualism*. Cosmic dualism compartmentalizes life into the spiritual realm declared “good”, and the physical world deemed “evil.” This a simplified definition, but see how this errant teaching has influenced the church to develop practices such as:

- **Nicolaitanism** — a “clergy” class set apart for higher sacred pursuit while “laity” work in the realm of the mundane and the profane. (See Revelation 2:6,15 for God's view of this.)
- “Blessing” food and other physical objects to make them “holy” instead of blessing the true Source of all that we have.
- Identifying inanimate buildings as “the church” or “the house of God” rather than focusing on Jesus' followers as the “called-out ones”, the definition of the Greek word for church. (See Acts 17:24.)
- Masking the immanent presence of God in believers' hearts by creating visual barriers. Stained-glass windows draw attention to images that are removed from present-day reality, while steeples point upward to a deity out of reach.
- Historically holding in contempt those whose livelihood involved commerce. (The church of the Middle Ages “cursed” the Jewish people by stealing their land and relegating them to despised occupations of finance.)

These and many more practices entered the church through the influence of the Hellenist philosophers and their dualist perspective. If God had wanted these practices in the body, Jesus would have been born in Greece.

God's holiness demands that followers of Jesus be *set apart for His purposes*. But most of these purposes call for His people to represent Him IN the world, not be secluded away from it! No separation exists between the "sacred" and the "profane" in the Hebraic view of life. True holiness — set-apartness for God's use — calls for those who love Him to *do what He commands wherever He plants them*. His ambassadors keep His Word *in the world*; they don't remove themselves *out of it*.

Because of cosmic dualism, little of the Hebraic perspective is found in most church expressions. The Hellenist/Greek worldview called for people to separate themselves from worldly concerns to pursue some higher spiritual calling. A clergy-laity distinction developed that was contrary to God's commands.

The Relational Priorities of the Earliest Church



With the onslaught of pagan influence, the Hebraic relational priorities of *Jesus*, then *the home*, then *fellowship in homes*, were discarded for impersonal gatherings in temples overseen by professional clergy. The fellowship in homes that had helped to uphold communal righteousness diminished with the demise of Hebraic interconnectedness. Relational load-bearing and "one-anothering" became nonexistent under the Hellenist influence. The intimate relational faith practices of the Hebraic early church were replaced by performances. Spectatorship took the place of personal participation. The self-provision of the earliest faith communities that had upheld the dignity of God's people disappeared.

Hebraic Patterns Practiced in Native American Culture

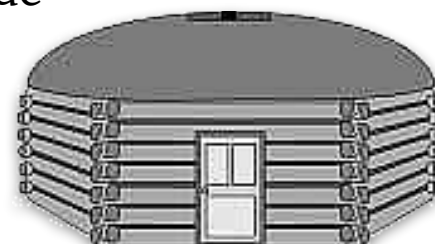
Many of the faith practices and ways of life of the early church are detailed in our books Restoring the Early Church and Pastoring by Elders. When we wrote these volumes in 1995 and 1997 respectively, we didn't understand the vital significance of some of these practices. Key elements began to stand out when we moved to Flagstaff, Arizona in May, 2000, and became acquainted with Native Americans.

Many of the Native people who have held on to their heritage are Hebraic in their thought patterns. As we investigated their cultural values it became clear to us why the church has failed dismally among them for generations. Contrary to the western European religious approach, the Native peoples would not let themselves be Hellenized. In fact, some Native tribes do not even have a word for "religion." They see the *continuity and interconnectedness* of the spiritual and physical worlds as God has ordained.

A tragic Native American counterpart parallels the centuries of persecution of the Jewish people by the organized church. Practitioners of religion were hired by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to eradicate Native culture, particularly among the children. Every indigenous cultural practice or value was declared "evil" by the mission school authorities. In their arrogant zeal, mission school staff resorted to beatings and rape to subdue and humiliate Native young people. In their blind prejudice, the missionaries and mission school authorities failed to perceive the Hebraic pattern of thought that had already been embraced by most Native tribes. It was as if the Greco/Roman destruction of the Hebraic roots was happening all over again.

A Lesson from the Hogan (HO-gahn)

The hogan is a traditional eight-sided Navajo home. Each of the eight sides represents a *value of cultural life*. The first side, facing east, represents your family and clan; the next side, your spirituality and values; then your culture and language; fourth is your people's history. The fifth side represents respect for your elders, followed by health, then education. The eighth side depicts your own responsibility to be a role model for others as you repre-



sent your people.

Do you see anything about materialism or self-fulfillment listed among the cherished values of the Navajo? Although the cultural importance of the hogan was ridiculed and vilified by most missionaries who encountered the Navajo, weren't the indigenous cultural values in many ways more biblical than the Hellenistic values and traditions that the missionaries brought with them? If the European Christians had shared a true Hebraic Gospel rather than the syncretist Hellenized version, they would have sought a "bridge" to the Navajo through understanding the cultural meaning of the hogan. Paul used the altar to "the unknown god" to bridge Athenian misunderstanding (Acts 17:23). Now is the time to incorporate the God-centered Gospel that permeates every facet of daily life and culture.

