



*Experiencing the Depths of Christian Community*

A RENOVARÉ RESOURCE FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL



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# Foreword

The shallowness of our age chokes the roots that feed our life with God.

Shallow attention.

Shallow wonder.

Shallow connections with others.

This may be our cultural inheritance, but we were made for depth. And we can still find it.

Unfurling into resurrection life requires rooting ourselves in disciplines and daily life, letting Jesus shape our hearts in solitude and—especially—in community.

Any serious effort to follow Jesus must be grounded in fellowship with other disciples. To be in Christ is to be *in* the gathered Body of which he is the Head. Not just abstractly or “in the great by-and-by,” but planted in a particular place and a particular group where we can be formed *by*, *alongside*, and *for the sake of* other people.

Rootedness can mean a lot of things. This booklet is designed to help us consider ways to root our communion with the Lord God in relationships with other people. Maybe you will be inspired to form a new spiritual friendship, to give church another chance, or to take the next step in that ongoing movement out of “the dungeon of self,” as George MacDonald puts it, and into the bond of love.

If there are depths of community you long to experience, may God meet you in your desire and lead you further in.

Grace Pouch

*Content Manager*

# Introduction

## A CHORUS OF VOICES

Wisdom about life with God is a shared inheritance. With that in mind, the voices included here represent different traditions, cultures, and expressions of Christian community.

## TO BE READ IN COMMUNITY

Following each reading there are questions to spark group discussion. Consider finding a group of Christ-followers who will read alongside you and join you for thoughtful conversation and prayer. Listening to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to our own hearts can help us pay attention to God's voice. What do you hear?

## GROUNDED IN ONE PURPOSE

The Renovaré Covenant is a helpful vision of how to trust Jesus and follow him into the Kingdom of God: *In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend, I will seek continual renewal through Spiritual Exercises, Spiritual Gifts, and Acts of Service.*

Community grounds each aspect of Kingdom life expressed in the Renovaré Covenant. For example, without one another we have trouble knowing who God is. Recollecting God's character and goodness is foundational to a relationship with the Lord, and we need one another in order to remember well. Marva Dawn explains:

One of the best habits that we have had in the church for hundreds of years is the set of phrases, "The Lord be with you. And also with you." We say these phrases in our worship services to keep in mind that we are gathered here as a community together. You and I have been grafted on to the Jewish roots of Christ's first disciples. We get to share in the understandings of the people of God who

know Who our God is, the great “I am,” the LORD, the King of the Universe.

If this is the sort of God we have, then we certainly have nothing to fear. That is why Paul can say, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” Some of you might be thinking, “I just can’t rejoice all the time.” But let me remind you that this practice is not one you have to do all by yourself, though when you yourself are able to rejoice, it will be enormously beneficial.

It would be better for us if we would express the original Greek in the colloquial, “Rejoice, y’all.” Our English language doesn’t convey the plurality of the verb. God is not commanding, “Rejoice as an individual;” God is urging, “Rejoice as a people.” We rejoice together.

One of the reasons we need to gather for worship is because our own expressions of thanks are too shallow, too flimsy. We need the whole Body of the people of God. If I’m ill and can’t remember what the joy of the Gospel is, you can remember for me; you can stand next to me and sing these wonderful hymns of the faith and remind me of what our God is like.

We gather together, and we are helped by each other to do this rejoicing, to do this thanksgiving, because we are part of a people. We have lost our Jewish sense that we are God’s *people*, not persons—that we are part of a whole Body of people who remember together who God is. Since we know this God, our lives are changed.<sup>1</sup>

“Part of a whole Body of people”—who together hope and remember, celebrate and mourn, encourage and challenge, sing and hold silence. As D.T. Niles writes, we “belong together on the road of salvation.” What follows are some of the ways we can grow as disciples of Jesus by experiencing the depths of Christian community.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Marva Dawn’s *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 217-222. Used with permission.







