

Come Quickly Dawn

From George Patterson's book *Come Quickly Dawn*
(William Carey Library: 2012)

Become Holy by Nurturing the Fruit of the Spirit with Others' Help

(pp. 89–90, 92)

Julio groaned. "Leaping over Mount Silverado would be easier for me than to be holy. I can't live with purity like you guys do."

"You will soon, son." Jethro clasped his arm. "When you were baptized, you died with Christ to sin and were raised with Him to new life. God is working in you, transforming you into the image of His Son. In His sight, you're a saint."

"A saint! Wow! Kiss my ring, guys! I'm a saint, Pastor Jethro? That's crazy!"

"Scripture says you are. You're a spiritual baby and you still dirty your spiritual diapers—a soiled saint, like all of us! Take heart, Julio; you're growing and God watches your faltering steps with joy. Join a group that makes disciples as Jesus said, and you'll grow faster than that papaya out there."

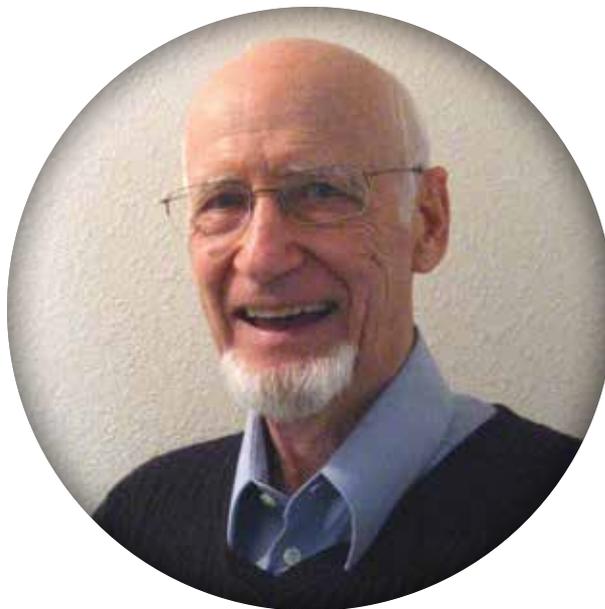
We prayed for Julio and I exhorted, "Let's deal with holiness in small groups just like we're doing now and the Lord will grant victory. There's tremendous power in a cell group that's also a real church."

Colombo asked, "How can a cell group be a real church, Tiger?"

"Just let your group do what God requires of a church. What more can God expect of your group if it follows His orders? Call it what you may, small group, cell, flock, house church, congregation or simply 'Colombo's Cluster.'"

Jethro sighed. "The word 'church' has been so abused! Define it, Tiger."

"We know it means both the Universal Church and a local congregation, but the New Testament also uses



the word for the closely-knit groups that met in homes in a city or area—the regional body. Church history mentions no buildings used solely for Christian worship until nearly three centuries after Christ."

"Are buildings bad?" Colombo asked. "Have you read about that, too, Tiger?"

"No building is intrinsically good or bad; that depends on how people view and use it. Excess institutionalism and professionalism weaken churches, and buildings can reinforce those excesses. Common sense and financial reality forbid forcing all churches to build; it would kill church multiplication in our field."

Roger clapped. "God has given 'professor' Tiger the gift of wisdom!"

"For sure!" Arturo agreed. "Let's name him as a shepherding elder."

"You're joking! Me, a shepherding elder?" A cyclone of doubts assailed me.

"Tiger's new in the Faith!" Pacho sputtered. "You forgot that, Arturo!"

"Does mere time produce spiritual maturity? Or living in the Spirit, obeying Jesus? Tiger's grown more in a few months than most believers do in a lifetime." Pacho pondered this, agreed, and they prayed to commission me there and then.

“In conclusion,” Arturo ordered, “all elders will lead a cell for new believers.”

... “Ahoy!” Julio called to me across the square that night; he and his grandfather Gerardo came bearing a treat—a bowl of berries! I tried some and they were superbly sweet. The old man used them to illustrate how to extend mentoring chains as the apostle Paul told Timothy to do. “Anna planted them and they sent out runners that started new plants. We give the surplus to our neighbors and tell them the gospel.” Gerardo drew a plant in the dust with his toe. “Jesus likened growth in His kingdom to that of plants.” He drew more plants. “Its creeping runners take root, sprout and new plants send out more runners. A church sends out runners, too, with its God-given DNA.”

Julio asked, “Can we multiply churches like this in the villages, Tiger?”

“We can if we train leaders the way Paul told Timothy to do it: one trains others who train still others at the same time. Jethro’s church multiplies that way. Leaders break the chain if they wait until every church can afford an academically trained pastor. There are never enough new leaders then, to keep multiplying.”

