

My heart yearns to see people fully alive and totally equipped--His story-makers, who alter the course of history toward God's incredible kingdom. In 1997 Bill Johnson and I (along with an amazing team) founded the Bethel School of Ministry (BSM) in Redding, CA. BSM became the largest international SEVIS-certified (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement-certified) vocational school in America.

Henry's parents (my best friend in childhood) were Flintstones...out of touch with the real world. His and my lives were duct-taped together because our dysfunctional families had beaten the stuffing out of us. Our self-hatred bonded us together; we fed one another's brokenness and provided a generic intimacy for our starving souls. How are we to move ahead, to become prosperous in the Kingdom? It's imperative that we wake up to the stunning reality of God's superior kingdom, while learning how to navigate this journey we call life. Greatness cannot be reduced to an action or event. True greatness lies deep in the heart of every person. The world cries out for people like Joseph and Paul—who will become fathers and mothers to the pharaohs of the world (Gen 45) and see whole nations fall into the hands of the Lord.

Marilyn Monroe (Norma Jeane Mortenson) became one of the most desired women in Hollywood. She wrote, "Hollywood is a place where they'll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and 50 cents for your soul." She overdosed on barbiturates at just 36 years old--the tragedy of living as Marilyn Monroe on the outside while Norma Jeane remained within.

Jesus warned crowds about living as *hypocrites*, meaning "stage actors" (Mt 6:5, 16). Many self-help books today are like acting lessons that teach people how to behave in the big screen movie of life. We are all born with an intense need to feel significant, loved, valued, and accepted; yet we fear that we are unworthy of these things. So, we pretend to be the people we think society wants us to be in order to meet the desperate needs of our souls. What water, food, air, sleep, and sunlight are to your body; love, acceptance, attention, approval, and significance are to your soul. Sadly, many believers are actually taught by their pastors to ignore their souls—even to think of it as something inherently evil. To be truly spiritual you must suppress or ignore the needs of your soul and focus only on spiritual things.

But the apostle John encouraged his friend and follower Gaius, "I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers (3 Jn 2). **Prosperity and health are directly related to your soul, not to your spirit.** Sunday after Sunday, many are taught how to become more spiritual, but not how to manage their souls. It's imperative that we first acknowledge and then manage the needs of our soul. In Heb 4:14 God uses His word (depicted as a sword) to separate what shouldn't be in your soul from what should be and shouldn't be in your spirit from what should be. When the body of Christ devalues the soul and declares it irrelevant or, worse yet, believes it is evil, then the needs of the soul are never addressed or met. Soul-desert cultures use certain phrases to condemn the manifestations of their people's soul needs: "That

person is in the flesh!" "They just want attention!" "They just need to feel important!" "That person is so clingy!"

Deut 6:5 says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (spirit) and with all your soul and with all your might (body)." We tend to approach meeting the needs of our souls inactively, reactively, or proactively--*inactive* when you remain ignorant of the condition of your soul and life just happens to you; *reactive* when you acknowledge your soul's needs but fulfill them in dysfunctional ways—"looking for love in all the wrong places;" *proactive* when you wisely assess the needs of your soul and devise a healthy strategy to meet them. You need a deep understanding and acceptance of love to seep so powerfully into your soul that it overflows out of you into the hearts of others. Your heart can take you places your head can never go! "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding" (Prov 3:5).

**Two lies keep Westerners from experiencing the love of God. The first, "If we can explain God's love, then we understand it. And if we understand it, we have experienced it." The 2<sup>nd</sup> is worse. It says, "We can't experience something until we understand it."** If romantic, human love has to be experienced to be understood, how can the love of God be explained before it's experienced? What you know can keep you from what you need to know!

God is all about you. You are His favorite. He tells you secrets the angels wish they knew (1 Pet 1:12). You are God's inheritance (Eph 1:18); you are His son or daughter—His child—and part of His cosmic family (Rom 8:12-25). You are the only creature ever made in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26), the only one to be redeemed by the death of God himself (Jn 3:16), and the only one allowed to carry His glory (Jn 17:22). You are the apple of His eye (Zech 2:8) and the bride of the Bridegroom (Rev 21:2). God rejoices over you with shouts of joy (Zeph 3:17). No one and nothing can separate you from His love (Rom 8:38-9) and anyone who messes with you must answer to Him. (Rom 8:31).

**Love is experienced and yet not explained** (Eph 3:19). There is something special about being in the presence of people who think you're beautiful. It has a way of transforming the way you think about yourself. It's love in action, nourishment for your soul. 1 Cor 13:4-7 describes the kind of love that transforms people. When coaches demonstrate this kind of love, their players know they are more important than the game. The ability to play from instinct and muscle memory is the catalyst that triggers what is often described as the "zone" in the sports world. If you want to reach your full potential in God, you need to find a culture where love flows through you, to you, and around you--or create one.