You may find greater insight into the Christianity that came out of Europe by reading our article, "[Jesus Wasn't A European White Man.](#)"

The Challenge: Do you agree with our Lord that He never purposed that the Hebraic foundations be replaced by over 38,000 creedally-divided, competing denominations and sects? Those who yearn for the Church that Jesus builds to become a reality can cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is restoring to the Gentile church around the world. Accurate discernment and great courage are needed if we are to throw off the syncretistic practices of the Hellenist/Roman Christianity. That path offers entertainment and education but ignores the silent pain of those who thirst for intimacy with their Father and with the body of Christ. When we embrace the Hebraic practices initiated by our Father for His people, we will be empowered by His Spirit to live out our relationship with Him and with each other.

Seven Faith Practices of the Earliest Church

The core of the Hebraic Restoration presupposes that the spiritual and physical realms are both good and interconnected. Sin is spawned from the heart of the individual. Only mankind is made in God's image, and only God's Son could pay the atoning price to uphold His holiness and remove our guilt. The Hebraic view of mankind's worth to God is biblical: Every person is precious to Him. Each one has been blessed with the dignity of being made in His image. Every person owes it to their Creator and to all human beings to uphold each other's dignity. Let this truth sink in before you read further!

Few of the first century faith practices, including missions and evangelism, are lived out in the church today in a way that would stir unbelievers to seek Jesus and turn away from the unrighteous ways they've chosen. If we look back to the faith practices of the early Church, we will discover a totally different manner in which they cared for the needy and underprivileged. Their assistance extended far beyond financial charity.

What were the faith practices that were carried by the earliest Hebraic believers into their faith communities? There were seven:

1. Torah teaching (Pursuit of God's Word).
2. Prayer.
3. Worship.
4. Justice.
5. Economy.
6. Hospitality.
7. House of Community Council.

If we could summarize all the teachings of God in Torah, the Holy Spirit would convey the same seven practices which were foundational to faith communities of the earliest Church. Torah embodies both *our responsibilities to God* and *our communal responsibilities to one another*. The earliest followers of Jesus did not view these seven practices as individual elements to pick and choose which ones to live out. For example, our bodies have different organs which can be examined, but it is the *coordinated cooperation of all the parts* that

makes the body one. It is the same with these seven practices: the strength of the faith community lies in their cooperative enactment. The Hellenized church has hobbled along for centuries discarding the Hebraic essence of these practices.

The seven practices operated within a faith community which was *interconnected as a body* (Paul's analogies) and *as a family* ("brothers and sisters" according to Jesus as well as Newer Testament writers). Every aspect of life in this fabric of Christ-followers was a corporate extension of family. Every practice that was shared collectively was an expression of what was already going on in the home! Today, if followers of Jesus were to apply the underlying principles and commands of Torah to our faith communities, we could be confident that the Spirit would guide us to come up with the same seven practices as our forefathers. In that light, how were these seven practices understood by the pre-Hellenized church?

1. Pursuit of God's Word

When you discuss God's Word with other followers of Jesus, you discover *specific application to life situations*. This is how the earliest Church produced its "doctrines." Doctrine for them was not the development of organized creedal systems which the Greek philosophers later introduced. Hebraic "doctrine" was a way in which a person's love for the Lord was shown through the way he applied God's Word to the life of his family, faith community, and business. [See the *Relational Priorities of the Earliest Church* chart on page 5.] Their faith was readily seen in their walk.

Paul admonished Timothy to study the Hebrew Bible to show himself approved of God. But Timothy's "study" pattern was a conduit, if you will. Paul knew that his younger disciple would be "learning for effect" as he gathered with others—the ancient Hebraic method of *identifying God's will* and then *following through in obedience*. The truths and wisdom that were gleaned from the input of others as "iron sharpened iron" would be carried to other faith communities. These nuggets of biblical lifestyle would become the building blocks upon which the leaders of the new faith communities would then

equip converts. In other words, what went in then came out to be passed on and applied!

Hellenists, on the other hand, *lectured to convey content*. Faith communities that adopted this unHebraic method produced spectatorship and dependence on trained clergyman to “hear from God.” The epidemic of “knowledge-fat” spectators stuffing today’s pews is a thoroughly Greek, self-centered phenomenon.

2. Prayer

A focused devotion to God is the motivation for nonstop awareness of His presence. Prayer is communication that both *gives to God* as well as *receives from Him*. That is why Paul could command Jesus’ followers to “Pray without ceasing.” People who are truly submitted to His heart and will are eager to be available for His use at any moment. To be available means that the ears and eyes of your heart are tuned in to the Spirit (see Ephesians 1:17,18).

