

The Communion of Saints (and the Dream Lover)

John 17

August 10, 2003

Peter Hiatt

Eleven years ago I returned from a retreat on a Sunday afternoon to church in Danville, California, where I was youth pastor. I saw my friend Chuck Harris, who ran the audiovisual equipment for our church.

Upon seeing me, he said, "Have you heard what happened this morning?" I said, "No." And then he told me an amazing story, part of which he had on videotape.

He told me, "This morning in the worship service, a gal stood up at the start of the service and began confessing a list of sins. She had pages and pages. The ushers got her to sit down and be quiet for a little while."

Chuck told me that after that, Woody, our missions pastor (sweet, kind, polite, sixty-year-old Woody) led the church in a time of silent, Presbyterian confession. Again, she got up and started confessing her sins out loud. Some of them were really bad. The ushers got her to sit down again . . . at least until Dr. Dilworth, interim pastor, got up to speak.

And this is what Chuck had to show me on tape: Dr. Dilworth, about eighty years old and hard of hearing, stood at the pulpit. This gal just walked up on the side of the platform and started confessing sins. Some of them had to do with sleeping with the senior pastor. (You see, a scandal had just broken; people were on pins and needles. Our pastor had been in several adulterous affairs.)

Well, Dr. Dilworth saw her but didn't realize what was happening. I know he didn't hear her, because he firmly stuck with his philosophy of not rocking the boat but playing it safe. He didn't know what was happening, or he wouldn't have done what he did next.

He put his hand up to his hearing aid, squinted, and walked over right next to this gal. He said, "What's that, dear? We can't hear you." He leaned over so as to hear her, which simultaneously placed the lapel mic in perfect position to pick up what she said next on the loudspeaker so everyone could hear: "And I confess to lusting after Pastor Hiatt."

Well, having heard that much, Dr. Dilworth's eyes got big; he jumped back, went up to the pulpit, and did his best to preach his sermon as if nothing had happened.

It turned out this gal probably didn't have an affair with the pastor. She was a bit confused. But that's not to say she didn't lust after me, as if I wasn't *attractive* . . . and it's not to say she wasn't confessing some real sins . . . but it certainly wasn't in the program for the morning.

Well, Chuck stopped the tape, looked at me, and I laughed . . . partly because I was nervous, wondering if I'd get in trouble for messing up somehow. I laughed because it was a comedy. You couldn't have timed it or written it better. I laughed, but I think I was laughing at more than the timing and the lines. I was laughing at the ushers and the pastors and the gal and the service. I was laughing at the church (and maybe God). This entity called church — what a joke.

Sometimes we tell jokes to hide from pain, and sometimes comedy is how we protect ourselves from tragedy. Church felt

like a painful tragedy. So I stood back, separate from church, a spectator of church. And I laughed.

All comedy aside . . .

For about twelve years, the church had been crushing my dreams. I'd *had* my dreams for church. I had grown up in church, a pastor's kid. In high school, I recommitted my life to Christ under the ministry of our new youth pastor. Youth group was a dream come true for me. Then the Session fired the youth pastor.

Three years later the Presbytery fired my dad with a pack of lies. You could taste the jealousy, envy, and gossip in the church. It stunk. The church had been my dream, my home, my family. My dreams were getting crushed.

Ironically, it was then that I began to want to be a pastor. I think I wanted to manufacture my dreams of church.

After college, I went to Fuller Seminary. At that time, it was a hub for the church growth movement. And seminary is where pastors go to dream dreams of church. While at seminary, I was *working* at a church, and all those dreams of church just seemed so far from reality: successful programs, people who always loved each other . . .

During my first year working in the church, I and my dreams constantly failed. I used to just sit in my old Mustang at night in the dark and weep.

At last, when I got to Danville, it felt like my dream of church was coming true: big, fun youth group; a staff that loved each other with vulnerability and integrity. I remember thinking, "This is like Camelot . . . I wonder when Lancelot will sleep

with Guenivere.” It turned out he already was. And not just Guenivere . . .

Ironically, Lancelot, that is, our senior pastor, used to always play what he’d call Dream Church. He used to say, “Peter, who would you get for your Dream Church? What’s your dream church?” Then we’d play a mental game constructing a dream church.

So what is your dream church?

Have you found your dream church?

Could you create your dream church?

Chuck shut off the videotape, and I laughed. I mocked. I laughed at church.

What is church, really? Well, there’s this visible thing we call church — a building, some programs, the people you see. But that’s just like the bathwater that holds the baby. That’s the manger that contains the Christ child.

