

Touching the heart of God



Part 1: The story

The journey begins

It was over 20 years ago that I first began my journey into the emotional heart of God. With three children already, Mary and I were used to the routine of pregnancy and birth. We waited with expectation for number four. Sadly, he didn't make it, dying just a few hours after he was born. As I thrashed around in anger and despair at the loss of my son, I also raged and shouted at a God that I thought had let me down at the point of my greatest need. My real problem was that I didn't really know the God I served. I loved him in my own way, followed him, taught about him and built up the church I was leading, but I didn't really know him. That was about to change.

*The pain was tearing
at my heart,
like broken glass was
slashing me apart.
"Oh God, what can I do,
where can I turn?"*

*A broken man
with all my sorrow
in his eyes
reached out his hand.
and said
"Take this, hold on
and don't look down"*

I didn't want to. I only wanted to hurt this God that had hurt me so much, but to my absolute astonishment, I saw that he was hurting for my hurt - feeling it, knowing it, understanding it. This astonished me then, and still astonishes me today.

*I hardly dared to lift my head.
Could it be true that
he would cherish me
and heal my wounds?
In the silence I heard his answer –
"yes"*

*And then I dared to hope
that I could last the course,
and even bear the pain, the strain,
the drain of all
those empty hours
if I could know that He
would never let me go.*

Absolute love

The beacon

Our house here in East Sussex looks over the South Downs. Early one morning I got up, and as usual, looked at the view I had enjoyed a hundred times before, but this time something caught my eye. High up on the Downs, a golden light was shining – very bright indeed. I tried to explain it away – it was the reflection of the sun, a car windscreen reflecting the sun, but I knew these

explanations were meaningless. Still the light burnt. After about 20 minutes I turned to wake my wife, but when I looked back, the light had gone. This experience puzzled me. I understood for the first time how the burning bush had got under Moses' skin. Later that day, I shared this experience, and one of the team said "I think you have seen the light of the Holy Spirit burning." Had I?

Three of us began to pray, every week, for some kind of understanding of what we had seen. This was the beginning of Still Waters. Just 3 people in a house, waiting to see if God would tell us what we had seen, and what he wanted of us. Every time we met, I never knew what we would do. I thought I should plan something, but slowly we stumbled on our first, and still key principle of our community - no agenda! We never planned, and that left all the space and time to the Lord. He seemed very able to fill it.

Then one day, I felt it was time to make some kind of public stand, to announce the birth of Still Waters, and our commitment to it. When one of the team asked me what we should do, I spoke words which have also become part of Still Waters. "I don't know. We will have to ask the Lord." "Not knowing" has become part of our life. No agenda and not knowing. I remember thinking at the time that these were strange principles on which to establish a community. But stranger things were still to come.

I saw a man - such glory! Everything he touched was glory, because he himself was glorious. He was the source and essence of glory. I wanted to worship, to leap with joy, leap like a deer in celebration of this glory, yet I looked again and I hesitated. For this man's hands were broken, and there was such sorrow in his eyes. He spoke - not to me but to someone I could not see beyond the glory. "It's done," he said. What's done? I wanted to know what's done, but before I could ask, I heard another voice: - "and will they follow?" "Some" said the man, "just some."

Beginning

We did have our launch meeting, and 12 people came. It took a lot to get them there, and as usual, I wasn't sure what I was doing. We worshipped, prayed and studied the Bible - and went home! But we were under way, and a few months later, we rented a room in a Community Centre, and on an autumn Monday morning, a few of us sat in a very small circle of chairs, wondering what to do next. We prayed for some hours, and began to learn how this experience would develop. We had no agenda, but obviously the Lord did, and the time went by, we shared thoughts, pictures and ideas, and took these into our extended prayer time. We became aware that we were following an agenda - God's agenda. This has become our pattern - pray, share, pray, share, pray, share and then try and decide what God was asking us to do, and try to do it.