Because God hears the prayers of the righteous (see Psalm 66:18-20 and 1 Peter 3:12), relationships that are *load-bearing and committed* fulfill the need we all have to be accountable (see Matthew 18:15-20). Our Father really does look for each family member to be our “brother’s keeper”, not to confine them but to help their prayers to be answered. Answered prayer becomes a very practical outworking of every aspect of daily life as it brings glory to the Father through testimony, edifies and encourages those in close fellowship, and strengthens the dependence of the individual in need. Answered prayer got the earliest Church noticed!

3. Worship

Submitting in loving trust to God’s revealed will is the essence of all true worship. In order to know His will, you need to know His Word and be constant in prayer for the rhema that His Spirit would reveal for you to apply His Word. Interconnected with the other six dimensions of faith practice, worship is a matter of lifestyle, whether at home, at work, or in a gathering. The root word for both *work and worship* is the same, *avodah*.

That connection ties in vividly as Paul bolsters the Colossian believers:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23,24). The Greek concept of worship, confining it to a “holy place”, flies in the face of the Hebraic understanding of *all of our lives as worship to God!*

A particularly graphic image of worship is pictured from the literal Greek meaning of the word: “To kiss, as a dog licking its master’s hand.” This definition recognizes the intimate relationship which the Lord seeks and your total submission—lovingly prostrating yourself before His Person. Such a level of intimate trust is reflected when you reveal God’s character by establishing biblically ethical decisions and choices. In other words, when you choose *to act justly and treat others as you would want to be treated*, you are worshiping at our Lords feet!

Another visual reminder that true worship comes at a price: When Abraham and his son Isaac set off up the mountain for that fateful sacrifice, the patriarch told his servants, “Stay here with the donkeys while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5). There was no distinction between obedience and worship in Abraham’s heart. Complete surrender and obedience to the revealed Word of God are our true worship “in Spirit and in truth.”

4. Justice

All mankind is made in the image of the Creator. This is why God commanded His people to love their neighbor as they loved themselves (Leviticus 19:18). Knowing God as described in the faith practices of Torah, prayer, and worship demands that His followers act in response to His commands. The life application of justice is found in the words of Jesus, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

The Hebraic understanding of justice that emanates from a righteous heart was voiced by the prophet Jeremiah as he reprimanded the disobedient son of

King Josiah: “Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? [In today’s terms, are you more of a success if you have a prestigious house and eye-catching car? Is God really more honored if His people gather in multi-million dollar “houses of worship” when so many of His saints are starving and cold?] Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know Me?’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 22:15,16).

A righteous person is concerned for the care of the poor and needy in his midst. Again, *interconnectedness as family* impels your heart to respond with compassion as well as with concern for the dignity of the needy person.

5. Economy

God understands the human needs of His creation. The enactment of *economy* is interconnected with *justice* (we will cover both of these topics in depth shortly). Jesus warns us to focus not on those who can repay our kindness but on those who can never return the favor (see Luke 14:13,14). *Preserving the dignity of those in need* is far more important than just extending charity. The corporate identity of the early church believers caused them to share a collective responsibility.

Accustomed to the interrelatedness of their Hebraic heritage, the earliest believers had no problem reaching out to help anyone in their spiritual family who was in need, as shown in Acts 2. The very real dynamic of belonging to those who are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ puts flesh on Jesus’ mandate to treat others as you would want to be treated yourself. The healing that was enacted by Jesus and His apostles enabled those who were made whole to return to productive, normal lives. It is our responsibility as His ambassadors to equip and facilitate the poor and needy in faith communities to be restored to productivity and dignity.

6. Hospitality

Visitors to the faith communities of the earliest church found care and lodging among the believers. Care that meets needs is the type of “fasting” that

pleases God: “Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter--when you see him naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isaiah 58:7).

God is honored when we invite people into our lives and our homes because of their intrinsic value of being made in His image. Their interrelatedness transcends bloodlines. Our “spiritual family” are all those who love God and do the will of their Father. Hebraic teacher John Garr expresses this idea of connectedness clearly: “It is in the small groups of extended [spiritual] family that believers receive the mutual support and reinforcement and the accountability that they need for successful Christian living.” Isn’t this what Paul meant when he wrote, “Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13)?

The essence of hospitality is not the activity performed (even Martha proved that tension over opening your home does nothing to make guests feel honored!). Rather, valuing those who come into your life mirrors the welcome that we look forward to receiving at Jesus’ banquet table. How hard this concept of intrinsic worth is for those so accustomed to the *activity-based church system* of Bible studies, church services, and scheduled events! Opening your home also models for your children the extension of worth to others who are in God’s image. Perhaps even an angel might drop by! “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

Sacrificial hospitality reaches out to those who cannot return the favor. Jesus anchored His condition for welcome into eternity as care for the less fortunate: “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. •For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, •I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, •I was a stranger and you invited Me in, •I needed clothes and you clothed Me, •I was sick and you looked after Me, •I was in prison and you came to visit Me. . .I tell you the

truth, •whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me” (Matthew 25: 32,34-36).