Gerardo remarked, “Inflated egos also wipe out the runners.” He rubbed out a plant with his foot. “I’ve seen plenty of ‘em! Proud leaders won’t share real authority with apprentices. They got to run things, loathe to let the work grow beyond their control. They just want their own flock to grow forever bigger and start no new ones. They’d win hundreds more to Jesus if they did.”

After I ate the last berry, Gerardo clasped my shoulder. “Tiger, I’ve been watching you. God will use you to extend His work. He gave you the vision. Others are too busy griping to step out, but you will surely lead them out of that darkness.”

They left and I puzzled over Gerardo’s prophecy that I’d extend God’s work.

Tiger Shuns Popular Trends that Lead Churches into Mediocrity

(pp 280–283)

We returned on foot to Arenas to buy oil, and Fred looked like he was ready to cut and run back to the States. Such woes were routine for Gadget and me,

and Roy enjoyed the adventure, but I pitied Fred; he was sweating in spite of the cool air, clearly unused to physical exertion.

Back at the car, the oxen’s owner came to say, “You gentlemen are soaked and shivering. Stay in our house tonight. You can’t cross the river yet, anyway.”

Ernesto’s two-room house had mud walls whitewashed with lime, a roof of palm fronds and glassless windows with rustic wooden shutters. His wife roasted coffee mixed with corn and raw cane sugar on an outside, earthen stove until the mixture was almost ash; the process was too smoky to do inside. The potent brew penetrated to our bones, and we stopped shivering. I was grateful, but Fred spit the black stimulant back into the cup. “Bitter!”

“Add sugar, man!” Ernesto laughed. “No one can take that stuff plain!” He shaved sugar from a brown block into Fred’s cup.

“You call that sugar? It smells like molasses.”

“The best!” Ernesto pointed at an apparatus outside. “We squeeze cane with that ñongoté, and then boil it down in a round mold.”

“Ñongoté?” queried Roy. “How does it work?”

“I’ll show you; the rain’s quit.” Ernesto sat bouncing on the end of a pole while his ten-year-old daughter Rina inserted cane stalks under the pliers-like lever, squeezing out the sweet juice, and we all drank the raw beverage. To warm us, Ernesto built a small fire on the mud floor in the middle of the room. We tried to sleep on the floor but even with our exhaustion, we couldn’t ignore the floor’s unforgiving hardness, the smoke that stung our eyes and odorous emanations from an obese sow that accompanied us. Fred griped, “You’d think they’d at least get some decent furniture.”

“They have what they can afford,” I replied. “Poverty’s extreme in these villages, and yet they share with us what they have. Be grateful, sir.”

Roy affirmed, “I’m grateful; such hospitality to strangers warms my heart.”

The next morning Rina petted the pig and boasted, “She’s mine!”

"I'll buy her from you," Gadget teased. "She'll make tasty bacon."

"No!"

"I'll pay to you ten times the value of a big pig, Señorita."

"No!"

"Let's swap, then, Rina. My luxury car out there for your fat sow."

"No!"

Ernesto's wife brought beans and tortillas. There were too few chairs for all of us, so we took turns eating. Rina watched for a while, fascinated by Fred's red hair and freckles. "You're awfully pale. You been sick? Your skin's ugly."

"Rina!" her mother scolded, "Don't be rude! That's the natural color of the gringos. Their skin lacks normal pigment, and they can't help it."

"Maybe if they'd eat chocolate or licorice..."

"That's enough Rina. Finish your tortillas."

I told Ernesto, "We follow Jesus Christ, and it's our practice to pray in His name for folks' needs. Is there something you'd like us to pray for?"

"Oh, yes! Our corn. Animals got into it and ruined half of it. Tapirs, maybe. And my aunt who lives in the next village up the river is down with malaria."

We prayed for these, and asked God to bless each family member; Ernesto thanked us heartily. Fred muttered to Roy, "I'm surprised how they welcomed your prayer so readily; it didn't seem at all unusual to them. Most of the Americans I've been around would've been uncomfortable."

"Not here, Fred, and not in most of the world's major societies. They've escaped Western rationalism; Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and even many Communists respond readily to an offer to pray for them or their families."

I asked Ernesto, "Do you pray with your family?"

"No. We're rather out of touch with God. Haven't been to a church for years; it's a bit far to town. Your prayers

are different from what I've heard in mass. You pray like you're talking right to God, like to a friend you know."

"I used to find prayer hard; my sins made it unpleasant to talk to God. But Roy here and his family led me into the Presence of Christ, and I discovered His forgiveness. He died on the cross for us, as you know, rose from the dead and promised followers forgiveness and new life. He called it being 'born again.'"

"I've heard that, but never understood it."

"He gives us a new, loving heart, a desire to obey Him joyfully and eternal life as part of His heavenly family. He'll give you and your family the same assurance. We don't earn this blessing by doing good works; it's all by His grace."

