



The New Church Newsletter

August 2023

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Evangelization: Following Jesus' Model

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

At the end of the gospels, Jesus sends out his disciples on what is known as the "Great commission." They were told to go out into the world, and teach people everything that Jesus taught them. This is normally the kind of thing we think about when we talk about evangelization. Get the message out there! Tell your friends, knock on doors, put on events, and speak about the church whenever you can!

But is that really how we're supposed to do it? Well, it's one way, but not the only way. Jesus did teach, but He also set an example by His life. I've written about this before, years ago, but I think this way is best summed up in three steps: follow, believe, obey. Jesus went to the disciples and said, "Follow me." He wasn't declaring He was God, or opening with a lesson on the inner meaning of the Word. Simply, "Follow me."

They did, and as a result got to see first hand not only His miracles, but the way He conducted Himself in the face of those who challenged and hated Him. Jesus was showing them, not telling, who He really was. Eventually Jesus said, "Who do you say I am?" They said, "You are the Messiah." They were asked to follow, but now they believe.

This changes things. Jesus basically says, "Now that you believe who I am, obey." It makes sense, doesn't it? "Since we're on the same page now as to who I am, and that I have not just some, but all the authority when I speak, how about you actually do what I tell you?" So often we get this process backwards though, and when we do our evangelization we start with telling people to obey, which frankly doesn't go so well. "Welcome to our church! Obey!" But the reality is that people are going to judge your faith by your deeds rather than your words, so they're not going to obey because you told them to, but they might obey if they've seen evidence in your life that the teachings have made you into a person worth aspiring to be.

And that brings us to what I really want to write about today. What if your life was so different, so inspiring, that a man in jail changed his life to join your church? This is the true story of the Abdullah's and Samuel Davidson. You may recall how this story starts... Davidson, drunk and high on drugs ran over three of the Abdullah's daughters and their niece, killing all four, three years ago in western Sydney.

The story was going to make the news because of the immense and avoidable tragedy that it was, but what happened a few days later was as big of a shock as the death of the children: the Abdullah family forgave Samuel Davidson. WHAT?!?! Yes, they forgave him, and they did so publicly. You see, the Abdullah's are Christians, and this is what they said:

"Grief with faith gives hope. We don't live in the past. The kids are in front of us. We're going to be reunited with them in the next life. That's what faith does. As Christians it does give us that hope that we'll see them in the next life, and we know that 100%. They're preparing a place for us now.

To be honest, Danny and I have built our family, and Christ has always been in the middle of the family. We've still got our family, and we've grabbed them close to us and focused on the healing and that's why we were able to forgive and to accept that these children have entered into the kingdom of God. Rather than say we have lost our kids, we were saying we were blessed because our kids are in heaven, they made it to heaven. That's all we ever wanted was to get our kids to heaven."

I've read this statement several times, and it still just amazes me. Apparently, it amazed Davidson as well. In what can only be the workings of Providence, it turned out that Davidson's cell mate in jail knew the priest who worked at the church the Abdullahs attended. Davidson reached out to Father Robert Pio, and they started communicating.

"I was shocked. I honestly didn't expect it at all to hear Father Robert went and visited him and spoke to him and he'd done his first confession," Mr Abdallah said. "They spoke and (Davidson) said 'you know, the whole world should have hated me, but because of Danny and Leila's forgiveness I was able to see life in a different way'. (Father Robert) said (Davidson) kept on saying how sorry he is and knows what he (did) was wrong but goes 'that's what's changed my heart'."

Now Davidson prays the rosaries three times a day, he goes to mass, he's doing Bible study, goes to confession and he wants to become a Maronite Catholic. Davidson saw – or should I say, "*followed*," the Abdullahs, and *believed* that what they were teaching was something so valuable, that he gave up his former life in order to have it. Now it seems that he's willing to *obey*.