7. House of Community Council

Elders were key to the leadership of God’s people. The collective identity of the community was upheld by the gray-bearded men who preserved the memory of God’s interactions with them in the past. Through the wisdom of years of experience they were able to interpret present community needs in light of His revealed standards. As repositories of memories embedded by countless retelling, they understood that disobedience to God’s ways brought chastisement upon the people as a whole. Both good and evil suffered famine or flood. Likewise, obedience found His favor and protection. The fruits of applied wisdom were obvious, as was the folly of independent thinking: “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice” (Proverbs 12:15).

In light of this heritage, shepherds of the earliest faith communities were older men of wisdom, a wisdom that was gained through life's experiences as God's way was lived out. (See *Pastoring by Elders* for more on this.) "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). Because the Hebraic view of life is *a pilgrimage*, a life journey of obedient trust, growth in wisdom is a lifelong process that is measured by application rather than by fact acquisition.

Discussion that leads to application is vital to a communal society. A number of Hebraic rabbis taught before the coming of Jesus that if two or three studied Torah together, the Holy Spirit would give them understanding and application. Wise counsel was needed not only for current situations but for the future, for the progeny of the community. Each generation of elders concerned themselves not only with decisions that affected their own generation, but with the successful transition of leadership for subsequent generations. God's selection of Abraham taught them this principle: "For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Genesis 18:19).

Wisdom and discussion were highly cherished in the Hebraic early Church: “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). In later centuries, however, the Greek philosophers introduced to the church the supremacy of knowledge, the lecture format, and styles of philosophical argument. Knowledge requires no experience in trusting God or His Word. Unlike wisdom, which embodies the responsibility of trusting God, knowledge can be taught by anyone.

- How many of the seven faith practices are part of your faith family or faith community?
- What effect does their absence have on your ability to serve the commands of Jesus?

Summation: Most congregations today have no idea of how few practices of the early church they are exercising. Sermons and lectures offer facts and stories that demand no life change from listeners. Worship has become performance-based rather than the exuberant response of the repentant and righteous. Sadly, many of God’s people are convinced that whatever they offer up to God is pleasing to Him. “Waiting on the Lord” in obedient trust has fallen by the wayside in a society that's bent on instant self-gratification. Coming together as a body to seek wisdom from a sacred perspective and to administer justice as the early church did is foreign to most congregations.

Restoring Justice and Economy

Jesus proclaimed that He would judge each of us based upon "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine." To follow Jesus is to *live justly*, that is, to walk the second mile: to treat others as you would want to be treated, and to address injustice so that you may secure justice for those who are unable.

Historically, the church has defined justice from a legal framework: violation of, or obedience to, God's Word or church regulations. From the biblical perspective, however, justice begins with *equitable treatment of all people*. Justice is brought to fruition by proactively confronting injustice and remedying it.

"Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to [injustice]" (Proverbs 25:26). Unlike those who are governed by the world's standards, God's children are commanded to bring about justice for the weak. We *are* our brother's keeper.

The pattern of the western church has only prolonged charity, not advocated justice. Prolonged charity, however, does nothing to promote dignity. Rather, ongoing dependence on charity compounds the injustice, particularly by eroding the dignity of men and making subsequent generations "charity dependent". Good intentions aside, the church has perpetuated a support system that has kept the needy in economic bondage.

Within the church, charity buys off the conscience of many, enabling them to walk only *the first mile* by giving from their wallets. But they are never held accountable to walk the second mile with actions motivated by justice. Those who fund prolonged charity wouldn't want the same loss of dignity for themselves. That is what makes the practice of walking only the first mile so unjust.

God designed work to bring purpose and meaning. Without work as a means to provide for their families, needy men in particular have been reduced to a humiliating dependence on handouts. Many have abdicated all responsibility by escaping through alcoholism or desertion. Only by understanding *justice*—

treating others as we would want to be treated—can the economic responsibilities and enactments of the early church be fully appropriated.

A study of God's creation of man in Genesis shows that He created each of us with *seven needs*. All of mankind have a need for •dignity, •authority, •blessing and provision, •security, •purpose and meaning, •freedom and boundary, and •intimate love and companionship. [These are explored in our book *Demolishing Strongholds* <?????>.]

God the Creator instilled these needs into the hearts of mankind as part of His covenant relationship with man. Having needs helped man to recognize his *dependence on God*. Our Father revealed first to the Israelites and then to all others who would put their trust in His Son Jesus that He was the ultimate Provider—Yahweh Yireh. We are expected to work for our sustenance, but it is He Who provides both the strength and the opportunity for our needs to be met. (See 2 Thessalonians 3:10.)