The beauty of humanity lies in its flaws, frailties, and weaknesses, like worn patterns in wood floors that reveal pathways and passions, marks on thresholds made by those who toiled there. The world is hungry for diamonds whose beauty was created from the pressures of life. It's in our flaws and weaknesses that the intrinsic beauty of **our Creator shines through our brokenness: light refracting through humanity manifesting in the many colors of His nature.** Shame (the fear of

disconnection) is at the root of society's brokenness. Guilt says, "You did something wrong;" shame says, "You *are* something wrong." Of course, this causes you to hide in order to protect your heart, but hiding only helps create the ecosystem of disconnection. When you numb your pain, you also numb yourself to joy, pleasure, and excitement. Life becomes drudgery, a place where you survive but never thrive. *Vulnerability* is what breaks the cycles of shame and disconnection.

In Jn 4:1-8 Jesus connected with the woman's brokenness and invited her out of her shame. Only husbands could divorce their wives. Therefore, this woman had been rejected 5 times, thrown away like a piece of trash, and the man she was with wouldn't even marry her. Jesus became vulnerable by exposing His own need to her and then He asked her to meet it.

The reasons we were put on earth were for connections and relationship with God and one another. **The enemy of connection is shame--but the cure for shame is vulnerability**, the ability to be fully known. Jesus is the Master of inviting people out of their caves of shame and into the light of His countenance. "in your light we see light" (Ps 36:9). People increasingly lead virtual lives that keep them in hiding. They work out on a treadmill where they run but go nowhere, watch Bethel TV and think they've gone to church, although they haven't actually had fellowship with anyone. They go to the movies and have a fictional adventure, get on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to "connect" with their 200 remote friends who know them only by their profiles and photoshopped pictures.

The most vulnerable victims of this virtual generation are the kids raised by virtual parents as machines nurture our children. Video games replace real people. A generation raised by babysitters wrote the software that keeps our children company and spend time learning virtual video skills, not knowing how to do real life with human beings. When it comes time to solve a real conflict with their peers, they are clueless.

Nobody becomes successful by him/herself; all of us need the right people to launch us into our destinies. Most of us ask what we are called to do when we should first ask who we are supposed to be with. **It's only when we find our people that we can fulfill our purposes.** The truth is, **our purposes lie in our people.** Bill Johnson's relationship with God was a catalyst to me being fully actualized. His love and acceptance created a place for me to play the game of life with passion. My desires changed after I met Bill. Suddenly I had an insatiable yearning to lead people into deeper relationship with God and to teach them all the things we were learning about living successfully in the Kingdom. I was changing so quickly inside that I hardly knew myself. Since Kathy and I joined in lifetime commitment with Bill and Beni, God has granted us influence with both the poor and the powerful of the world. You are called to influence the world, and you can't do that by yourself. You can't find your purpose until you find your people, because your ultimate purpose is in your people! My vision grew out of the role I played with the people with whom I was called to be in community.

Naomi said to Ruth, "Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16-18). Even though some couples repeat Ruth's declaration in their marriage vows, they

often still live as "friends with benefits." A cohabitating relationship says, "I'm in this relationship for what I can get from you." People who live together without being married often excuse themselves by saying marriage is just a piece of paper. I say, "If it's just a piece of paper, then why don't you sign it?" They use the fear of abandonment to manipulate each other to get what they want. They don't want an agreement that lasts forever, because that will take away the element of insecurity they use to keep their partner under pressure to perform. Those in a covenant relationship are in it for what they can give; they have complete control over their own behavior.

I call the cohabitating mindset the "Judas spirit." At the last supper Jesus said to his 12 disciples, "Let's make a covenant." As soon as Judas realized that covenant was required, his cover was blown (Lk 22:19-22). He betrayed Jesus with a kiss because he wanted intimacy without covenant. Orpha, Naomi's other daughter-in-law, eventually became the mother of 4 Philistine giants, including Goliath who David killed.

Review 1 Sam 10:5-6, 22-12. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Saul was anointed and commissioned, but he had to meet his people before he could fulfill his purpose. Meeting his people changed him into another man...the man he needed to be to lead his people. But over time he allowed insecurity, bitterness, and low self-esteem to move back into his heart, which caused him to revert to the man he was before he met the prophets. Then, during one of his worst demonic exploits, Saul encountered the prophets at Rama and was suddenly changed back into the man he was created to be (1 Sam 19:18-24). Unfortunately, Saul refused to stay connected to his people and his madness returned.