In the afternoon of that first day, for want of any better idea, I went to get my guitar, and we began to worship. Unknown to us then, another key element of our community life was being given to us - worship. We had no books or song sheets. I just sang, and we picked up the songs as we went along. The worship moved freely - never resting, always dynamic, often deeply powerful and very moving. As we grew in experience, we did try song sheets, song pro and all sorts of other "methods", but we found them so inhibiting. We wanted to have "no agenda" worship, just as we had "no agenda" meetings. So we abandoned all the paraphernalia, and just sang what seemed right. I kept thinking of the Lord's teaching - "The wind blows wherever it pleases." We learnt to let our worship out of the man-made box we so often put it in. I'm not criticising, but how can we fix lengths of time, content or style to this most sensitive experience? Our hearts must be relaxed and free - like harps, waiting for the Spirit to play on. This must be true for the musicians and for the people. I went to one church, and after a gentle musical introduction from me, we started singing that beautiful song "Light of the world." But the people sang it as if it were a march - booming it out, rushing along as if they couldn't wait to finish it. The Spirit was blown out, and we never got started again. We in Still Waters were learning a different way, and we were learning to like it.

So on we went. People joined us - some for the full day, but most for the afternoon, where I would teach, and we would fellowship. All seemed to be going well, but the level of challenge to the inner team was rising, and I wondered where we would finish up. The challenges came in waves! Putting the call of God first is never easy. I remember a number of events which were to prove formative in this process.

“Near the clock!”

We began to come under pressure from other people using the Community Centre. They didn't like our singing, and some of them were very proprietorial about space - especially the kitchens, which we had to share. We also found that our room being used for other things during the week. This meant that we had to spend time praying and cleansing the environment before we could start. Then came the vision of the clock. The Lord said to us: - “I want you to have a base in the High Street of this town. It will be near the clock, at the far end of the street!” But we didn't know of any such place, and even if we did, how would we pay for such a base? From where I sit writing this, in our base at the far end of the high street, near the clock, with 4 years of rent paid, it looks a small thing. But to us, as we were then, small, uncertain and having no sense of belonging anywhere, it was a frightening challenge. This was where we learnt that if the Lord speaks he expects us to act, whatever the obstacles and whatever the consequences. Still Waters still holds this principle in the centre of its heart. Whatever the Lord says he will have whatever the consequences. We push this principle to its radical edge, and some people have found this too hard to live with.

“It's too hard.”

One morning, I suggested that we might have a time of teaching on Sunday evening, using a local hall. We all agreed, and the event went ahead. At the end I said, “I think we should do this again.” Then one by one, people began to make their excuses as to why they could not come again. The principle of asking God what he wanted went out of the window, and people began to look to their own plans and ideas. I was shocked. The next time we met, I said this:

“I don’t think Still Waters has any future. Last week, we put our plans first. I think we should shut down now.” This was very hard, and I found that the response to this challenge had not changed in 2000 years. When Jesus drew a similar tough and uncompromising line, we read this:-

After this a lot of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. (John 6:66)

People left Still Waters, and some were very angry. I turned to the remaining team and said “What are you going to do?” One by one, they began to cry out to the Lord in repentance. This went on for some time, and then I said “It’s OK. We can go on this time. But this must never happen again.”

Still Waters principles were beginning to define themselves, and they were very tough and demanding. I have never been one to compromise, and I found myself following a Lord who saw things in the same radical and uncompromising way. These principles pushed people away from us. I didn’t understand this at first, but slowly I came to see that this will always happen, especially if we are not totally dedicated to him, to the point of giving up everything:

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matt 10:37-39)

This was just one of many tough experiences, as the Spirit forged the foundations of the community in our hearts and lives. We now knew that God must have his way, whatever the cost. But other principles were also emerging.