Our Lord's warning to the Israelites pertains in principle to His Church: "He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today" (Deuteronomy 8:16-18). Today, "manna" would represent our humble dependence on God's guidance and our trust in His provision.

It doesn't take a theologian to realize that all throughout the Scriptures our Father is seeking a relationship with us, a relationship that is characterized by *our absolute trust both in Him and in the justice of His commands*. Many steps of obedience called for in the Bible demand an element of trust—tithing, seeking His guidance, waiting on Him. The Lord reminded not only the Israelites but all His subsequent children that He is the Source for purpose and meaning in our lives. God gave Adam work to do in the garden as a blessing *before*

the fall, not as a curse for disobedience. to A man who has experienced purpose and meaning through work finds dignity.

God warns us that the abilities He's given us to carry out our work may tempt us to forget Him and become self-reliant. Purposeful work lays the pattern for our Father to affirm His part of the covenant He swore to our spiritual forefathers: "Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth." Since the Hebrew word for both work and worship is the same, part of our worship is practiced as we pursue wholeheartedly the work that He has established for us in advance. When we link our work with worship of Him, our dignity of being our Father's child grows. Our goal is always to love and to serve our Lord in all we do. Provision is a *by-product* of our worshiping Him in our work.

The Gates of Hell Will Not Withstand It

When Jesus spoke these prophetic words, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not withstand it” (Matthew 16:18), He was illustrating for His disciples how His Church would go forth. Jesus had brought these men to Caesarea Philippi to the site of the temple of the pagan god Pan, a cave known as “the gates of hell.” The Church that Jesus would build would not be found doing its greatest work in steeple-covered edifices. They would carry His truths into the very domain of Satan.

Just before His ascension into heaven Jesus told His followers, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Often referred to as the “Great Commission” passage, this command is actually building on a foundation of worldwide evangelism that had been practiced for centuries among the Jewish people. The “evangelists” of both the synagogues and the early Church were the *planters and repairers of faith communities* in the mold of Paul, Timothy, and Titus.

Quite often these evangelists were not the front runners for introducing to Gentiles the ways of the Lord. Among many cultures, preparation for the Gospel was conveyed by businessmen who observed Torah. Jews who loved the Lord and obeyed His commandments gathered in homes and synagogues to carry out the seven faith practices described earlier. Their lifestyle of godliness stood out markedly among their pagan neighbors and the townspeople. By their observance of God’s Torah, the way was paved for evangelists who later introduced the Gospel that was built on the foundation of the Hebrew Scriptures. That is why James could declare in the Council in Jerusalem, “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).

The earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish. They were observers of all that God had commanded in the Hebrew Scriptures, as Jesus had instructed: “If

you love Me, you will obey all that I command” (John 14:15). Their Torah-obedient lifestyle was conspicuous and certainly got them noticed among the pagan cultures. It’s in the market places of the world, not under steeples, that Jesus gets best represented among the unconverted. It is in the market place that God’s children can best fulfill the words of Jesus, “Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Followers of Jesus help apply Torah to the every day situations they encounter as they go into all the world.

“Teach them...”

The Whole World Lives In Sin.

Who Will Tell Them My Ways?

In our book *Christian Halakhahs*, we describe the process of the early Church by which God’s people established applications of God’s Word. *Halakhah* comes from the Hebrew word *halak*, which means “to walk.” It refers to *walking out your life in a way that coincides with God’s Word*.

These applications were the “doctrines” of the early Church — a way of living, not creedal agreements. Halakhahs fulfilled Jesus’ concern for the personal walk of His people: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

The Acts 15 meeting in Jerusalem addressed the issue of Gentile circumcision. In this display of the halakhic approach, the apostles and elders listened to all sides of the issue, looked into Torah, and established a halakhah, a biblically correct interpretation: Gentile believers did not require circumcision to follow Jesus.

In many ways the books of the New Testament are not new canon but halakhic applications of Torah for the church. For instance, Paul confronts a situation of financial compensation for those who preach the gospel. He first quotes the readily recognized Hebraic truth of Deuteronomy 25:4: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” He then declares a present application of that truth, a halakhah: “Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the

thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?... In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:10,11,14).

In the same vein of applying known biblical truth to find answers to a current situation, Paul counsels Timothy, “The elders who direct the affairs of the [collective called-out ones] well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’” (1 Timothy 5:17,18).

Another example of the halakhic nature of the New Testament: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:17,18). Does that passage mean that God Himself will supernaturally intervene to meet all the needs of the fatherless, widows and aliens? No!

Fourteen chapters later He details just how that provision will come about through the hands of His people: “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow” (Deuteronomy 24:19-21).

