



Dear Fellow Eagles,

Here in the UK we have been basking in the sunshine. After a long, cold, then very wet spell, when it seemed that Spring would never arrive, the trees have finally come into full leaf, everything is gloriously green, and the air is blossom-scented, and filled with birdsong. A good reminder as we wait on God's promises, that His provision is always worth the wait!

I have commented in the last couple of emails on how the secular ecclesia in the Roman-Greek world met for the purpose of seeking the common good, and how we can be inspired by that in our meeting with other Christians to pray for and bless our communities. Of course, the highest 'good' for all people is to know Jesus for themselves. We will only see the darkness in this world lifted, as people are *transformed* one person, one family at a time.

Often this has been interpreted as an 'evangelism programme', with the responsibility placed on church members to bring friends and neighbours to special meetings, or to sign up to special outreach ministries. There is nothing wrong with any of this, except that sometimes churches grow without lives being changed, and sometimes people are viewed as projects, not as valuable relationships. The 'Christians' who spew out the grossest bile across the internet and other outlets, are all sadly the fruit of someone's 'outreach'—and a huge embarrassment to the name of Jesus. It's time we stopped counting numbers and started looking for Christ-likeness, before we congratulate ourselves on the size of our Christian witness in a locality.

In addition, the traditional idea of 'evangelism' often brings believers out in a cold sweat. The idea of 'witnessing' to friends and neighbours, participating in a street mission or 'door-knocking', is truly horrifying to many, and a deep source of guilt and shame, as they feel they are letting the Lord down, by feeling so unwilling. There is another way, however...

Just as I would contend that true ecclesia is relationship-based, so is evangelism for most of us (although, there will always be exceptions, for the most important thing is to be Spirit-led). After all, we are called to make disciples [Matthew 28: 19,20], which implies quality time spent with people: talks, discussions, questions and answers, modelling a life lived with Christ—the way He did it, in fact (but without our shortfall!)

Away from traditional ways of doing church, we can be free to focus on relationships, rather than programmes. We can see people as valued friends who are not-yet-Christians, rather than projects for conversion; and rather than being hampered by having no church meeting to take them to, we

may find there is a new freedom in conversation with people who have been turned off by church, but are intrigued by Christ. How natural it is then to introduce them to our friend, Jesus.

Mother Theresa reportedly said that all we need to do is to 'love the person in front of us'. What simple, but profound advice! What if we prayed each morning for God to bring across our paths the people of His choosing? What if we looked at each of these with His eyes of love, and tried to serve them, if only with a kind word and smile? What if we asked Him to give us words of blessing and grace to say to each in the natural course of conversation—not in religious language, but normal speech which flows out of us, unconsciously?

With some of these people—not all—we will sense a connection. What if we developed the expectation of pursuing relationships, with those who want to, in this understated way, for as long as the door is open? Freedom means we don't need to put time and effort into the relationships which have no life in them—unless they are with family members, co-workers or other essential liaisons.

After my husband and I moved to a new area where we knew nobody, most of our friendships were developed in exactly this way, through our local coffee shop, music scene and people we met on walks. These friendships are now a valued part of our life. We have had so many God-conversations with these special people; round the dinner-table, over coffee, on walks and picnics. Instead of a project, we make friends. And friends share. They share about their beliefs, sometimes new-age beliefs, and we share conversationally about ours—on an equal basis. (God's Truth will always stand on its own merits.) This is not hitting them over the head with the gospel! Or pushing tracts under the bathroom door, as one lady I knew did with her long-suffering husband! This is about building relationships, about loving people.

We pray that our home is filled with His presence and love, so people entering actually feel a change in atmosphere. And as mentioned above, we pray for the gifts of the Spirit to be operating in a natural environment; that as we talk, words of wisdom, or knowledge will flow naturally as part of our conversation, in our normal vernacular; that we will speak 'God's thoughts' out loud—even if we are not aware that we are doing it, and that our friends will go away feeling served and loved. And we have found over the years, that somehow through fun, food and fellowship, deepest needs are met, wounds are healed, and people catch sight of our Master.

And we also tell stories—stories of God's interventions in our lives, anecdotes of the strange 'co-incidences' which happen when we pray. We have found when we share these conversationally, people love to hear.

Someone has said, people need to *belong* before they believe. We can help not-yet-Christians belong in our circle long before they come into relationship with Jesus. But gradually they are introduced to our very best friend; and oh what a joy when He becomes real for them too, a new dimension to our relationship is added.

Traditional Church involvement has gobbled up our time; freedom from it may be painful for a while, but it does provide space for relationships. Why not ask the Lord to bring people across your path today, to love and bless? Alternatively, what are your interests? Why not find a group or others who share them; then relate to them through that common ground. After all, you have the best of news to share with them when the time's right...

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes [Romans 1:16]

Until next time,

Be blessed,

Kate W

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<https://www.rhythmsofgraceuk.org/rhythm-of-mealtimes.html>