Our destinies lie in our people. Would Paul have become an apostle if Barnabas hadn't taken "hold of him" when he was still young in the faith (Acts 9:27)? Barnabas took hold of Mark and discipled him as well (Acts 15: 36-39). Barnabas is not credited with writing books of the Bible, but he mentored 2 of the most prominent authors of the New Testament. Would Esther have become a queen without Mordecai? Joseph met Pharaoh and prepared Egypt to survive a severe famine. David made a covenant with Jonathan and later became the king of Israel in his father's place. In his bestselling book Good to Great, Jim Collins revealed that organizations that "get the right people on the bus" have the greatest success. **Bethel now has more than 22 published authors on staff--not one had ever authored a book before joining our team!** When you join a family of creative thinkers, you become just like them. The people around us awaken the destinies dormant within us. If we find our people, we will discover our destinies. The people of God have a tribal DNA--a connection we can't completely explain.

Reread all the parable of Jesus in light of this revelation, paying attention to the ones you relate to the most. The *leaven* parable (Matt 13:33) resonates with Bethel's DNA. *Merchants*: "upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt 13: 45-46). *Fishers of men*: Iris Global reminds me of this parable. Heidi's motto, Stop for the One, defines the passion in the bones of everyone who is a part of Iris Global. Scriptures may define you. *Childlike*: Do you prefer the simple life—a life that's uncomplicated by responsibility, ambitious pursuits, or great exploits but is instead

characterized by unguarded love and relationship with those who are naturally a part of your life? *Servant-minded*: My wife Kathy would rather pray than preach, serve dinner than dialogue with the mighty. Although she has great self-esteem, she thinks as a servant and serves as a queen. *Noble*: These have great favor and divine insight to solve complex world problems. Their worlds are often isolated and they may struggle attending church because the congregation is inclined to pull on them in unhealthy ways. *Bride-like*: Express yourself through creativity; it's common to find your tribe in a community of artists and musicians—people known for being sensitive, intuitive, prophetic, and creative. *Competitive*: Highly disciplined, the backbone of any organization. *Battle-ready*: Hanging around warriors can be exhilarating if you are one of them, or exhausting if you are not.

If you surround yourself with idiots, you will become just like them. “Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces” (Pr 13:20). If you hang around the wrong people and let them influence you, your promises may be delayed or even deleted, like Joshua and Caleb. They entered their promised land 40 years late because they hung around with fools. They had to wait until the last fool died off before they could set foot on their promised territory.

There is a difference between ministering to people and letting them influence you. Invite honesty, not foolishness, into your inner circle. We owe the world the truth. **If the truth sets us free, then lies imprison us.** If you create a culture around you where truth-telling is costly, you will silence your wisest counselors. Many times, people have invited me to speak into their lives and then later punished me for my opinion. If you ask for input and then argue with the people who counsel you, you are sending them a clear message that you don't value what they have to say. People should speak into your life when you ask for counsel and when they see something in your life that you don't see. Rehoboam was an idiot king because he rejected the advice of his wise counselors, listened to his foolish friends and ultimately lost his authority.

Bill Johnson is a 5<sup>th</sup>-generation pastor who reminds me of Moses. He speaks to God face-to-face (or at least it seems that way). The strength of any leader lies in his/her ability to attract and keep capable people around. The challenge is that **we don't tend to draw the people we want (or need); we attract those like us.** You only learn how to overcome your weaknesses by spending time with people who are good at the things you are bad at. If you assemble the right kinds of people around you, their strong counsel will help you become very successful. The good thing about choosing a strong team is that you will receive lots of great advice when you need it. The bad thing about this team is that you will receive lots of great advice when they *think* you need it.

There will come a time when it is necessary to *define the relationship*. When we define our relationships with people, we give each other honest assessments of what we can expect from one another. This begins a dialogue that leads to agreement on what we are willing to do (and be) and not do (and be) in the lives of one another. It is most important to define the relationships among your Council of Leaders (COL). Everyone in your COL just carry “a can of gasoline and a pail water;”

pour gasoline on the fires of your dreams and drench the flames of your fears with water. They must cultivate a culture of honor. Show one another a high level of respect both when you disagree and when you agree. Honor values the rights of others to control themselves. The COL must intentionally draw out the deep things of God in each other and help activate them.

Ownership is key to successful exploits in life. People tend to support that which they help create. One of the ways I get our team to buy-in is to offer my idea as a question, giving them permission to share their thoughts without feeling as if they are killing me. Bill Johnson uses a different approach; he will throw out an idea and say, “Tell me why this won't work.” “God ideas” will stand the scrutiny of faith-filled people, but good ideas typically won't. Everyone has a voice, but not everyone has an equal vote.

Diversity is key to the success of a great team. Visionaries and administrators working together are necessary for success. Visionaries are the architects; builders get it done. Visionaries often try to turn water into wine; administrators try to turn wine into water. Nothing great was ever built without visionaries, but nothing at all was ever built without administrators.