## IN Neighbor-Love

### GEORGE MACDONALD (1824-1905)

George MacDonald was a Scottish pastor, teacher, and author. As a young pastor in his 20s, MacDonald preached boldly about the need for social and spiritual reform in the Victorian era, but his dearly held belief in the extravagant grace of God towards all cost MacDonald a decrease in salary and ultimately induced him to leave formal church ministry after 28 months. MacDonald devoted the rest of his life to writing for children and adults, teaching English Literature, and investing in his family and friendships. C.S. Lewis would later praise MacDonald's novel *Phantastes* as being essential in his conversion from atheism to Christianity. Combining prophetic imagination and theology with a seamless purity that few have been able to mimic since, MacDonald's life and work reflect a God of beauty, relational warmth, and mystery who wants to be found by us. In the piece shared here, MacDonald shares wise counsel on how to recognize in every neighbor "a beautiful brother."

### THE LAW OF LOVE

*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* Matthew 12:31

The original here quoted by our Lord is to be found in the words of God to Moses, "*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord*" (Lev. 19:18). Our Lord never thought of being original. The older the saying the better, if it utters the truth he wants to utter. In him it becomes fact: The *Word* was made *flesh*. And so, in the wondrous

meeting of extremes, the words he spoke were no more words, but spirit and life.

I am certain that it is impossible to keep the law towards one's neighbor except one loves him. The law itself is infinite, reaching to such delicacies of action that the man who tries most will be the man most aware of defeat. We are not made for law, but for love. Love is law, because it is infinitely more than law. It is of an altogether higher region than law—is, in fact, the creator of law.

Had it not been for love, not one of the *shall-nots* of the law would have been uttered. True, once uttered, they show themselves in the form of justice, yea, even in the inferior and worldly forms of prudence and self-preservation; but it was love that spoke them first. Were there no love in us, what sense of justice could we have? I do not say it is *conscious* love that breeds justice, but I do say that without love in our nature justice would never be born. For I do not call that justice which consists only in a sense of *our own* rights.

What man, for instance, who loves not his neighbor and yet wishes to keep the law, will dare be confident that never by word, look, tone, gesture, silence, will he bear false witness against that neighbor? What man can judge his neighbor aright save him whose love makes him refuse to judge him? Therefore are we told to love, and not judge. It is the sole justice of which we are capable, and that perfected will comprise all justice.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

“Who is my neighbor?” said the lawyer. And the Lord taught him that every one to whom he could be or for whom he could do anything was his neighbor, therefore, that each of the human race, as he comes within the touch of one tentacle of our nature, is our neighbor. Which of the shall-nots of the law is illustrated in the tale? Not one. The love that is more than law, and renders its breach impossible, lives in the endless story, coming out in active kindness, that is, the recognition of kin,

of *kind*, of nighness, of *neighborhood*; yea, in tenderness and loving-kindness—the Samaritan-heart akin to the Jewish-heart, the Samaritan hands neighbors to the Jewish wounds.

*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

The mystery of individuality and consequent relation is deep as the beginnings of humanity, and the questions thence arising can be solved only by him who has, practically, at least, solved the holy necessities resulting from his origin. In God alone can man meet man. In him alone the converging lines of existence touch and cross not. When the mind of Christ, the life of the Head, courses through that atom which is a man within the slowly revivifying body, when he is alive too, then the love of the brothers is there as conscious life. From Christ through the neighbors comes the life that makes him a part of the body.

It *is* possible to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our Lord *never* spoke hyperbolically, although, indeed, that is the supposition on which many unconsciously interpret his words, in order to be able to persuade themselves that they believe them. Yet there are mingled processes in the attainment of this final result.

### OUT OF SELF, INTO LOVE

The whole system of divine education as regards the relation of man and man, has for its end that a man should love his neighbor as himself. It is not a lesson that he can learn by itself, or a duty the obligation of which can be shown by argument... The whole constitution of human society exists for the express end, I say, of teaching the two truths by which man lives, Love to God and Love to Man.

What I want to speak of now, with regard to the second great commandment, is the relation of brotherhood and sisterhood. He who loves not his brother for deeper reasons than those of a common parentage will cease to love him at all. The love that enlarges not its borders, that is not ever spreading and including, and deepening, will contract, shrivel, decay, die. That we are the sons and the daughters of

God born from his heart, the outcoming offspring of his love, is a bond closer than all other bonds in one.

A man must not choose his neighbor; he must take the neighbor that God sends him. The neighbor is just the man who is next to you at the moment, the man with whom any business has brought you in contact. In him, whoever he be, lies, hidden or revealed, a beautiful brother.