Because *care for the needy* has been taught in every city where Moses has been preached, James can articulate as a simple halakhah this ordinance for the community of Jesus and know that it will be understood clearly: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans

and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27). That which had been commanded in the Hebrew Scriptures was brought forward and expanded for application under the new covenant. (Note that the needy *worked* to gather their food. It wasn’t deposited on their doorstep!)

True Justice and True Economy: Teach a Man to Fish

How can the followers of Jesus today undo the destruction that has been created as the church continues to embrace cosmic dualism? The answer: Re-establish the halakhahs of the earliest faith communities. Most followers of Jesus would agree that the halakhahs which are articulated in the Newer Testament are binding on us today. We depend on these enactments for guidance in our daily lives.

Today, what halakhahs would men of justice establish for their faith communities? Would the halakhahs be any different than the seven faith practices observed by the early Church? How about economy? What halakhahs would be determined and applied to meet this need within today’s faith communities?

The essence of “economy” in the earliest church were halakhahs that pertained to that practice of good deeds called *charity*. But charity encompassed many forms, not all equal in importance and not all handouts. Does the economic wisdom of our spiritual forefathers that upheld the dignity of both giver and receiver still apply today? Real charity, *going the extra mile by righting injustice*, went far beyond reaching into wallets.

- The lowest form of charity begrudgingly hands over provision to the needy. The deed has been done but the heart has not responded with Christlike compassion. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- A higher level of charity maintains the anonymity of the giver so that the recipient will never have to feel awkward in his benefactor’s presence. The

recipient's dignity is maintained and brotherhood is continued without embarrassment. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6;1-4).

- The highest form of charity recognizes the *dignity of purpose and meaning* that's found in God's gift of work. The best charity puts a person back on his feet by helping him find employment. This is the concept behind the modern expression, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This rationale is not only cost-effective in the long run, it also avoids the embarrassment of continual charity recipience. It is the only way we can restore dignity to the needy, especially to men.

The Hebrew word for righteous giving is *tzedakah*. It is rooted in the biblical word for justice, *tzedek*, and defines what is good for both parties, the giver and the recipient. Tzedakah is a significant concept—it occurs 157 times in the Hebrew Bible! Your acts of justice work a far greater purpose than merely alleviating an individual's problem. Righteous acts connote a justice that is motivated from the heart. You are restoring dignity with your actions, a dignity that can be passed along to the generations that follow: "Teach a man to fish and he will teach his children to fish... Give a man charity and he teaches his children to depend on charity..."

Note that Jesus' summary of the two greatest commandments are halakhahs of Deuteronomy 6:4,5 and Leviticus 19:18. He takes *established biblical truths and calls for current application*. This was readily understood by the expert in the Law who had posed the question about the greatest commandment to Jesus. This man was considered "not far from the Kingdom" by Jesus because his heart was penetrated by the implications of loving God and loving his neighbor.

“Love” that restores dignity and emanates from a righteous heart truly captures our Lord’s intent: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30,31).

Justice and Economy In Evangelism and Missions

For centuries the focus of the church has centered on the eternal state of people's souls. For the most part, only a small segment of the church body has ventured forth with the gospel outside the comfort zone of attending church services. The burden of most missionaries has been to "get people saved." The new converts, however, have generally remained mired in poverty, lacking the dignity of a means to provide for their families and reach others with the impact of Jesus in their lives.

Most of today's missionaries are dependent on charity themselves. Thus, their converts follow their example and look for charitable provision. Many new believers are tempted toward a "rice Christianity" that meets physical needs but fades when the benefits fall off. At the same time, very few Christians back in the sending countries have seen their work or their workplace as a front line for extending the Kingdom of God. They are imprisoned by under-the-steeple enactment of religion.

Few mission agencies send forth businessmen to start self-supporting faith communities. Converts disciplined by men and women skilled in trades and business practices can be equipped to sustain themselves and reach out to others independent of foreign handouts.

A poignant experience related by a missionary to Mozambique illustrates the consequences of charity that fails to see God's greater purposes. Seeking to help two local church workers who had no transportation, the missionary did what he thought was right—he bought two bicycles for them. Not long after, two church officials came to him to explain that he had failed to seek God's guidance or consult with tribal elders before giving the bikes to the men. The missionary apologized and thought the matter was over. Far from it! The two church leaders approached the bike recipients and demanded they hand over the bikes to them! They accused the workers of being greedy and disobedient and dismissed them. Subsequently, the bike owners started their own denomination and split the local church body!

Having learned this painful lesson, the missionary purposed that all benefits for new believers would come as a result of *their own prayer and self-sacrifice*. Not long after the bike episode a well-meaning pastor from the US visited him with a substantial donation to help the local believers build a meeting house. The gift was politely but firmly refused. Charitable handouts produce weak faith. He had seen the trust of the believers grow by leaps as they prayed and stood on their own feet. They joyfully constructed their meeting house bit by bit as they sacrificed for it themselves out of their own earnings.