Sacrificial giving

Sacrificial giving has sustained this ministry. Those of us in it have given all we have, then more. We have given of our very financial life's blood, so that the Lord could have his way. The gifts have been so many and varied. The one which sticks in my mind is the widow who gave me her heating allowance – in cash. I found that very hard to take, until the Lord pointed out who she was giving it to! I've lost track of what we have done - rented the base, printed 1000's of books and leaflets, bought banners, printers, toured around paying for hire of rooms, paid for me to visit Europe, and so much more. Much finance has been given to support Mary and myself. We have, on many occasions, barely survived. I have known what the Apostle means when he says "I die daily." On and on and on it has gone. We have had to give and give and give, and then give some more. It passed the sacrificial level long ago. We have never asked for money, we don't ask for money and we never will ask for money. We seek the Lord for money, and he has told us over and over again – "you must give it." When we have been desperate, he has given to one of us, so that we can give it into the work. Tithing for us is irrelevant - we are way beyond that. God provides, and he wants to see our sacrificial hearts giving. On one occasion we were in the most desperate need, and the money came 8 hours before it had to be available. On another occasion, I was telling the Lord most firmly as I opened the post, that I couldn't do whatever he was asking for, because I didn't have 1500.00 to spare. "Don't you?" he said, and the cheque for that amount fell out of the letter I was opening. I'm sure many have read this kind of thing before, and it's a joy! But this kind of thing only happens on a regular basis when those doing the asking are sacrificially giving to the Lord. Somehow it enables him to release to us. It is not easy. It is very stressful. It is the Still Waters way.

Sacrificial giving flows from sacrificial living.

This is much harder! I think it is best described by the strange experience of the holy stones. One day we were praying, and I saw the most beautiful holy place - a sanctuary made of glass, shining and radiant. We all wanted to enter into this place, but the Lord said "First you must lay the path up to the door

with holy stones.” “But what are these?” we asked. He replied: “These are the things you will lay down before me as a sacrificial offering.” One of the team knelt down, and prayed “Lord I want to give you everything, to serve you forever.” This looks easy in print, but to hear this cry of the heart was very painful, and it has been very painful for this person in the subsequent years. Another offered the willingness to be obedient - again something which has been very challenging. I offered my desire always to say “yes” and never to compromise. This has proved very costly for me. One by one we had to lay our stones, our willingness to offer a sacrifice and live within the framework of this sacrifice, whatever the consequences.

I think these experiences, and many like them have defined our community life. There was no room for personal ambition -only the desire to sacrificially follow the Lord, making that sacrifice a reality in whatever way seemed most relevant to us. Some have stumbled over this principle and fallen away from us, and indeed it is very hard to walk such a way. But it allowed us into the Sanctuary, where we experienced, on that day and hundreds of times since, the presence, the power and the glory of the Lord. The sacrifice is hard. But in the light of the glory, it seemed a small price to pay. “Momentary afflictions” outside and “changed from glory into glory” inside. It’s a choice – one we have made, and one which any and everyone who wants to be with us must be willing to make. It’s not an option. To refuse to sacrifice, or set any limit on it will eventually force people out of Still Waters. If this looks tough, then that’s just the nature of our community. We pray, intercede and worship - it doesn’t look much, but it’s the toughest experience I have ever had - and the most rewarding.

Holiness

The more we touched the heart of God, the more aware we became of his holiness. Archbishop William Temple said that the nearer to God he got the more of a sinner he felt, and that describes our experience. Things were going to have to change. We were going to have to change. But how? We soon learnt. Our first lesson was that being holy meant being pure. Isaiah understood this very well, when he saw the Lord’s glory, and cried out: -

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (Isa 6:5)

All have sinned

We came to understand that our sinfulness, even our hidden sinfulness was transparent to the Lord. Any attempt to pretend otherwise made us unholy. Does this make us superior? Quite the opposite - we became a group who were humbled by the forgiveness of the Lord for our unworthiness. We became more appreciative of his blood, and more understanding of our own personal weaknesses. Refusal to accept this truth will eventually, and did, force people out of the group, often in anger towards us. Does this mean the Lord rejected them? No. They just could not go any further on our journey into God’s heart. For holiness, or the desire to be holy, is a commitment, as much a challenge as that of coming to Jesus in the first place. We have to be willing to go this way, and be exposed by his unapproachable light. Purification hurts, and has to be willingly undertaken. But the more holy we become, the closer we can get to his heart. Like most things in Still Waters, there is a choice - but never an easy one.