Thus will love spread and spread in wider and stronger pulses till the whole human race will be to the man sacredly lovely. Drink-debased, vice-defeated, pride-puffed, wealth-bollen, vanity-smearred, they will yet be brothers, yet be sisters, yet be God-born neighbors. Any rough-hewn semblance of humanity will at length be enough to move the disciple to reverence and affection. It is harder for some to learn thus than for others. There are many whose first impulse is ever to repel and not to receive. But learn they may, and learn they must.

This love of our neighbor is the only door out of the dungeon of self.

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. MacDonald defines neighbor as “just the man who is next to you at the moment, the man with whom any business has brought you in contact.” How would you define neighbor?
2. “Had it not been for love, not one of the *shall-nots* of the law would have been uttered.” How does love being at the root of the law affect how we interpret God’s “shall-not” commandments? And where does Jesus’ saying, “I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it” (Matt. 5:17) fit into this?



## IN Worship

### RICHARD J. FOSTER (1942- )

Born in New Mexico in 1942, Richard J. Foster spent most of his growing-up years in Southern California, where he became friends with a group of Quaker youth. He came to faith in Christ in that small Friends gathering. As a young pastor, Richard recognized a worrisome phenomenon among many modern-day Christians—they had no vision for how to grow in Christlikeness. Mining the treasures of classic Christian literature, Richard learned to practice the spiritual disciplines. He began to share them with his congregation and, seeing how much these unfamiliar means of grace helped people to connect with God and grow in grace, he penned the book *Celebration of Discipline*. The piece shared here comes from the part of the book on shared or corporate disciplines for a with-God life.

### KOINONIA

A vital feature of the early Christian community was their sense of being “gathered” together in worship. First, they were gathered in the sense that they actually met as a group, and second, as they met, they were gathered into a unity of spirit that transcended their individualism.

In contrast to the religions of the East, the Christian faith has strongly emphasized corporate worship. Even under highly dangerous circumstances the early community was urged not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25). The Epistles speak frequently of the believing community as the “body of Christ.” As human life is unthinkable without head, arms, and legs, so it was

unthinkable for those Christians to live in isolation from one another. Martin Luther witnesses to the fact that “at home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition, when the people of God meet together, there often comes a sense of being “gathered” into one mind, becoming of one accord (Phil. 3:15). Thomas Kelly writes: “A quickening Presence pervades us, breaking down some part of the special privacy and isolation of our individual lives and blending our spirits within a superindividual Life and Power. An objective, dynamic Presence enfolds us all, nourishes our souls, speaks glad, unutterable comfort with us, and quickens us in depths that had before been slumbering.”<sup>3</sup>

When we are truly gathered into worship, things occur that could never occur alone. There is the psychology of the group to be sure, and yet it is so much more; it is divine interpenetration. There is what the biblical writers called *koinonia*, deep inward fellowship in the power of the Spirit. This experience far transcends *esprit de corps*. It is not in the least dependent upon homogeneous units or even knowing information about one another’s lives.

There comes a divine melting of our separateness. In the power of the one Spirit we become “wrapped in a sense of unity and of Presence such as quiets all words and enfolds [us] within an unspeakable calm and interknittedness within a vaster life.”<sup>4</sup>

### CULTIVATING HOLY EXPECTANCY

When more than one or two come into public worship with a holy expectancy, it can change the atmosphere of a room. People who enter harried and distracted are drawn quickly into a sense of the silent Presence. Hearts and minds are lifted upward. The air becomes charged with expectancy.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Steere, *Prayer and Worship* (New York: Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1942), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *The Eternal Promise* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 72.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, *The Eternal Promise*, 74.

Here is a practical handle to put on this idea. Live throughout the week as an heir of the kingdom, listening for his voice, obeying his word. Since you have heard his voice throughout the week, you know that you will hear his voice as you gather for public worship. Enter the service ten minutes early. Lift your heart in adoration to the King of glory. Contemplate his majesty, glory, and tenderness as revealed in Jesus Christ. Picture the marvelous vision that Isaiah had of the Lord “high and lifted up” or the magnificent revelation that John had of Christ with eyes “like a flame of fire” and voice “like the sound of many waters” (Isa. 6; Rev. 1). Invite the real Presence to be manifest.

