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CAUGHT, NOT TAUGHT
The Foundations

I started to learn that walking together on our journey of faith could be enjoyed, not just endured.

Church life is so much more than meetings. Relationship is at the core of who God made us to be, so it's through relationship with each other, in our homes, that we find welcome and rest, a place to gather and a place to grow.

A hint of what was to come

It's so easy to adopt a disposable approach to life. We don't repair things any more – we throw away and replace. If something no longer works the way we want it to, we throw it out and it's almost as if it was never there. Although much of what we say is about 'moving on', we must not lose sight of the 'great cloud of witnesses' (Heb. 12:1) who came before us. It is the hard graft of their faith that we stand on, their hard fought battles which we live the other side of. I never want to be disrespectful of those who have been true to the revelation and understanding that they had. I have less sympathy for, or comprehension of, those who have abstained from obtaining high heights and settled for something less. In that sense, I have no time for tradition: doing something again and again just because 'that is what we have always done' seems pointless to me. We are called not to waste time: 'Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.' (Eph. 5:15–16). I don't believe the Bible gives us much room for drift.

In my early faith there were three families who opened the doors of their homes and had a profound impact on me, often around the edges of what they thought they were bringing to me. It was the atmosphere of these homes that had the impact. At this time, I was part of a vibrant Pentecostal church in Dagenham, east London. I had grown up in a small Pentecostal church in Hertfordshire and had drifted from the faith of my parents, but God drew me back to Himself and I was not prepared to settle for the limited expression, a 'half-life' of faith that I felt characterised my home church. I had started a journey that would result in my becoming a church planter, but it was a gradual journey, in which I didn't know that the destination that God had planned for me was much greater and beyond my furthest imaginings

and understanding. Nonetheless, when I came back to God my heart was ‘set on pilgrimage’ (Ps. 84:5), and I wasn’t going to settle for something less than what God had for me.

What I saw in these homes was something like when you are in a dark room and the door opens just a crack into another room where the light is on. The edges of the door are framed with light and you realise there is the possibility of something else: the reality you are in is not the only thing on the menu.

We knew that our faith was expressed not only on a Sunday morning, and that it should affect our lives for the rest of the week as well. However, church life was pretty much limited to meetings. So in not restricting our faith to a Sunday morning, the answer was to have more meetings. Sunday was wiped out with meetings – morning, afternoon and evening with some additional prayer groups and study times – as well as various midweek combinations. So it was almost by accident that I started to see the home, the family and relationship as core to Christian life and church.

Each of these homes reflected the ‘flavour’ of the householder, and each was an open door into the idea of relationship – outside of meetings! I started to learn that walking together on our journey of faith could be enjoyed, not just endured.

Isn’t it interesting that of the many times Jesus says that we should ‘do’ something to one another (love, forgive etc.), only handful of these instructions could be carried out in the setting of a corporate meeting or church service. The great majority need a relational setting or a place of fellowship to achieve God’s practical commands.

HOUSES WHICH MADE A DIFFERENCE

I was travelling between work in the City of London, my parents’ home in Hertfordshire and the church in Dagenham. One family in Becontree, Dagenham, let me stay on their couch whenever I needed to. They were always so welcoming whenever I came by, interested in me and encouraging. It makes a big difference when, although you know you are imposing on someone, you are made to feel that they are