This was quickly followed by another challenge in holiness – being holy means following without limit or compromise. Jesus made it clear that following meant leaving everything. Peter found this very challenging: - **“We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”** (Matthew 19:27) Our following has to be total, committed, unreserved, unrestricted, without compromise, and total. This is very challenging, especially in the face of a church where following is very much partial, uncommitted, reserved, compromising and low key. The less of the holiness of God we seek, the more we can accept a poor level of commitment. The more we enter into his holiness, the less compromise appears as an option. I don’t know how most of God’s people can live with themselves. They take the blessings of Calvary, and respond with lukewarm commitment, which is, in effect, unholiness.

Then we had to learn the link between repentance and holiness. We have had to face the challenge of repentance many times, as we have tried to follow in holiness. The Bible helped us here to understand the true nature of repentance.

The word “*repent*” translates the Greek word “*metanoeo*.”

“*Metanoeo*” means, “to perceive afterwards, to change one's mind and purpose.” This change is always for the better, and denotes a change of moral thought and reflection. It doesn't just mean to repent of, or to forsake sin, but also to change one's mind regarding it. We have been this route many times, both personally, and in the community. We have started to learn how we can, and must, “metaneuo” for the world – especially its past and its strongholds. Still Waters has a positive attitude towards repentance.

To serve

Holiness motivated us into service. This has become an essential part of our life – we are called not to enjoy, not to have a personal experience of satisfaction, not to fulfill our needs, but to serve - first the Lord and then his people. This has been a hard lesson for many who have come into contact with us. They find it hard not to assert themselves or their own agendas. They find it hard not to try and push us in one direction or another. This usually indicates that they haven't quite understood how we work – leaving self and personal agendas to one side, and seeking only the Lord's agenda. We are a “no agenda” ministry in one sense, as I have already mentioned, but perhaps we should say we are a “Lord's only” agenda. It's amazing how simple that looks and yet how hard it is to do!

I was leading the intercession once, and we had a woman visitor who just could not follow the flow of the prayer. In the end, I asked her, as gently as I could, to stop sharing, and to listen to where the Spirit was leading us. She replied, quite aggressively, “I pray where the Spirit leads.” I replied “In this group, my responsibility is to get the whole group to go in the direction that the Spirit leads.” This person did not come back, because, I suspect, she didn't have a servant heart, but her own agenda driven one, which she could not

suppress for the common good. She wanted what she wanted, and could not grasp the servant nature of our intercession, our willingness to lay aside our personal needs and views so that we could, together, follow the Lord. To be fair we all started where she was, but we have learnt to be servants in intercession and prayer. We have learnt to lay aside self and to follow the Lord. The Spirit certainly does “blow where he wants.” We try to have our sails up, but our hands off the rudder. Again, this is harder than it seems.

This servant mentality flows into our worship, and into our ministry style. We are not slow to act, but we never push. We believe, as servants, that the Lord will open doors, and we go through them, with boldness and a high level of risk. We never insist on our right to be heard. If people are not interested, that’s their privilege. We never demand support - financial or otherwise. The Lord must meet the needs of his servants, as an employer must do so for his workers. He has and he does, but it’s a hard line to follow. This does not make us weak, but strong. The Lord himself underlined the servant nature of ministry in Mark 8:34, and no one ever accused him of being weak. We find that the servant mentality has given us immense strength, and great sensitivity to each other’s needs and skills.

Endure

Holiness also led us to suffer and to endure. Suffering and endurance are out of fashion in the church, yet it is these very experiences which have sustained the people of God over 2000 years. We have learnt to suffer, and to endure. This must and will continue. We follow a suffering Master.