Next, lift into the light of Christ the pastor and other worship leaders. Picture the Shekinah of God’s radiance surrounding them. Inwardly release them to speak the truth boldly in the power of the Lord.

When people begin to enter the room, glance around until you see someone who needs your intercessory work. Perhaps their shoulders are drooped, or they seem a bit sad. Lift them into the glorious, refreshing light of his Presence. See the burden tumbling from their shoulders as it did from Pilgrim’s in Bunyan’s allegory. Hold them as a special intention throughout the service. If only a few in any given congregation will do this, it will deepen the worship experience of all.

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever tried entering worship in the way Foster describes—actively praying for the ministers and for those who are gathered? Do any of his suggestions for cultivating holy expectancy feel like an invitation you would like to try?
2. What is the difference between showing up for worship in a church building and belonging to a community of Jesus’ disciples? What does belonging demand of us that attending a service or event does not? What gifts does belonging offer?



## IN Transformation

### VERNON JOHNS (1892-1965)

Known as the father of the Civil Rights Movement, Vernon Johns was an ordained Baptist minister who served in Virginia and later in Alabama. He was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s predecessor as pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama and was sought for his wise counsel by both King, Jr. and Civil Rights leader Ralph Abernathy. Johns was a passionate and creative preacher with a brilliant mind. As a young man, he taught himself Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and German, and he could recite long passages from the Bible, including Romans in its entirety. When he was turned down by Oberlin Theological Seminary, he protested the decision. The Dean handed him the scripture in Greek, and Johns proceeded to read it with such fluency that the decision was reversed. The excerpt shared here comes from Vernon Johns's sermon "Transfigured Moments," the first piece by a black preacher to be published in the *Best Sermons* series.

### A TRANSFORMING VISION

*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Matthew 17:1-4*



*It is good to be present when the ordinary is transformed;* when the dull plain garments of a peasant become shining white, and the obscure “mountain place, apart,” comes into the gaze of centuries. It is good to see the commonplace illumined and the glory of the common people revealed.

On the Mount of Transfiguration there is no representative of wealth, social rank or official position. The place could boast in the way of population only four poor men, members of a despised race, and of the remnant of a subjected and broken nation. But it is here, instead of Jerusalem or Rome, that the voice of God is heard.

It is here, instead of Mount Moriah, where the mighty temple stands, that the cloud of glory hovers. Out there where a carpenter and three fishermen keep vigil with the promise of a new day, God is a living Reality and life is charged with meaning and radiance. Out there in a deserted place, the meek and lowly are enhaloed.

There are two ways in which this transfiguring of the ordinary is specially needed. The lowly ones of earth need to experience this transformation. The great majority of our lives must be lived apart from any elaborate or jeweled settings; must plod along without any spectacular achievements. We ordinary people, then, must learn how to set the scraggy bushes of the wilderness ablaze with glory and make the paths that we tread, under the pressure of duty, like Holy Ground!

In the humblest routine, we must discover our task as a part of the transforming enterprise of the Heavenly Father. The laborer that toils on a country road must know himself as the builder of a highway to a Christian civilization. The cobbler may be a mere cobbler, or he may transform his occupation and be a foundation man in the Kingdom of Christ. Make tents if we must, but we will illumine the old task with a radiant new heart, and, with our tent making, make a shining new earth. If toil will be confined to the same old field, keep a land of promise shining in the distance and call down angels to sing until the drab turns golden. Let us light up the commonplace and make the ordinary radiant. Let us make seamless peasant garments shine like the sun.

Second, those who think themselves the favored ones of Earth need a transforming vision of life among the lowly. There is no warrant in the theory and practice of Jesus for dull and frigid doctrines of “lesser breeds without the law.”<sup>5</sup> If the life of Jesus means anything, it means implicit faith in the universal capacity of man for the highest character and worth.

To this end, the doors to the kingdom of the Best are to be thrown open to all the points of the compass, that men may “come from the North and the South, the East and the West to sit down with Abraham and Isaac, in the Kingdom of God.” Humanity that has climbed to places of social and economic authority must learn how to trace the rainbow tint over the life of the lowly, and to interpret the swelling and ferment at the bottom of society as a healthy and beautiful essay of one’s fellow men in the direction of fuller life. It is a heart strangely unChristlike that cannot thrill with joy when the least of the children of men begin to pull in the direction of the stars.