While we certainly can reach a higher volume of people through other methods of evangelization, I still feel that this way is the way we're supposed to do it. It is just so powerful to live that example, and have others see it, because the belief they will then have is so much deeper than if they were just taught some doctrine. This is what I wish for the New Church... that when people encounter us, that we're different, and different in a good way. When the world is crazy, we're calm because we know the Lord is in charge. When bad things happen, we're not seeking revenge, because we know the Lord will give us goodness and he'll deal justly with evil. And when they look at how we treat others – our spouse, our children, our friends, and strangers – they say, "Wow, those New Church people sure are nice." We can do this! But we've got to be like the Abdullahs, and follow Jesus' way of evangelization.

<https://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/news/i-was-shocked-danny-abdallah-reveals-oatlands-crash-killers-extraordinary-act/news-story/a1d55ca3161364969efa23d9c2952e20>

Regional Meetings & Perth Visit

I'm going to be away twice this month, the first of which is a trip to Brisbane for ministers meetings. Technically I went to **Seoul** back in April for regional meetings, but realistically, these meetings are more my "region." The main point of these meetings as far as I'm concerned is to get the group of us together and do some cross-pollenating of ideas. Let's talk about what we're seeing, what's working, and what isn't.

One of the things that came out of last year's meetings was a call for the various ministers and congregations to visit **Brisbane**. They're the congregation that is growing, so what can the rest of us learn from them? I've had that on my "to-do" list since then, but there really hasn't been a good time to go. It's been much the same for the other ministers, so we've made a plan for us all to attend in Brisbane on August 13th. The meetings will run from the 8-11th, we'll have an off day on the 12th, and close them out with worship on the 13th. We'll have a lay service here in Hurstville.

Then, two weeks later, I'll be gone again, this time to **Perth**. It's a shorter trip, the 25-27th, and the goal is to give a couple classes, a worship service, and do a lot of visiting. I've looked at the schedule for this trip, and I'm not sure when I'll sleep. I suspect plenty of caffeine will be needed! **Hurstville will not have a service that Sunday**, so you'll have the opportunity to take the week off or worship elsewhere.

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Good-bye to HyunJin & YoungHee

For the past month we've been hosting HyunJin Yang and YoungHee Jeong from South Korea. As you may recall, he graduated from theological school in Bryn Athyn just over a year ago. Since then he's been serving in Seoul, but due to the glut of ministers there he hasn't had a lot of opportunity to preach. Well, we were able to fix that here, getting him to preach twice in Hurstville and once in Roseville.

Just as important was giving him lessons on video production. One thing was clear: he didn't realize how many tools that I use to create videos. The big one was a teleprompter, which frankly I only started using back in February, but it's a huge time saver. I was doing 30 takes, and sometimes even more, but now it's usually 3, maybe 5. I also use a service to add subtitles to the short videos that I showed him, as well as editing techniques. In the end, HyunJin created 3 videos of his own, so he'll leave here having actually gone through the process a few times.

For me, it has been fun to have them around. It's been great to get to know them, and I've very much enjoyed working with them. I suspect we'll be in touch going forward, and if nothing else I'll see him at the clergy meetings next year.

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Social Media Update

There's been some exciting growth with my social media efforts since I last wrote about my social media experiment back in our May newsletter. Let's start with Instagram. Over the past 6 weeks, my number of followers has more than doubled, from around 220 to 510. That's not a huge number of followers, but what I'm really happy with is the number of views the videos are getting. All but one of them have over 1,000 views, some over 2,000, and two that are at about 14,000 each! This all with no advertising!

YouTube is also growing. You may recall that a few years ago I was doing some advertising for my YouTube channel, and at that time it was getting 10,000-12,000 views a month. After I stopped that, the channel settled down to around 3,000-3,500 views a month. When I wrote at the end of April, the channel was at 8,000-8,500 views for that month. Right now, if you look at the last four weeks, the channel has 15,000 views, again with no advertising.

One of the really pleasing things about YouTube is that my new, full-length videos are getting more attention too. When I stopped doing them a couple years ago, I would get about 100-200 views in the first week or so, but the video released at the end of June picked up 1,000 views, and it seemed to get people to watch more of the shorts too.