It's Not Sinful To Make Money

God's Word commands us to "remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth." This reminder from Deuteronomy 8:18 reiterates His connection to His people: they must *depend on Him* as they find dignity and provision through the purpose and meaning of their work.

Cosmic dualism has for too long held Christians captive to the lie that God is against wealth or making money. NO! God is against anyone *making an idol* out of their wealth. At that point they forget their God-dependence. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24).

Making money can never become your goal, even if you start out believing that you'll use it to bless others. Economic provision is the by-product of your obedient relationship with your Lord. Followers of Jesus who focus on money become anxious about the future and are a public rebuke to Him. They doubt His role as Provider for all our needs.

This is why He warns His people, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:31-33).

Evangelism and Missions in the Future

We who yearn to see the Kingdom of God go forth in power are in a period of “retooling.” We need the courage to rethink that the western church has better served Plato than it has Jesus. A time of *discussion with steps of action as a goal* is needed to effectively raise up faith communities that marked the earliest Church. There is no canned program to fulfill this mission. Every people group and every co-laborer will be unique in background and in need. Dependence on God’s specific guidance, His “manna”, will keep them humble. As you’ve seen in our contrast of Hebraic and Hellenized churches, God uses *people* far more effectively than He has ever used *programs*!

What Christians on the reservations need...

What Christians in the impoverished ghettos around this nation need...

What Christians in countries where the political/religious system does not permit them to earn a living need...

What they all need is the model of the earliest church — to establish *self-providing faith communities*.

And the ones most equipped to fulfill this need are *older followers of Jesus* to enter other cultures and start businesses. These must be individuals whose motivation is more than providing handouts. They must be *men of justice*. Regrettably, “charitable” people treat those in need as little brothers and sisters. A just man, however, recognizes injustice and asks himself, “How would I want to be helped?” In answer to this question he responds, “To treat those I’m sent to in that same manner.”

The recruitment of older men of justice is not a criticism of the merciful side of charity. A heart that is burdened to relieve suffering was demonstrated by the loving acts of Jesus. But only justice can *restore dignity* especially among men and impact the generations to come with hope.

“They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green proclaiming, ‘The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him’” (Psalm 92:14,15).

For several decades the Church has witnessed a great Gospel resource evaporate as men and women have retired into the pleasure-bent playground of American senior citizenship. Many of these people have the business acumen that could help establish self-supporting faith communities among those who have been charity dependent. Even those who never leave their home town can be equipped to reach the needy in their faith communities and partner with them to establish productive businesses to help them become self-sufficient.

Research in economics and business has shown that the current concept of retirement encourages older people to abandon key relational responsibilities when they reach a certain age. A national plan for retirement first began in Germany following World War I. Facing hyper-inflation, the government needed a way to convince people to save their money rather than spend it. They developed the idea of “saving for retirement,” choosing the age of sixty-five for job severance. This age was chosen because actuarial tables indicated that only one per cent of the population would live beyond that age. (They neglected to tell the populace that ninety-nine per cent of them probably wouldn’t live to collect their savings.) Over the decades, saving toward a compulsory retirement age has become standard in most industrialized nations, even as longevity has risen dramatically throughout the world.

To save for the future is biblical: “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (Proverbs 6:6,7). But this concept has become grossly distorted in the United States. Rather than an admonition to save for old age, “retirement” has meant withdrawal from family responsibilities, relocation to the “sun belt”, a pleasure-oriented senior citizen culture. Younger and younger men and women are retiring at an earlier age to fulfill adolescent dreams or focus on self-gratification.

This destructive “retirement system” has also uprooted older women to keep them from helping younger women (see Titus 2:4,5), and has fostered the very life of self-indulgence the Bible warns against: “But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives” (1 Timothy 5:6). An ever-increasing

number of lonely senior ladies exist without purpose in convalescent homes and cavernous homesteads. Because some have forsaken their God-given responsibility to younger women, has God permitted them to be treated as “dead even while she lives”? It’s not too late to change this situation and help older sisters in Jesus find wonderful purpose and meaning!

Missionaries of the Future

Currently, 75% of all missionaries sent forth from the U.S. do not make it through their first term on the mission field. The reasons for this tragic reality are discussed in our article, “*Hebraic Foundations for Trans-Cultural Ministry.*” The two most common causes for missionary failure are *unresolved bitterness toward parents* and *rebellion against authority*. The result of this tragic situation is two-fold:

- The missionaries leave the field devastated.
- The new converts are shaken that God can’t sustain His own.

Many of the missionaries sent home have been younger men and women who have entered another culture to minister predominantly to women and children. Mission training ministries need to change their recruitment focus. Older, retired followers of Jesus have a lot to offer. Many have sufficient retirement income and don’t need to go through the anxiety and exhaustion of deputation.