#### AGLOW WITH THE GOOD LIFE

*It is good to be in the presence of persons who can kindle for us fine, heroic living.*

The population on the Mount of Transfiguration was very small, but it was tremendously significant. Jesus, Moses and Elijah! In the presence of personality like this, men can kindle their torches and go forth in life as bearers of light and heat. Humanity needs the contagion of lofty spirits. Humanity needs contact with persons who are aglow with the good life.

We practice brotherhood within carefully restricted areas. We forgive other people’s enemies. We carry a Bible but not a cross. Instead of the Second Mile, we go a few yards of the first and then wonder that Christian goals are not realized.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase “lesser breeds without the law” appears in Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Recessional,” composed in 1897 for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

“O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” When we lift ourselves, at least from the ruin and entanglements of our diluted and piecemeal righteousness, it will be under the leadership of persons for whom righteousness was a consuming and holy fire, instead of a mere lukewarm and foggy something.

It is such leadership, such righteous dynamics as this that we find in the presence of Jesus and Moses and Elijah. “We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And of his fullness we have all received.” You can kindle a flame like that! It is the full receptacle that overflows, spreading its content to neighboring borders. It is a flame vital enough not to be extinguished by a slight jostle.

“It is good for us to be here.”

#### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In his interpretation of the phrase, “It is good for us to be here,” Johns speaks of *here* not as a physical location, but as presence with others. Who are the ordinary fellow learners among whom God has placed you? Who are the “lofty spirits”—leaders by example—who kindle your heart for God and the good life? When you are “here” with these people, how is it good for your soul?
2. Does your Christian fellowship include those at the bottom of society? At the top?
3. Johns says: *The great majority of our lives must be lived apart from any elaborate or jeweled settings... We ordinary people, then, must learn how to set the scraggy bushes of the wilderness ablaze with glory and make the paths that we tread, under the pressure of duty, like Holy Ground.* How might you honor the ordinary moments of life and the people around you as opportunities to experience God as a living Reality?

Excerpted from “Transfigured Moments,” a sermon delivered in 1925 at Court Street Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia. Originally published in *Best Sermons 1926*, Vol. 1, ed. Joseph Fort Newton. Public domain. [www.bestsermons.net/1926/](http://www.bestsermons.net/1926/)



## IN Believing the Best

**AMY CARMICHAEL (1867-1951)**

Born to an upper class family in Northern Ireland, Amy Carmichael began her ministry as an inner city missionary to working class women from Belfast's mills. After attending the Keswick Convention, 27-year-old Amy became a full time missionary to Asia and never returned home. She moved to India, where she founded the Dohnavur Fellowship—a place for women and children rescued from sex trafficking to live as family with one another. Amy was the “amma,” Tamil for mother, to hundreds of children here, and she also founded a religious order called Sisters of the Common Life. From her deep family-like attachment to the Dohnavur Fellowship Amy Carmichael gained wisdom about protecting the bonds of love when conflicts stir up unloving thoughts, shared here as a challenge for all of us as we move deeper into authentic community.

### TENDERNESS IN JUDGMENT

*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

We are trusted to spread the spirit of love. Tenderness in judgment, the habit of thinking the best of one another, unwillingness to believe evil, grief if we are forced to do so, eagerness to believe good, joy over one recovered from any slip or fall, unselfish gladness in another's joys,

sorrow in another's sorrow, readiness to do anything to help another entirely irrespective of self—all this and much more is included in that wonderful word love.

If love weakens among us, if it ever becomes possible to tolerate the least shadow of an unloving thought, our fellowship will begin to perish. Unlove is deadly. It is a cancer. It may kill slowly but it always kills in the end. Let us fear it, fear to give room to it as we should fear to nurse a cobra. It is deadlier than any cobra. And just as one minute drop of the almost invisible cobra venom spreads swiftly all over the body of one into whom it has been injected, so one drop of the gall of unlove in my heart or yours, however unseen, has a terrible power of spreading all through our family, for we are one body—we are parts of one another. If one member suffers loss, all suffer loss. Not one of us lives to herself.