TikTok however, isn't growing. I'm at 124 followers, and the videos are getting 200-400 views. Over the past month the account has 3,500 views, but that's down 20% from the previous month. Others I've talked to who have social media experience have said "TikTok is a waste of time," and I'm starting to see why. However, since I'm making the videos for Instagram and YouTube anyway, the only time I spend on TikTok is the time it takes to upload the video.

Overall this is very encouraging, and I'm interested to see where this all goes.

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Why We Do This

It doesn't take a genius to know that being a pastor is a very different job than that of selling race car parts. But this is the choice I made, and one of the differences I've noted is in regards to feedback from "customers." In sales, it's easy to know if you're doing a good job. Just look at the monthly sales numbers! Yet, when I'm preaching, or posting a YouTube video it is definitely harder to figure out if the effort was successful. However, every now and again there is something that happens where it becomes clear that it was worthwhile.

Earlier this year I posted a video that was based off a sermon I gave from the "Shift" program... it was the "Shift of Perspective" sermon where Jacob flees Esau, spends the night in the desert and has the "Jacob's ladder" vision. In that sermon, and in the video, I compared Jacob's story to a woman's near-death experience. In both cases they were feeling worthless, and there was a shift of perspective because God came to them and they realized that they were, despite what their mind told them, very loved. The key moment in

the NDE was where she was contemplating suicide and God said to her, “Don’t waste your life thinking you’re unloved.”

Anyway, with that as background, here’s a comment I got on the video:

“His mercies are never ending. I was literally just thinking about "life stopping". Just right now. I opened the app thinking I would see a recommendation of the political videos I've been watching for days. Instead I saw this. Your title wasn't specific, but I just clicked it anyway. I have wanted the same things as this woman for decades. I just got out of an abusive relationship as well. I am struggling to focus and worried about failing. I just wanted a simple life but it's not happening and I was hating myself. I was feeling useless and unworthy of taking up oxygen. Then I clicked the video and I saw that He hears me and loves me despite how I've been acting the past few years (desperately trying to get that "simple life" the wrong way). My best friend says it's bizarre the way God always reaches out to me. I'm still surprised every time. I'm crying right now. I guess I will rethink my plans and my significance to the Creator. And keep living. Thank you for posting this.”

Wow. How about that?! The video only has a few hundred views, but really, all that matters is this one. This is why we do this work. I say “we” because the church wouldn’t exist with out you, and it is this church that has allowed me to do this work. So while we’re never going to see or know this person, the work that is happening here is making a difference.

<https://youtu.be/qwMuhWw634Q>

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Letter to the Editor

Last month I asked for somebody to send me an example of a character in the Bible who was basically obsessed with their appearance. Well, you folks didn’t do any better than me, and came up empty. However, I did get one response from a reader that pointed me to *Conjugal Love* #330, as the passage does speak to beauty. It’s an interesting passage where Swedenborg joins in on a conversation regarding women, and the question is asked, “as to whether any woman can love her husband if she is constantly in love with her own beauty?” I don’t have the space to publish the whole account here, but if you’re so inclined I encourage you to look it up.

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Fundraising Support Needed

You may be aware that the **spring women's weekend** is coming up, **September 8-10**. Part of what happens during these weekends is some sort of charitable work, and this time is no different. The ladies will be assembling birth kits for childbearing women in developing nations, and they have got until **August 10th** to raise the remaining \$284 needed for purchasing supplies. If you feel called to support the ladies and this cause, a donation would be greatly appreciated!

You can give Jenn cash on Sunday, or donate online (the online process is quite straightforward: simply go to <https://www.mycause.com.au/p/315835/womens-weekend-sept-810-2023> (or www.mycause.com.au and search for 'womens weekend') and click on the big 'donate' button) . For more information about the cause and the birth kits, visit www.bkfa.org.au. The ladies - and childbearing women - thank you for your consideration!

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Emily Kermond** (7th), **Rhonda Hall** (12th), **Rebekah Horner** (17th), **Larah Walsh** (21st), **Lily Heldon** (29th)) **Ralph Horner** (30th)

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