Prophetic community

Still Waters is a prophetic community. Currently, at its heart is a prophet, but that might change with the years. God “flavours” his works, and our current flavour is prophetic. The prophetic heart is one which hears from God, but we all hear from God at some level, so what is the difference? The difference is that the prophetic voice insists on a response, and this has marked Still Waters from the beginning. Here are just few examples:-

* The Lord said to us, “You need to launch this community.” So we hired a conference centre, invited 12 people, and launched this ministry.

* Again – “You need a regular meeting place.” We found that a room was available in our local community centre every Monday. We hired it.

* Again - “You need a base by the clock in the High Street of your town.” One year after this we found such a place, and rented it.

* Again - “You need to travel around, sharing the things I tell you to share.” We toured round, sharing what we believed God was saying to us.

* Again - “You need to go to Istanbul.” I went to Istanbul.

* Again - “You need to raise up intercessors – the lamps.” We began to try and find and equip intercessors with a vision for Europe.

On and on it goes and this has marked Still Waters as a place where God not only speaks, but can expect action to accompany his word.

The community house

I became aware, quite early on, that there would need to be a community house, where the inner core team could live together, work out all that God was asking, and do it, within the context of community. Over the years of prayer and thought, I have come to some firm conclusions about how this would function. We are not going to be a “poverty” community. In other words, those joining will not be expected to sell their houses, cars and so on and pour all into the common fund. Quite the opposite – I want members to keep their houses, and their personal resources. This way no one will feel trapped in the community, and can leave whenever they feel the time is right. Within the house there will have to be a common sharing, to meet all the needs of the community. So I suppose I am trying to find the balance between “they held all things in common” (Acts 2) and being free to respond to God in my personal life. (You shall know the truth.) Only time will tell if I can get this balance right. But getting it right brings enormous benefits. It leaves the direction of our personal lives in the hands of God, and it leaves us free to respond to God’s call, while at the same time being able to be totally committed, knowing that this is a free surrender to a vision, not a prison. At

the same time, we retain our links with the world. As a byproduct, it frees the community from accusations that we are taking people's money and misusing it - a charge which has been rightly leveled at a number of Christian communities.

Bethlehem

The core of the community house will be the Bethlehem worship centre. Every night at 8.00 pm, the community will gather in the worship centre, and seek the Lord. Why "Bethlehem?" The Lord asked me to call it this, because, as he pointed out, this is the place in Israel where the spiritual touched the physical, and that's what our worship and waiting will be. This will be open to all - anyone staying in the house, and anyone from the surrounding area. But it will not be compulsory. We are a "no agenda" group, and if one of us feels they want to do something else, then we are free to do it. My desire is that we will be drawn to Bethlehem each night, not driven there by a timetable.

There will be a time in the morning for the community to gather for prayer. This will be just for community members, because we plan to follow the path of many Franciscan priories, and let anyone come and stay with us. Rooms will be set aside for visitors - people who want time to reflect, to rest, to recover in our spiritual environment. But there does need to be a time for community members to meet together, to seek the Lord for the needs and direction of the community.

And after that? Some community members will have full time employment, and they will go off to work. Others will study, prepare, sort out the house, visit local churches and fellowships, or just be. The days will sort themselves out, but we're an active community, not a contemplative one. We are going to be doing what we hear God asking us to do. The Community House will not be a place of ease, but a place of action.

Searching

As we begin to try and find the Community House, four principles are guiding us.

Who is at the front?

As I have already said, this is a prophetic community, and we are becoming aware that the prophetic element has to be at the front – to be the point of the spear. This will sharpen up our activity, and push us on into doing the works God has set for us to do. But it will also make the Community very dynamic- perhaps too much so for some, who are looking for a quiet meditative type of community.