- What the Church is *really* is a body — the body of Christ (His body and blood)
- And the Church is a bride — Christ’s Bride (His body and blood)
- And the Church is the children of God — family of God (His body and blood)

The Church is finished in eternity — but being revealed in space and time (a work in progress).

The Church does stuff, but that’s not *who* she is.

Church (“ekklesia”) literally means “the called out.” God chooses and calls the Church out, and Jesus said He builds it. The Church—the true Church—is God’s dream.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”

You know, you can love your *dream* of a wife more than you love your *wife*. And you’ll kill the real wife God gave you, with your dream. You’ll say, “I married the wrong person,” that is, “She’s not my dream.”

You can love your dream of children and family more than the children and family God has given you, and you’ll destroy them.

You can love your dream of a Messiah more than you love Jesus. Ask an old Pharisee. Your dream of Jesus crucifies the real Jesus.

Do you have a dream of a church?

Well, what’s it doing to the *real* church God has given you?

Do you have a dream of a perfect friend?

What’s it doing to your *real* friends God has put in your life?

Do you have a dream of perfect kids?

What’s it doing to your *real* kids that God has given you?

Do you have a dream bride?

I got a brochure in the mail. It said this: “Imagine a bride who kept the house and managed the finances. Imagine a bride who

is entirely glamorous and physically fit. Come to the Dream Bride Conference and learn how to make your bride your dream come true.”

So I went. And a man stood up and said, “This is my bride [Exhibit A]. She’s the ultimate housekeeper, cook, and mom. Get your bride to follow my program, and she can be a dream bride too.”

Then another man stood up and said, “This is my bride [Exhibit B]. Not only does she balance our checkbook; she raids Wall Street and owns companies. Get your bride to follow my program, and she can be a dream bride too.”

Then another man stood up and said, “This is my bride [Exhibit C]. She’s totally glamorous and knows what to wear. Get your bride to follow my program, and she can be a dream bride too.”

Then another man stood up and said, “This is my bride [Exhibit D]. She has sleek muscles and she’s physically fit. Get your bride to eat only spinach and fish . . . do 300 sit-ups a day . . . just a few thousand dollars in surgery . . . and she can be a dream bride too.”

Well, I came home, enacted all the action steps, and it wasn’t pretty. I spent a lot of time on the couch . . . alone.

[Singing] “Cause I want . . . a girl . . . to call . . . my own
. . . I want a dream lover, so I don’t have to dream
alone.”

George MacDonald wrote, “When a man dreams his own dream, he is the sport of his dream” — the point of his dream. But to dream my own dream is to be alone.

[Singing] “Dream . . . dream dream dream . . .
 Whenever I want you all I have to do is dream. I could
 make you mine, taste your lips of wine, anytime night
 or day. Only trouble is, gee whiz, I’m dreaming my life
 away.”

Jesus is The Life.
 Life is love.
 God is love.

Are you dreaming your life away? Dreaming your *wife* away,
 kids away, church away, Jesus away?

Well, of course I didn’t really go to the Dream Bride
 Conference. And yet I did. I get brochures for them all the time.
 They say stuff like this:

“Pastor, imagine if your church was a prevailing church.
 Come to the prevailing church conference.”

“Pastor, your church could be a purpose-driven church,
 a growing church, a relevant church, a real church, a
 church where people love.”

Well, those things are *good*, just like housekeeping, money
 management, glamour, and fitness are good. But you sense the
 problem: You can’t make a bride, and she’s not yours to own.

A bride or a church doesn’t exist to serve your dreams, and you
 can’t *make* one . . . only *serve* one.

In our society, it’s easy to view a bride or a church as a
 consumer item. So we shop around for a church that matches

our dreams. We pastors act like church is a product, which we then market for your consumption.

Well, the church is *God's* dream and *God's* creation.

Bonhoeffer continues:

The man who fashions a visionary ideal [a dream] of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally a despairing accuser of himself.

“Accuser” in Greek is “Diabolos”—Devil—the Evil One. Satan is the accuser.

Well, Jesus had a church: a group of guys he called out—really a *small group*. You know that there are only two programs we ask everyone at LMCC to be a part of. The first is corporate worship, and the second is small groups.

Jesus had a small group, a church, twelve guys. It was absolutely *not* anybody's dream of a church . . . except God's. For three years Jesus had been preaching, and He had *these* twelve guys to show for it . . . guys like Peter, the unstable coward; John, the hothead Son of Thunder.

On this night, one would betray Him, one would deny Him, and all would abandon Him in His hour of greatest need. And Jesus knew it. But instead of accusing them, abandoning them, laughing at them, or giving up on them saying, “It didn’t work” or “I got the wrong guys . . . I need to find another group,” instead of killing them and starting over, He covenants Himself to them with broken body and blood shed. And then He prays this prayer: John 17, beginning in vs. 6:

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.”