To illustrate grace, Roy related the parable of the Prodigal Son and other Bible stories. The entire family listened, their eyes reflecting intense interest. Fred started to expound the doctrine of salvation in an abstract way; those eyes lost their luster, and Rina followed her mother away to do chores.

The next morning Ernesto was all smiles when I offered to return another day to talk again, pray together, and have worship with his family and friends.

"We'd appreciate that very much, Tiger. Most of our neighbors, too."

On our way again to Bat Haven, Fred remarked, "You were rushing things, Tiger, to offer to have worship with them on your next trip."

"They'll be ready for it, and we might baptize them." Fred looked shocked at this, and I explained, "Where the Holy Spirit brings families and social networks to Christ, things can move lightning fast compared to where a traditional church like ours once was demands a slower speed. Don't doubt the work of God in those folks' hearts. If you do, such doubts become contagious and discouraging."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Roy. "I feel like I've stepped into heaven!"

"You're blind then," Fred growled. "I feel like I've fallen into hell!"

This dampened conversation until Fred remarked, “Few Americans are that receptive to the gospel, and I wonder why not.”

“Some are,” Roy replied, “especially among the poor. Fred, in America you’ve been trying to push ‘camels’ from the middle class through the needle’s eye, as Jesus put it. Rationalists say religion is for the poor and uneducated, and in a sense, they’re right. God wants to save everybody, but the poor respond quicker; Jesus said it would be that way. Poverty helps people face reality and trust in God; wealth lures people to trust in themselves.”

I asked Roy, “Is that why God allows so much poverty?”

“Widespread movements have always begun with the poorer working class, Tiger. It trickles up; poor believers’ children become the next middle class.”

“Did you notice how much easier it was to talk with Ernesto and his family about the Lord after we’d eaten in his home? Some Christians try to theologize too soon, before the Holy Spirit has awakened seekers’ thirst for God, and they act superior because they know Christ and theology; this deters seekers. The apostles never witnessed in a theological way; they simply related the Good News—the historical facts—and let the Holy Spirit convict and convince.”

“You dealt with the entire family as a unit,” Roy said. “Most Americans tend to view salvation as an individual affair, and aim for one to make a decision on his own, to receive Jesus as his personal savior.”

“You said ‘decision’ and ‘personal’—two enemies of evangelism; Scripture uses neither word in connection with it. Mere decisions rarely include repentance; most folks who merely make decisions fall away.

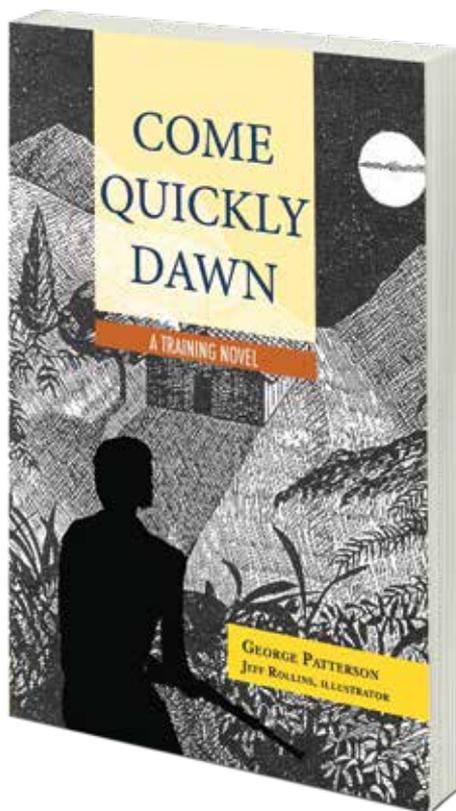
Faith is personal only in that one’s heart consciously embraces it, and not simply because one is a member of a social group; the word is fatal for a movement if we add the Western spin to mean private. God doesn’t see a person as an isolated individual, but part of a network. The apostles dealt with the networks of the jailer, Cornelius, Lydia, and Crispus. People repent more readily along with their friends and kin.”

“Very true,” Roy replied, “now that I think about it. I came here to learn.”

“Well, I didn’t come as a pupil,” Fred grumbled. “I came to start churches.”

I told him, “If you’re looking for neglected fields, then you’ll have to travel a ways from Bat Haven. We already have churches in the villages nearby.”

“So you’ve got the area all sewed up, have you?” Fred sneered.



Folks smiled and waved as we drove slowly through a mountain village, and Roy waved back. “This culture fascinates me. It’s delightful, except the poverty.”

“It doesn’t impress me,” growled Fred. “I’m going to change things.” The stark contrast between the two Americans stirred anxiety in my mind.

“Wow!” Roy exclaimed. The sun goes down fast in these high mountains!”

“The brief twilight is not due to the altitude,” I explained. “It’s because we’re near the equator where the sun does not cross over the horizon at a slow slant as you’re used to in the north; it swoops almost straight down. The morning’s the same; dawn, once it makes up its stubborn mind to emerge, leaps up boldly!”