The blood

We have to release the power of the blood into the area we are searching, and the Community has to exist under that power. (See “Releasing the power of the blood at www.visionworld27.org)

The joy

We had a vision recently. The Lord showed us a place, and he said “The stones of this place have been waiting to break out with joy.” This suggests to us that the place is ready, and has been ready for a long time. Very exciting!

Look ahead

We are concentrating on finding the place, but we must also look ahead to what God wants to do in and through the Community. We must not just fix our eyes on the House. Rather, we must fix our eyes only on the Lord.

The List

This experience came in February 2011, and I think it is relevant to our search. The Lord asked me “Who have you got on your list to approach?” I showed him the names, and he said “No, none of them!” I was shocked, and said, “Then who will join?” Then he showed me his list - it was very long! We are now praying that those the Lord is touching will come to us, so that we can begin to

talk and pray together. We are encouraged to think that the Lord does have a list.

Joining

How will people join? I am writing this on our African base in Ghana, and we have just been listening to a Nun on the BBC world service. She and 5 other nuns wanted to start a community in Burkina Faso, so they came out, bought a place, and started. After 6 months, only one nun from the original six was still in the house, but others had joined her. They came to stay in the House for a few weeks, and the Lord asked them to stay. This is the way ahead for us. People will visit and stay for a few weeks in the House, the Spirit will take hold of them and ask them to join us. Then it's up to the existing community to discern that call, and take matters on. After prayer and discussion, if we cannot agree, I will have the final say. Someone has to bear the decision making role, so that things which cannot be decided by the members can be resolved. This is right, but I regard it as absolutely the last resort.

The Nuns have shown us the way ahead, but I also remembered that many years ago, the Lord said "I will call a community to you." So I believe that there are people already being prepared to be with us. I hope that we will have 10 members soon, and my ultimate aim is 20 members living in the community.

So this is the story so far. All we can do now is to go forward in faith, believing that the Lord will honour his word to us. What exactly that will mean we don't know, but one thing is certain. We are in for an exciting ride!

Part 2. The Bible base for Still Waters

What is the biblical basis of Still Waters? The basis of all ministries has to be a good biblical based theology. This gives the foundation for everything else, keeps us in line with God and prevents us straying into ways of our own making which may look good, but leads inevitably to ruin. What is ours?

1. Togetherness

“They all joined together” (Acts 1:14)

The willingness to live and be together is the key to any community. Here, an unusual Greek word gives us the biblical basis. “Joined together” is the Greek word “homothumadon”, a compound of two words meaning to “rush along” and “in unison”. As a conductor blends together the instruments of an orchestra to produce a pure sound, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church into a pure family. This is our aim in Still Waters - we “move along.” Still Waters has never been a static experience. As we hear from God, so we move, change, grow and develop. But we are trying to do this “in unison” - trying to move along together. This isn't a false harmony, a “peace at any price” approach to God's will. It's very dynamic, and very challenging. Within “homothumadon” we challenge each other to reach for the heights of spiritual experience.

“Constantly in prayer”

“Prayer” is the Greek word “proseuche.” This describes our regular daily prayer walk with the Lord, where we make all our needs known. But in the New Testament, prayer has a wider context, so we join this verse with another:-

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.” (Eph. 6:18)

Here the Apostle adds another word for prayer - “deesis” and this gives us the wider range of Still Water intercession. “Proseuche” is the regular prayer of the Christian family - seeking, asking and believing. “Deesis” is prayer with a serious desire to be heard - powerful heart felt prayer, which gives all emotion and compassion to seeking and moving the heart of God. It is a deeply moving

emotional experience, and touches the heart of God. There is a great sense of urgency in deesis prayer. Still Waters knows both kinds of prayer, and has learnt much about both.

We also like to add yet another verse, to give us the fullness of intercession:-

“In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” (Rom 8:26)

This Greek word – “entygchano” only appears five times in the New Testament, and three of those are in Romans. It is used of the intercession which Jesus and the Spirit make for us before the Father. It’s such a moving understanding - that our intercession is being added to by the Lord and the Spirit. We do not intercede alone.

