

Chapter 3

Soup Kitchens and Discipleship Houses

My First Encounter with the Demonic

John and I decided to follow the model we had seen in the States by opening a soup kitchen in the basement of a four-story building located in the commercial Zone 1 area.

We had connected with a couple who had been reaching out to women given to prostitution along the railroad tracks in a pretty rough area of town close by.

Several days into an extended fast, as I was building benches alone late one night, when a street man entered, and asked for money. His penetrating eyes vibrated with evil, and when I refused, he became very angry.

A demonic spirit took over his being. “You haven’t been tested yet. I will be waiting for you around every corner with a knife to kill you!”

“May I pray for you?” I walked toward him, but he fled up the stairs and out the door. In the moment, I was bold and courageous, but as soon as he left, I was filled with fear and decided to leave. As I stepped outside into the dark and empty street, looking in every direction, I locked the doors, and walked cautiously toward my car. I drove to the Christian couple’s house to share what had happened. They prayed for me, and my heart was restored.

We persevered, and opened the doors to the soup kitchen. We preached a message every day, and followed it with a meal. Once the word was out, we had a full house. We hired one of the girls who had been saved out of the couple’s ministry to prepare the food and run the kitchen.

Second Cook

A few weeks after opening the doors, our cook’s best friend sat with me and told me about her life. She had been involved in using and selling drugs from a very young age. She had been to prison numerous times and was tortured in many ways by prison guards, including the use of electrical shock. Her story reminded me of those who ran with Charles Manson. She had been involved in many robberies and often severely injured her victims. But the tears began to flow as she heard the good news and believed she could be forgiven.

She eventually became cook number two and was one of the brightest, most joyful Christians you could ever meet. She loved Jesus, and others, like few I have known – those who

are forgiven much, love much.

The day she received her first paycheck, she began to weep. The first thought that came to my mind was the amount. We could only afford minimum wage, which was about twenty-five dollars every two weeks in those days. “I’m sorry it is so little, but for now it is all we can afford,” I said.

Tears continued to run down her thirty-eight year old face. “Oh no, Hermano (brother), – you see, this is the very first paycheck I have ever received in my whole life!”

She finally had a real job, with a real paycheck, and she was overwhelmed with joy.

Discipleship House

We had to appreciate the small victories because there were many disheartening moments. Day after day, people listened to us share the Lord’s heart for them, but with seemingly little effect. We finally realized why all the other street ministries we had visited in the States had intern programs. Being on the streets was just too difficult, so we decided to develop a program as well.

However my own conversion stood as a challenge to our plans. God changed my heart and my desires, and I began living differently. But these people were not changing. One of the rescue missions I visited in the States told me the average street person needed to hear the gospel 250 times before he or she responded.

We pushed on, against my heart’s discernment, because we just didn’t think we had any other option. We rented a huge three-story house, giving us a place where our men were protected from the influences of alcohol and drugs. The kitchen and teaching areas were on the first floor, the men lived on the second, and John and I were on the third. A small church was located nearby, so we could walk there for worship. We hoped things would be different now that the men were isolated from the evils of the world. I look back and smile at the ways God protected us from harm, or from going to jail ourselves for something the men did, or could have done.

Fellowship Close By

The fellowship near our internship was small, zealous, and what most would call very religious. The women did not use makeup, wore only dresses, and had long hair. I felt sorry for one woman who had kinky hair which made it appear shorter than it really was. I wondered if her community believed she wasn't very spiritual. The men did not play sports, drink alcohol or smoke, and believed that anyone who did was not saved. Many Friday nights they would have a prayer vigil which started at 7:00 p.m. and ended at 5:00 a.m. the next morning. I learned how to pray with those brothers and sisters and I am grateful for their training, dedication, and passion.

The Spiritual Disciplines

You may wonder why we submitted ourselves and the men to such Christianity. I think some of us are afraid of being called religious. When we hear that word, we picture the New Testament Pharisee. Satan uses that deceptive fear to move many of God's people far away from the effort and disciplines crucial to maintain our relationship with Him strong and vibrant.

Jesus ordained a path for new followers in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 which included blessings to pursue and temptations to resist (Chapter 5), disciplines to practice consistently (Chapter 6), and the relational challenges to overcome to become a disciple who chooses the narrow path and builds a house on rock (Chapter 7). Specific to the context of my point, He taught them five kingdom activities that were to be cultivated and practiced in secret so they would position their hearts before God to freely receive more grace. They were prayer, fasting, giving, serving, and blessing our enemies. Jesus was not teaching how to be a zealot, but instead was giving simple instructions for His new followers—Christianity 101—if you will, to lay the foundation to build lives on.

