This article is excerpted and adapted from a word David Ruis brought to the Canadian Vineyard worship leaders at their National Summit in October of 2000.

Simple Devotion To

As soon as any organization gets larger than the life of the organism that sustains it, it can begin to crush that organism, and the organism begins to die. Many of us have lived through that kind of experience at some point in our journey.

As the Church, we never want to put ourselves in the position where we exist to provide certain "services" as an organization. To use a Biblical image, we must fight to sustain the *organism* that is the Church. Our goal as an organism is to be obedient to Jesus, to live a life of simple devotion to Him and to constantly fight for something truly organic to live within our organizations.

A few months ago I had a little run in with the Lord. I had a simple encounter with God, and yet it was very profound. The Lord challenged me with this statement:

Stop inviting people to church; invite them to me.

There is a tremendous pressure on our worshiping communities to make a palatable experience for people, often in the hope that they will eventually find Christ, join our church and say a prayer in which they give their lives to Jesus. I think it's a wonderful starting place.

But I want to ask a direct question: *Are we drawing people to an encounter with Christ?* The next question that follows is this: *Have you truly encountered Jesus for yourself?* Not through your pastor, not through your dad or your mom, not through your house group leader and not through a song and/or an emotional response – *Are you encountering Jesus for yourself?*

All of these things have their place, but have you encountered the living Jesus Christ? I don't think we have much else to hang on to.

Re-Encountering Jesus

Something that Dr. Don Williams said has been turning me upside down for almost a year now. He looked at a number of us and said, "You know what guys? Jesus is alive!"

Jesus is alive – this is what sets our life's journey apart from any other thing we could touch or experience. This truth catapults us past Buddhism, the Islamic faith, Mormonism or the New Age movement. We serve a *living* God, and Romans encourages us, in light of this dynamic and sacrifice, that Jesus has now ascended to the right hand of God the Father and mediates for us. Our faith is *alive*, and we are living sacrifices. We are trying to unlock the whole, wide pallet of how God expresses His heart through His children. This thing called life is about Life – Jesus is *alive*, and you are *alive* in Him.

He is also a ruling king, and so the whole dynamic of worship is not static. The question is not whether you have a devotional life; it is whether or not you are living a devotional life – which is an invitation to re-encounter the living Jesus.

Steps Toward Simple Devotion

1) Are You Encountering Jesus As Truth?

Jesus is Truth. John 14:6 says *"I am the way, I am the truth..."* He Himself is truth. When we encounter truth, if we can hang on to it, I believe we will encounter God. A phrase that John Wimber liked to say was "All truth is God's truth." We have a wonderful Vineyard community in the city of Katmandu, Nepal. The man who is leading that community, a Nepali, tells how his great grandfather, a Buddhist priest, encountered Jesus Christ – right in the middle of his prayers! He was in pursuit of truth. There is now a lineage of passionate Christians all throughout the Himalayan Mountains out of that one man's experience. We must know Jesus as truth.

Whether you want to or not, you have a theology – and you had better know what it is. The scripture says, *"Study to show yourself approved unto God"* (2 Timothy 2:15). You might not be a scholar with five degrees hanging on your wall, speaking Greek when you get up in the morning and Hebrew when you go to bed at night. But again, in the pursuit of truth, go for an encounter with Christ. The scripture says that while knowledge puffs up, the truth will set you free.

2) Are You Encountering Jesus With Faith?

Put yourself in situations where you are taking risks and seeing the Kingdom come. You will encounter Jesus in that place. As worship leaders and songwriters, this must be a part of our life experience, or our songwriting will be "fluff" – those songs will not be anchored to the Kingdom experience.

A true encounter with Jesus causes repentance – repentance in the biblical sense. I am not talking about being a heap of tears in front of a meeting at an altar (though that can be an awesome piece of the journey of repentance). That is not necessarily biblical repentance. The Greek word for repentance is "metanoia," and it means, "to change your thinking." You can change the way you think.

There are things you haven't thought about before that are actually truer than what you are holding on to as a reality right now. Change your thinking. There's an alternate reality; it's called the Kingdom of God and it is



BY DAVID RUIS

Christ

crashing in everywhere! Pursue Jesus in that place of risk and you will find Him there.

3) Are You Encountering Jesus Among The Poor?

I have more questions than I have answers on this one, but I do know that our worship, from a biblical standpoint, has absolutely no integrity if our lives are not touching the poor. I am not talking about your church's soup kitchen, or free store, or the percentage of the budget that goes toward the poor. You have got to sort out who "your" poor are. Let me qualify by saying that the poor I'm speaking of are those who are tangibly poor – not a rich guy who is "poor" in his heart. I challenge you to look through the teachings of scripture regarding the poor and attempt to spiritualize the passages. It cannot be done.

God will be kind to you and there will be some poor that you will encounter if you ask Him. He is gracious, and James in fact says that the poor are a gift to the whole church because they are ones who understand faith. It's the rich who often do not understand. James goes as far as to say, and I don't fully understand this, that God has actually *chosen* the poor.

Jesus did not even seem to be too worried about ending poverty. Now, there are issues of justice around poverty that we must take seriously, but the issue of the poor is, at some stage, more about us than it is about fixing people. It is about "me encountering myself," and even more so, it's about "me encountering the Lord."

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25: "*Whatever you've done to the least of these, you've done to me.*" I don't know a better definition of worship than that. If Jesus is not getting pleasure out of this thing called the Church, then we may as well pack it all up.

Jesus says in John 4 that the Father is actually looking for this kind of worship. Worship seems to be absolutely attached to our engagement with the tangible needs around us. When you start encountering the Lord among the poor, it can seem to become an unending avalanche. But I believe that is where God is.

Conclusion

We can never pin worship into a service. Just when you think you have God cornered, the Living One has gone somewhere else. So you run after Him, and you find Him in a place you never expected, or you see His face in the poor. Our journey is one of life, and our worship is a living sacrifice before a living God.

That is a life of simple devotion to Christ.

Are you encountering Jesus for yourself?

Jesus is alive.



DAVID RUIS

pastors the Winnipeg Centre Vineyard in Manitoba, Canada, which seeks to provide a safe place for the artistic and native communities in that city. He has written many popular Vineyard songs such as «We Will Dance» and «Break Dividing Walls,» and resides in Winnipeg along with his wife Anita and their four children.