Very much tied up with this praying experience is the conviction that God will answer. (Jeremiah 3:3. John 14:13) These verses from Jeremiah and John look relatively straight forward in black and white, but are a huge challenge to the intellect and emotion. Sometimes the answers don’t seem to come, sometimes they are not what we want and sometimes they are very challenging. But underlying all this is the conviction that God does answer prayer - for those who are committed to responding to him, with no conditions, no strings and no qualifications. This is not a reckless position, because we check all our responses together against the biblical revelation. But I think it is fair to say that no one can be part of Still Waters who is not prepared to persevere, deesis, believe that God hears, and answers, and make, in some way, a sacrificial response.

2. Commitment to community

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

This passage contains much of the theology which is necessary for any and every Christian community:-

*** The Apostles' teaching. ("Didache")**

The Greek word "didache" means "doctrine, teaching, instruction." Didache is a key part of the church, and a key part of the life of Still Waters. We are constantly studying, sharing and growing in a deeper understanding of the things of God, based on the Bible. Not only does this increase our personal and community faith, but makes sure we stay in line with biblical truth. This always gets harder when there many people involved, all with their own ideas and experiences. Still Waters has made a commitment to biblical didache, and currently, I maintain the standard. I do not hesitate to correct biblical inaccuracies, even within worship and prayer. I remember one women getting very angry with me and after the time of intercession said to me, "I can speak what I feel is right. I am led by the Holy Spirit. I don't appreciate your interruptions." I replied "And I must maintain biblical accuracy, because I'm also led by the Holy Spirit."

She did not stay with us which is sad, because we are a servant ministry not a dictatorial one. Theological and biblical accuracy is there to help and to encourage growth and to help us reach as far as we can in the Spirit, not to control and restrict. I have been studying theology for over 40 years and I have always been guided by a good principle – bad theology makes for a weak church. Good theology excites and powers us on to achieve great things under God. Still Waters embraces this thinking with enthusiasm!

*** "The fellowship". (Koinonia)**

"Koinonia" is another powerful Greek word. Its root meaning is "fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation." From the very beginning of Still Waters, we knew that there had to be a strong koinonia between us. It took a while for this to develop. It shows itself in the ways which are described in Acts 2, but we have had to expand our understanding it to reflect our 21st century experience and understandings.

We developed our koinonia in the area of mutual support, as did the first Christian community. We have all had times of hardship, family trouble, personal faith challenges, sicknesses, and so on. Many times we have,

individually wanted to give up, and some did give up. But those who continued depended on the koinonia of the other members - that mutual support, love and willingness to share the burdens of others as if they were our burdens. This wasn't a "cloying" relationship. Sometimes communities develop in such a way that no member seems free to be able to do anything without telling the others and getting their permission. I personally do not feel that this is koinonia life. Within the Kingdom, we each have responsibility for our own spiritual walk - our own internal relationship with the Lord. We can choose to share some or all of this with others. It is this freedom to share or not to share which best reflects koinonia. We keep our personal freedoms, for which Jesus died, and we share them as and when we can, and to the level which we feel we can share them.

This level of sharing rises as the koinonia grows in depth. Koinonia has to grow on both sides - for those who share and for those who receive the sharing. Those who give must know that they will be loved, whatever the sharing may entail, and those who receive the trust and sharing must likewise be gentle, not crushing the responsibilities which we all have – but offering the help which is needed. We do not want to create dependency, but genuine trust – genuine koinonia.

True koinonia is gentle, just as the Holy Spirit is gentle (Isa.42:3) and also powerful as the Holy Spirit is powerful.(Romans 8:11) Koinonia develops into a deep bond of trust and sharing, which makes all involved become the mature people in Christ which we are made to be, both individuality and corporately. This requires a lot of effort, and constant adjustment. Koinonia is a gift of the Spirit, but doesn't fall from heaven. Like so much of the kingdom, it is a grace gift - one we have to learn to use, and one we grow better at using with practice. We all make mistakes, and Still Waters has plenty of mistakes to own up to, but the mistakes are the way we learn and develop a better koinonia.