These mature men and women have wisdom gained through years of success and mistakes. More importantly, they have long-term experience in our Father’s mercy and forgiveness. His sufficiency has been proven over the long haul! By walking in this compassion they can bring the hope of forgiveness to the repentant because they themselves have tasted it. Their representation of the Father attests to personal experience with His character rather than doctrinal statements about Him.

Most cultures that have not been infected by western worship of youthfulness place high value on their senior members. Godly older men and their wives who enter a new culture are often more readily accepted by tribal or community leadership. Older wives in the Proverbs 31 mold have raised their fami-

lies and extended themselves into the lives of others. They bring with them a flavor of nurture to encourage “one-anothering” in the self-supporting faith community, modeling as well as teaching godly womanhood.

Younger men and women with skills and gifts that enhance the establishment of *self-supporting faith communities* can find a welcome place assisting older mentors. As part of a team, their youthful zeal and vigor can be guided by the wisdom and compassion of the more mature laborers. As the generations fellowship together in homes and work alongside each other, they are modeling the *intergenerational, extended spiritual family* of the earliest church. Accountability and deference can be passed on while ethical, biblical business practices are shared within the new faith community.

More Considerations for Evangelism and Missions.

As We Look Back, Which Way Should We Follow?

Success in wanting to serve our Lord through meeting a need should be all the more encouraging to followers of Jesus who hope to start faith communities. As people earnestly pray, God will show them a need that the business can fulfill and at the same time affirm His covenant by providing for His needy children. It is essential that you realize there is no canned program, no five easy steps to developing relationships that will become a faith community.

Incorporating *dignity, economic provision, and justice* into evangelism and missions calls for humble people who first of all believe that this was the pattern of our earliest forefathers. Next, specific, practical guidance by the Holy Spirit that flows through men of wisdom is the crucial factor in establishing self-supporting faith communities that will bring glory to God and blessing to His people.

Practical Points to Consider

- The focus of *justice and economy* is to bring Jesus and His Word right into the market place. The goal must always be to *make Christ known* by extending His Kingdom. The goal is never what we do but the One we serve. This is best accomplished as we uphold the dignity of people who are made in His image through enabling them to work. The provision is always the by-product of the goal to reveal Jesus and His Word.
- In evangelism and missions within the United States, a Limited Liability Partnership or Sub Chapter ‘S’ Corporation could be established. Through these entities a *biblically-based cooperative* in which those who participate share commensurately with the income they produce.
- There is no need for a tax-exemption status. Any tax considerations would only impede the trust-based relationship among the partners and their dependence on our Lord’s intervention to bring about success. Tax-exemption

embitters nonexempt businesses that have to compete against them. Witness for our Lord can be hindered because of this.

- The *Holy Spirit and the Bible* should be the only avenues of guidance for the people of God. The Internal Revenue Service should never be part of the decisions that God's people make concerning their faith community. When the participants pay their personal income tax, they are fulfilling their financial accountability to the government. Neither the "S" Corp. nor the Limited Liability Partnership needs to render account to the IRS beyond the personal responsibility of each member to pay appropriate taxes on their own income. Those in need of sustenance through the cooperative are accountable to God and to each member of their faith community.
- Not everyone in a faith community that is established by this method of evangelism/missions needs to be part of the business or businesses that develop. Self-supporting cooperatives can exist within the framework of a larger faith community. Those who need the provision are extended the opportunity to be self-sufficient. People who have their own provision can participate in other ways in the relational life of the faith community.

Concluding Comments

While we were preparing this article we received correspondence from people in the mission field who wanted to come back to the US to retool their methods of ministry. These men and women want to share Christ in the midst of meeting the practical needs of the people they are serving. It doesn't get any more practical than *helping someone put food on their table* and *upholding their dignity*. That's a double victory for walking the second mile!

Several years ago we spent some time vacationing near a retirement community in North Carolina. Within three years every one of the retirees we met got a job. These men and women had been shriveling inside because their dignity was waning as they lost purpose and meaning. This was particularly true among the men. In 1997 we conducted a Hebraic Restoration workshop in Phoenix, Arizona. The participants were mostly retirees who were seeking

something to fill the void that retirement and moving away from their families had caused.

What we have seen in North Carolina and Arizona is a small indicator of the vast resource of people available to extend the Kingdom of God. Will you pick up the mantle and bring together those who would follow the footsteps of the earliest Church? Jesus warned His listeners time and again that HOW they hear is crucial. Is your listening bearing the fruit of new purpose and meaning? Or are the seeds of your potential being snatched away and choked by the deceitfulness of wealth and the ways of the world? Jesus is revealed when the needs of the people made in His image are met with dignity and purpose. Do you hear His call?