I found out many years later that attempting to follow Christ without Christian disciplines would turn me into the Pharisee I feared to be — a man who had all the right answers, a heart of stone, and a lifestyle of sin. The small fellowship close to the house provided a safe place, sound doctrine, and a Christian family that practiced the basics and accepted wholeheartedly what we were trying to do, so it was a great fit for us.

Moving to Zone 4

After a year or so, we moved the soup kitchen from the very safe and somewhat sophisticated Zone 1 commercial area to the most dangerous and notorious Zone 4 bus terminal market. Local businesses and the school located above us in Zone 1 had been complaining about the people we were attracting. We couldn't blame them. Most of those we ministered to had not bathed or washed their clothes for weeks, were unshaven, and carried all they needed to sleep and survive on their backs. Many faces were marked with significant scars that testified of their struggles to survive. Some were old, some were young, and a few were women, but mostly we dealt with men—almost all of whom were addicted to sniffing glue or alcohol.

Our new location was infamous for robbery, glue-sniffers, alcoholics, and violence. It was also the hub for a young street gang of adolescents who ranged in ages from 14 to 17. John took charge of the house and I was responsible for the message and soup kitchen. Changes had brought new hope. Later I learned in the construction world, and it definitely applied to this situation: if things don't turn out how you want, at least you gained some experience.

We Had Each Other

We loved Jesus with all our hearts, and we wanted to be found doing what we thought He wanted us to do. I had been a Christian well over a year and John a bit longer. We had both been born-again with no spiritual parents to teach and guide us. In God's sovereignty, this was how it was to be. At least we had each other. John beamed with joy, and loved to tell others about Christ. Together, we were in pursuit of the One who had given us purpose and destiny. We were not ashamed of our Savior before our families, friends, or other Christians. Jesus said, "Go," so we went! Things were not turning out the way we expected, but we kept seeking answers.

Trials

The changes renewed our zeal, only to be met with new challenges. One of the men stole the offering from the fellowship we attended. Another broke into our house while we were at a worship service and took all the valuables we had in our rooms, which

of course was not much. John became sick with hepatitis and was down for several weeks. We hired some brothers to help us minister, and if it wasn't for them, only God knows what might have happened. His protection hedged us more than once.

Protection (Victor)

One morning, after praying all night, I slept for a couple of hours before going to the English-speaking church for Sunday worship. I had a dream during those two hours. In the dream, a man named Victor, who was living in the house, had murdered another man in the house. I loved Victor and his sincerity, but he had done time for murder and I knew it was a possibility. So I brought him into a small room and apologized many times for the question I was about to ask.

I told him how much we cared about him, and the progress he had made, leaving alcohol behind, but that I was concerned about a dream I had. Victor sometimes struggled with his temper, and I wasn't sure how he would react. But when the Spirit is doing a work, things turn out divine. So I shared my dream with him.

He looked at me. "Brother David, I was considering murdering Hector!" He paused. "I suppose this means I will have to leave, won't it?"

"Yes, Victor. I think it is in the best interest of all concerned, don't you?"

"Yes."

He loved John and me, and was very grateful for what we provided. But he also knew his weakness and was selfless enough and cared enough to go back to the streets.

Protection from the Demonic

On another occasion, a man who was sometimes demonically oppressed was showing signs of it returning. So I locked myself in a small room with him one evening to pray for him until he was delivered. Although my intentions were noble, I would not recommend doing this alone.

When I placed my hands on him something started moving and bothering him in his stomach. By that time, I was somewhat used to demonic manifestations in people. Shortly after we had opened the Zone 1 soup kitchen, a demon possessed man thrashed all over the floor like a snake caught by his tail. I was talking to someone a few feet away and calmly walked over to

him. The Spirit led me to sit on his chest. “I command you to come out, in the name of Jesus,” I said.

The man was paralyzed for a moment, but he opened eyes and was unaware of what had happened. I am sure he also wondered why I was sitting on his chest.

Several of the street people felt something like a wind pass by them after I mentioned the name of Jesus.

I believed I was going to see similar results with the man I locked myself in a room with, but after a couple of hours of intense intercession, I fell asleep.