Our koinonia is biblically based. We share what we have, in a sacrificial pattern of lifestyle, but not within a "vow of poverty" context. As I have already outlined, we are not a "vow of poverty" based community. I admire such communities greatly, but we are not one. We have all kept our personal possessions - houses, cars and so on, and will go doing so. But at the same time, we are totally willing to sell all for the support of our fellow Still Waters members, if the need arises. We hold our personal possessions, but sit lightly to them. They are available for us to use within the koinonia, for ourselves or for the other Still Waters members. This is easier to experience than to

describe. We have all received from each other, emotionally, spiritually and physically, as the needs have arisen. Perhaps that best describes it - we are totally open to giving our all, as and when the need arises. Perhaps in the future the need to sell all and to give all will arise. We'll see.

Far more challenging in the "selling everything" area is the emotional and personal commitment we have to make to each other. Koinonia does not just touch our physical possessions, but also our spiritual ones. The Apostle described it as "bearing one another's burdens." Koinonia is a total life experience within Still Waters - koinonia with a light touch, not a heavy handed discipline. That's how the early Christians found it, because they experienced it with joy and with sincere hearts. It's what we believe in and what we are working towards. So far it hasn't been a burden, but a joy.

*** "Praising God". ("aineo")**

The Greek word here is "aineo" which means "to praise, extol, sing praises in honour of God." Worship has been a central part of Still Waters from the beginning. On the first day we met, I didn't take my guitar in the morning, but did bring it in the afternoon, and we've never stopped worshipping since then. Worship has been the way in which we have come closest to the heart of God. We have encountered his holiness (Isaiah 6:3), his majesty, (Mark 9:2) his glory, (2 Chron. 7:2), his power, (1 Samuel 7:10) and his stillness. (1 Kings 19:12) It remains our central experience of touching the heart of God.

*** "enjoying the favour of all the people."**

"Favour" comes from the Greek word "charis", which means "grace." As we walk with the Lord, we have an effect on the people around us. We become what the Apostle calls the "sweet aroma". (2 Cor. 2:14) Spiritual communities have an effect on the area where they function. People and circumstances can be affected for good. We are aware of "favour", but as yet we cannot point to any specific experience of the changing nature of Still Waters on any community. Perhaps it is still to come.

*** "And the Lord added to their number ("ecclesia – assembly") those being saved." ("sozo")**

We do expect to grow - in numbers and in depth. An "ecclesia" which is not growing can never claim to be a true church. True churches are always in a

state of growing. Every time we meet, we are changed. That is what we expect, and if this expectation is not fulfilled, we are very sad. We do expect to grow in numbers, because that too is a sign of growth. This is the Lord's will, and it is our will as well.

3. Living for a purpose.

“And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7)

Communities are not meant to be cosy clubs. There are many churches which need to take note of this truth. We are here for a purpose – to reach the ends of the earth with God's full Gospel. To do that, we first have to live it, and then we radiate it outwards, in whatever form seems right to us. Still Waters is an active community, committed to Acts 1:7. “Cosy club seekers” need not apply!

How we exercise our ministry is still a work in progress. We have done all kinds of things, but I don't think that, as yet we have a coherent idea of what our true purpose is – but this will come. It involves deesis prayer, and a willingness to pray into any situation. It also involves teaching and equipping, but in what form we are, as yet, uncertain. We have brought the “lamps” ministry to life, and the “gateways” ministry. But I must be honest and say that, as yet, we have not really worked out how all these things fit together. One thing is guaranteed- we will not be sitting in our chairs, hoping for inspiration. The Lord will make his will plain, and as we are a prophetic community, we will get on with it.

© Jim Smith

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jimsmithghana@yahoo.co.uk

07803 617435

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