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Monthly House Church thoughts – Book or TV?

2012-09-27, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

My mom was a great reader. I remember a whole wall of shelves lined with books ranging from World Atlases and Agatha Christie murder mysteries to encyclopedias and dictionaries. From floor to ceiling the shelves were filled, yet I never read a single one of her books.

That was because her wall of books served as background to where our TV sat. I'd come home from school and watch shows like 'Get Smart', 'The Brady Bunch', and closer to dinner, 'Hogan's Heroes'. TV was always much more appealing than books because TV was always moving, colorful, and took me into other worlds, whether that be a mock WWII prison camp, the world of an incompetent secret agent, or the family of 'Marcia, Marcia, Marcia'.

I shared last month about summer doldrums and priorities, but how do these play out?

One day mom really pressed me to read a book. I distinctly remember her trying to get me to read one of her classics like Ben Hur, Quo Vadas, or even Agatha Christie. I stiffly refused, stating they were boring, drawing that conclusion without doing anything more than leafing through the pages - all I saw was page after boring page of black ink on white pages. Nothing tickled my senses or inspired me.

So she challenged me to find a book at the school library and read something that appealed to me.

I took her challenge and found a book about a Mountain Lion, also called a Cougar or Puma in the US. It was from the lion's point of view; Its endless search for food, the wariness of meeting another male lion, the danger in bringing down a deer with antlers - and I was hooked on reading!

And this relates to house church...how?

House church is like the battle in my mind between boring books or flashy TV. The richness of the books could only be experienced by immersing myself in them, by setting aside time to read, making them a priority, spending time between the dust jackets.

TV required no effort on my part, it entertained, and was comfortably shallow. TV entertained me, books changed me.

Last month I shared about the summer doldrums. The time upon us now is the settling of the seasons, when priorities are set, schedules are remade, and suddenly people we haven't seen all summer either completely disappear off the radar, or return like long lost family.

We find that even people who have been with us for a year or more were in the end, only leafing through our pages, never truly making those of us they fellowshiped with in our houses a top priority in their lives.

Sometimes 'going to church' is all that people want. They would rather 'go to church' because it is entertaining, isn't challenging, or they find they need to go to a church that 'ministers to me'. Its for the kids, or an hour and a half where they don't have to do anything, or they need to 'recharge' for a time.

For those of us on the inside of house church, between the covers of a great book to stay with my example, life is rich in multiple dimensions, and returning to 'TV' Christianity just has no appeal. We want to invest ourselves in relationships, to be part of a solution rather than just back off from relationships.

Identity

This last 6 months or so I've continually been drawn back to how the early church had a sense of belonging, of identity with those they fellowshiped with. Look at Acts 4:23 where Peter and John came very close to execution, but were instead released by the officials. "And being set free, they went to their own group..."

They knew who 'their group' was. They knew who 'had their back', a US expression meaning someone is watching out for you. When Peter was released from prison by an angel in Acts 12, he knew where to go:

"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered together praying." (v12)

Peter demonstrated in 4:23 and 12:12 that he had a group he identified with, who he considered home base, those

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who had his back - in this case praying for him while he was in prison.

While we see travel 'house to house' in Acts, we also know there were 'home bases' that were focal points of identity for believers. Even after a house church multiplied out those 2 remained related, and then to 3 and 4 and more, to where Paul ended up writing to all the related house church by saying 'to the church at'...Rome, Corinth, etc.

And that is why we see specific people named as hosting church in their home: Priscilla and Aquila in Rome and Ephesus, Justus in Corinth, Jason in Thessalonica, Nymphas in Laodecia, Philemon in Colossae. To some of them Paul writes 'Greet the church that meets in your house'. (Acts 16:15,40, 17:5,18:7, Romans 16:3, I Cor 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon v2)

TV or book?

And that's part of what happens every fall; people decide who they want to identify with. The church that meets in your house, or 1st church down the street. It is normal process. Our hope and prayer is that they will choose to identify themselves with those of us who 'watch their back' so to speak and have met with us in our homes, sharing meals even.

I have no problem believing that for some, being in the traditional church can be the Lord's will for them. But as I've said many times, though righteousness comes through knowing Christ, God ordained that righteousness is proven through relationships. Some back away from that in house church, or seek that growth through other relationships in the traditional church. We love them and the door is always open for we want God's best for them.

So watch and observe the wrestling going on in some people. Don't be afraid to sit down and talk frankly with them. Is (house) church boring for them? What could be improved upon? Have they been so busy this summer they've lost touch with others and so feel distant and unattached and searching? Are there family needs we can help meet?

Remember that we are a living body, which means the only thing constant is change. Don't be afraid of it, follow life and meet needs, and encourage people to be part of the solution so that others may benefit.

Be related to the rest of the body of Christ in this network and the body of Christ in your community, but allow yourself also to be identified with 'your group' as Peter was. Know the 'church that meets in the house', for they are extended family, friends, and they have your back!

Blessings!

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