### TRUSTING ONE ANOTHER

We owe it to the younger ones to teach them the truth that united prayer is impossible, unless there be loyal love. If unlove be discovered anywhere, stop everything and put it right, if possible at once. Often these misunderstandings are about the merest trifles. You let them grow and grow till your whole day is shadowed. This delights the devil, but it terribly injures your own soul, and it sorely grieves the Spirit of Love. Also, and this is serious, while you are yielding to such feelings you are unconsciously sowing seeds of unlove and distrust in other hearts—in the children's hearts. These seeds will spring to life and grow up to your sorrow one day.

Why don't you keep the Law of the Family and go straight to the one who has (you think) done something wrong? You can't, do you say? You can. Love will find a way.... Some of you remember how in the old days if a Prayer Day meeting was lifeless and we could not get anywhere, I used to stop, and we scattered, and any who were not "in" love met somewhere, perhaps just for a minute under a tree—and then the Spirit led us into real prayer. We are too big a Family for that to be possible now, but it is as important now as ever that all should be clear, no one out of love with any other one, no one doubting anyone.

## LOVING FRANKNESS

O my children, if only you would make up your minds never to doubt the love of another sister or brother in Christ, but always to think the best, to take the best for granted, and never admit an unkind thought in your heart, how happy, how heavenly life would be. I could not endure it if for one minute I doubted any one of you. It would be like the sting of a wasp in my soul. Why do you endure it? Why do some of you even encourage that wasp to sting? I beseech you to have done with this. Refuse it. Hate it. It may seem like a trifle, but it is of hell.

We are all human. We may forget things we should remember. A message may be undelivered. There may be some mistake or delay about food or some such trifle. Take it as a mistake, not as something intended. I remember once weeks of unhappiness because a certain curry was badly cooked—the cause could have been discovered in five minutes if only there had been loving frankness, and speaking *to* instead of speaking *of* the one who made that curry. Such things are absurd, but they are too sad for laughter, for they do harm. They wound love.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. “You can’t, do you say? You can,” Carmichael assures her readers that awkwardness is no excuse for avoiding frank discussion and reconciliation. How would you feel if someone approached you about something you did or said that hurt their feelings?
2. Amy knew that the little ones in her fellowship would be formed by what they saw adult members doing. What would a child in your own congregation observe, in public or behind closed doors, about the way your church members:
  - deal with conflicts among themselves?
  - speak about people of other faiths?
  - treat enemies—those who pose a threat, say to your property or way of doing things, who disagree with you, or who are simply difficult to put up with?

From Frank Houghton, *Amy Carmichael of Dobnavur* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1979), 349-350.  
Used with permission.



## IN Solidarity

### D.T. NILES (1908-1970)

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles was an author, ecumenical leader, and evangelist in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). As a young man, Niles participated in the Student Christian Movement for India, Burma, and Ceylon and became deeply invested in ecumenical Christian cooperation. While serving as president of the Methodist Church in Ceylon he was also actively engaged in Church unity initiatives. He founded the ecumenical East Asia Christian Conference and served as general secretary of the National Christian Council of Ceylon. In 1948, D.T. Niles was chosen to be the keynote speaker at the first assembly of the World Council of Churches. He later became one of the “world presidents” for this dynamic Council. His ultimate joy and passion was evangelism. Niles famously described the role of the evangelist as “one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.”

### IN CHRIST

The phrase that Paul uses, to describe the Christian experience, is the phrase “in Christ.” Christ is not a person in the past tense only. He is present Lord, and the Lord who is to come. To be “in Christ,” therefore, is to live by all that He has done, to be involved in all that He is doing, and to prepare for all that He will do.

“Let us give thanks to the Father,” says Paul (Col. 1:12-14), “who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to

the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Redemption is *in* Christ. It is an abiding experience. What are the consequences of this indivisibility of man’s inheritance in Christ ?

### ACCEPTING THE WORLD

First, the Gospel is not truly proclaimed where the proclamation does not make the Kingdom of God the explicit context within which an individual is invited to accept the Gospel. Since there is no other name given by which men can be saved except the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12), no man should be invited to accept Jesus Christ without, at the same time and in the same act, accepting the world for which Jesus died and to which Jesus belongs as its Lord and Saviour. If there were many ways of obtaining salvation, it would be possible for a man to choose a way on which he can go alone or only with those whom he chooses. But, since there is only one way, all humanity is bound together by this circumstance. They belong together on the road of salvation.