God’s protective hand was on my life, once again. I awoke to great commotion in the house. The man managed to get out a window and he jumped from a second story balcony. I watched as he ran down the street with nothing on but a pair of briefs. It should not bring a smile to my face, but the vivid memory of an almost naked man running barefoot in the light of a full moon from a new believer trying to deliver him from his tormentors registers in the humorous storage area of my mind.

Baptism, Not the Solution

At some point, we decided the reason we had seen so little change in the “converts” was because they needed to be baptized. So, on one occasion, we took ten to fifteen men and baptized them in a very large lake. We took another group and baptized them in the ocean. It was not long until we realized that an unrepentant sinner entering the waters of baptism comes out unchanged.

My First and Second Baptism

I have actually been baptized three times. The first time occurred when I was a baby. The second time shortly after I was born-again in Guatemala. John was attending a little dirt-floored church in his village close to Guatemala City and I had him ask his pastor to baptize me. The urge to obey the Holy Spirit’s desire was undeniable.

The pastor invited me to a lake close to where they worshiped, and I entered the waters of baptism with Jesus – that was the pastor’s name. He was a very short man and was accompanied by another brother, both reaching the height of my chest. I smiled because I was not sure they were going to be able to pull this gringo out of the water.

That's probably why they asked to kneel down on the lake bottom instead of standing. They celebrated my obedience with prayers, joy, and food! It was an incredible day, and my heart had found a family whose love was divine and had no color, ethnic, or economic barriers.

My Third Baptism

Before leaving to be a missionary in Guatemala, I worshipped a few times at a lively fellowship where a man I used to work with attended. The first time I entered I was a bit taken aback when many men greeted me with a kiss on the cheek. Paul did say to, "Greet each other with a holy kiss!" Since it was in the Bible, I accepted it.

Next they gave me a flyer that had every Bible verse in which people were baptized in the name of Jesus. They asked me about the verbiage used by the two men at my second baptism. I told them I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, really "Padre, Hijo y Espiritu Santo" for the men spoke Spanish. They said because I was not baptized in the name of Jesus my baptism was invalid.

So I went home, read all the scriptures many times, prayed, and concluded that it could not hurt anything so I was dunked again. I knew something was not quite right when they filled a tank with unheated freezing cold water in the middle of the winter and sent me in alone. There was plenty of room for several people, but the pastor stood on the side as I shivered and my lips turned blue. As I looked out from the tank, I saw many faces that brimmed with pride because they had convinced another to have an "authentic" baptism, using the correct words.

My First Encounter with Traditions of Men

I was highly entertained by most of their services because when one of the elders or pastor would become filled with the "Holy Spirit" they would jump off the platform and sprint around the congregation a couple of times. No falling asleep here! However, my time with them would not last long. After watching several brothers go beyond what I believed were Holy Spirit limits to get a brother to speak in tongues, I set up a private meeting with the pastor. The man was crying and his sincere effort was challenged with comments blaming him for his lack of faith. I knew it was wrong.

Although the meeting with the pastor was cordial, no one else needed to come to the next service – the sermon was exclusively for me. At one point, the pastor looked directly at me and

began shouting about how the men of his church run around the congregation when filled with the Spirit because, “That’s the way my father did it and that is the way I do it!”

I do not doubt for a moment that the Holy Spirit can cause a man to do such things. The Bible supports the possibility. Take Saul for example, in I Samuel 19:23-24: “So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel’s presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’” What a challenging possibility to consider from the Holy Spirit’s might-have-us-do-list.

However, it was clear in my heart and to this day that what was going on was not of God. This would be my first lesson in how the pride of man’s tradition can close ears. New believers often have an innocent, clear perspective and message that could help restore the heart of God in a congregation if the mature have not become too calloused to listen. “From the mouths of babes,” Scriptures says, all kinds of wonderful words come! I love to be around new Christians. The eyes of their hearts are pure, and they model passionately what Jesus commanded – to love God with their *all*. They ignite godly jealousy in me and remind me how to live and love God!

Move to the Farm Answer

After a few trips to the pond in Guatemala, it was clear that baptism was not helping our men change. Our next solution was to put them to work and be out in God’s nature. We found a small farm where we could grow some of our own food and enjoy the peace and quiet of a beautiful spot hidden in the mountains, close to the city.

John worked diligently to teach them the ways of God which included hard work. Our hope was renewed yet once again to see fruit from our labor. I made daily trips to our center in the city to deliver a message of salvation, share a meal, and identify those who needed a place to live while they changed. The work continued.