In the book of Joshua, when he entered the promised land and defeated its inhabitants he was instructed by God to distribute the land by tribe and division. Each tribe of Israel was given a specific place by God (not just random acreage), which meant that each piece of land was given to a tribe, a certain people group, and then to divisions within the tribe. Tribe refers to our people, division in our mission in life (the roles we play among our people). Then we need to find the place (our specific piece of the promised land) that will support our God-given mission. Caleb received the land where the Anakim dwelled, the land of the giants!

When you find yourself in the wrong place, despite being with the right people with the same vision, you must be willing to reevaluate whether God is calling you to a new, more fitting location or community. Kathy and I knew that we had to leave the place where we *grew up* to find the place we could *grow in* God. We didn't know where to go even though we knew where we couldn't stay. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is your compass; at other times your road map. Manipulation produces guilt (you owe us your life), shame (you have selfish motives for leaving), and fear (something terrible will happen if you go). Perversion is the wrong version of truth.

If you become a provider of hope, you won't have to worry about the competition, because there will always be more customers than carriers. In this crazy and chaotic world of intense need, we only thrive when guided by someone more brilliant than us. If you don't have a plan for your life, others will provide one for you. You should never be too busy to touch the desperate needs of the people in your inner circle--those who serve you and your family. It is part of your journey in the Spirit. If you fear people, you are not leading them; they are leading you. You are called to serve somebody, not to touch everybody. “A man of too many friends comes to ruin” (Pro 18:24).

A Spirit-led life isn't always fun, but it is always filled with joy. I grieve over a (false) gospel that is cloaked in benefits but requires no responsibility. **Expectation is the fruit of faith.** Fear is faith in the wrong kingdom. Everything works out for

good in the end. So, if it isn't good, then it isn't the end (Rom 8:28).

Too many of us are spiritual mummies; we've had the conversion experience but live lives encumbered by the same things that entombed us in the first place. Fear transforms the gift of discernment into suspicion--a faultfinding, critical spirit that masquerades as caring. Forgive those who caused you pain. Forgiveness is an act of your will, not a manifestation of your desire. Change the way you think about pain. If time healed, people in prison would be the most whole people in the world. Time is a revealer and an enabler. When you hide pain deep in your soul and water it with bitterness and unforgiveness, in time they become weeds that grow up around your heart and choke out every semblance of happiness. The promise of joy gives us the ability to face seemingly impossible circumstances and helps us thrive when life is hard. Vision enables us to perceive the outcome of the process while still in it. It enables us to fight *from* victory instead of *for* victory. Allow yourself to mourn when you are in pain. Examine your troubled thoughts. Strengthen your broken places. Eat healthily, sleep well, exercise often and have fun. If you find yourself slipping into depression or anxiety, you are most likely processing too quickly or you are believing a lie.

Have the right structure in place for the right season. Creative people need flexibility to chase inspiration without the constraints of a schedule. Discover, develop, and deploy a structure proactively built for you. Who is leading? Who are the people you are leading? In what season are you leading? What are you to accomplish in this season? What core values guide you in life and leadership?

Everything in the Kingdom is obtained by faith. True Vision is foresight with insight that comes from His sight. Vision gives you motivation and energy, the cure for apathy and slothfulness. Grace gives you the skill and motivation to work hard. The world forces of darkness only trouble themselves over world changers and His-story makers (Eph 6:12).

The ark was in Obed-edom's barn for 3 months and everything that belonged to him prospered (2 Sam 6:9-12). You came to Christ through a new covenant, and as it did in the ark of old, the presence of God rests in you. When Obed-edom put the chest in his barn, everybody knew that God was in his house. When God parks His presence inside of you, He wants everyone to know He is in your house. The force to transform everything in your life is the presence of God himself. With Joseph, his master saw that the Lord was with him and caused all that he did to prosper in his hand (Gen 39:2-4). Heaven was unleashed on Egypt because God was with Joseph and everything he did prospered (Gen 37-50). Jealousy will be a side effect of extreme blessing. I love the saying, "If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway." Jesus made it clear that if people hated the Savior or the world, they would certainly hate those of us following in His footsteps. Misery loves company but hates success. Focus on living in response to the heaven that has broken loose in our lives.

**The Potter's hands often look familiar, human, and anything but divine.** Saul was molded for 13 years on the Potter's wheel before he became the great apostle Paul.

[It's only when we find our people that we can fulfill our purpose. Two lies keep Westerners from experiencing the love of God. The first, "If we can explain God's love, then we understand it. And if we understand it, we have experienced it." The 2<sup>nd</sup> is worse. It says, "We can't experience something until we understand it." The enemy of connection is shame--but the cure for shame is vulnerability. It's only when we find our people that we can fulfill our purposes. Our purposes lie in our people. If the truth sets us free, then lies imprison us. If Love is experienced and yet not explained (Eph 3:19). The enemy of connection is shame--but the cure for shame is vulnerability. Expectation is the fruit of faith.]