There are many Christians for whom the natural way of speaking about the issue of salvation is to say that one is saved by accepting Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and that thereafter one lives responsibly in the world. It does not seem to me to be a mere quibble to insist that the primary act must involve the awareness that one does not really accept Jesus as personal Savior unless that acceptance is informed from the beginning as to who He is. He is Lord of the world and Lord of the Church, and any one who accepts Him accepts Him only to the extent that he accepts to be implicated in the exercise of Christ’s double Lordship.

### MORE OF LIFE SHARED

Second, salvation is truly proclaimed only when its indivisibility is effectively demonstrated. Where it is not manifest that Christians share an indivisible gift in Christ, their proclamation of the Gospel is already mutilated.



The basic issue here is not only that of the unity of the Church. It is even more pointedly the issue of the unity of each congregation. Sunday worship in most churches today, in East and West, is not the activity of a family. Discrete individuals gather together in one place to worship God. This has its own validity, but a worshiping congregation must possess a community life which is both secular as well as religious. It is this need that is driving Christians to create what have come to be called “para-parishes” where the secular sharing of common life, whether in terms of a common occupation or a common neighborhood, provides the basis for congregational unity.

The Evangelism Department of the World Council of Churches, in one of its monthly letters, puts the matter thus:

This question of the witness to the Gospel of the corporate life of a congregation becomes acute when it faces the prospect of opening its doors to the outsider. The outsider is already frequently a sharer in group life in the secular world: a labor union or a work group or a teenage gang, or a neighborhood athletic club. There he finds the reward of fellowship ; he is known by name, is accorded the dignity of being permitted to speak and to be listened to. Ultimately, to be sure, none of these fellowships may satisfy his deepest needs. Rootlessness, and the fate of the wanderer, and suffering the loss of personal freedom in subjection to the power structure of a technological society, hover in the background. But every congregation is called upon to become a fellowship so clearly witnessing to Christian brotherhood that it can witness as from community to community.... What has the fellowship of Christians in a congregation to offer by way of witness that can differentiate it from community life in the secular world?

### **REAL BELONGING**

The issue is plain (is it not ?)... Love is the very method of inheritance. It is the way by which one enters into and abides in the world-embracing love of God. “The man who loves his brother lives and moves in the

light.” “We know that we have crossed the frontier from death to life because we do love our brothers” (1 John 2:10; 3:14).

Love is the way by which one enters into and lives in the light. It is the way by which one passes from the sphere of death into the sphere of life. It is the way by which one comes to the knowledge that this transition from darkness to light, from death to life, has taken place in one’s life....

The Church and the churches cannot live their life or fulfill their mission without effectively expressing the Church’s solidarity with the world as well as with fellow Christians. In both these spheres there is necessity for common action and also for common life; for programs of work that involve cooperation and collaboration, as well as for social structures within which there can be real belonging to one another.

#### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Take a minute to think about your own understanding of Jesus Christ as “personal” savior. Was this invitation communicated to you as a shared inheritance in God’s kingdom or as an individual journey with individual goals and outcomes?
2. In your faith community, are divisions between people more or less prominent than in the secular communities you take part in? Are people given “the dignity of being permitted to speak and to be listened to”? Do people take care of each other with thoughtfulness and generosity as well as they do in secular community groups?



Any serious effort to follow Jesus must be grounded in community. To be in Christ is to be in the gathered Body of which he is the Head. Not just abstractly or “in the great by-and-by,” but planted in a particular place and a particular group where we can be formed by, alongside, and for the sake of other people.

Rootedness can mean a lot of things. This booklet is designed to help us consider ways to root our communion with the Lord God in relationships with other people, drawing on insights from:

- Marva Dawn
- George MacDonald
- Richard J. Foster
- Vernon Johns
- Amy Carmichael
- D.T. Niles

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RENOVARÉ is a Christian nonprofit that models, resources, and advocates fullness of life with God experienced, by grace, through the spiritual practices of Jesus and of the historical Church. Christian in commitment, ecumenical in breadth, and international in scope, Renovaré helps people in becoming more like Jesus through print and online resources, gatherings and retreats, and educational initiatives like the Renovaré Institute.