Vs. 17: *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”*

The church is supposed to look something like Jesus and His disciples. How’s that for a church dream?

“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have

given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

“They were yours, and you gave them to me,” prays Jesus. The Church isn’t a consumer item; it’s not really something we shop for and choose, but something God chooses and gives to us. The Church is God’s creation, not ours.

Your church or small group is not something you produce but that you commit to and discover together or is revealed to you together. So we ask each group to form a covenant (not an eternal covenant, just a commitment to meet), so you don’t bail out.

People bail out of small groups and churches just when they start to work . . . just like people bail out of marriage covenants when they start to work, that is, when they die to their dream and begin to see God’s dream; when they die to their self and begin to love and live.

Jesus prayed, “I sanctify myself that they may be sanctified.” He’s talking like a priest making a sacrifice, and He *is*. The sacrifice is Himself. He’s covenanting Himself and offering Himself up to death.

You know, Jesus has a dream for His Bride (Ephesians 5:27): to “present the church [His Bride] to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy [sanctified] and without blemish.”

But listen closely, husbands. This is how He does it. He sacrifices Himself, bearing all her shame and washing her with

His life's blood. Rather than enslaving His Bride to His dream, He serves His Bride with His dream and sets her free. His dream is a Bride washed in His blood and filled with His Spirit.

God's dreams are always better than yours.

Jesus prays, "I in them and you in me." Wow!

You know, I don't know what I am. I don't know what *I* is that *am*, the *I* that perceives me. And Paul wrote, "It's no longer I who live but Christ in me." I really don't know what *I* am or what *you* are, other than this incredible fact: Somehow in me and you and anyone who comes to this table in faith is the Godhead. That's what Jesus prayed. "I in them and you in me."

Of course, I can't dream that dream. It's too big and good. But that's the basis of our unity, the communion of saints, the communion of the sanctified.

And if that's true, what does it matter if I have common hobbies with the others in my church or small group? What does it matter if they tell amusing stories or don't, or if they're rich or poor, fat or skinny, black or white, grumpy or pleasant, blind or lame? What are my ridiculous human dreams next to this fact?—

- They contain the Godhead.
- They are a doorway to the eternal city.
- They contain Father, spouse, family; not *my* dream so much as the One who dreamed me, heart of my own heart, deep calling to deep, "Come home," family, my deepest dream, a longing for the One who is dreaming me.

Somewhere I read a story about a young man returning from Vietnam. He called his family from San Francisco. He said to

his parents, “I’m coming home, but I have a good friend I’d like to bring home with me.”

“Sure,” they replied, “We’d love to meet him.”

“There’s something you should know,” the son continued. “He was hurt badly in the war . . . lost an arm and a leg stepping on a landmine. He has nowhere else to go, and I want him to come live with us.”

They said, “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Maybe we can help him find a place to live.”

“No, Mom and Dad, I want him to live with us — family.”

“Son,” the father said, “you don’t know what you’re asking. Someone with that handicap would be a terrible burden to us. I think you should just come on home and forget about this guy. He’ll find a way on his own.”

At that point, the son hung up the phone. The family heard nothing more from him. A few days later, however, they received a call from the San Francisco police. Their son had died after falling from a high building, they were told. The police thought it was suicide.

The grief-stricken parents flew to San Francisco to identify the body. They recognized him, but then to their horror, they saw something new: Their son had only one arm and one leg.

Perhaps their dream of a son killed their real son and their real dream. For what is a real son? Some arms and legs, some grades and trophies? That’s what a son *does*, not what a son *is*. A son is God’s dream—a spirit—a mystery.

I don’t know if that story is factual or not, and I certainly don’t want you to be enslaved to others in fear that they might commit suicide. (God numbers their days.) I’m just pointing out that with your dream of a bride, you can miss your bride. With

your dream of a child, you can miss your child. With your dream of a Messiah, you can crucify Jesus. With your dream of church, you can really hurt the real Church.

So drop your dreams and receive God's dreams. God's dreams are always better than your dreams. Ironically, it's at the very point where you drop your dreams that you receive God's dreams. That point is the cross.

So stubborn fisherman Peter dropped his dreams for himself, for the other disciples, and for Jesus that night at the cross. And hothead John, Son of Thunder, dropped his dreams at the cross. They dropped their dreams and became God's dream: Peter the Rock, and John the Beloved. And who would have guessed it, but those twelve disciples were the beginning of the Church, which is you.

Jesus builds His Church, and "the gates of Hell cannot prevail against it."

We want you to have a small group, that is, have some Christian friends you stick with, so you can begin to see God's dream and live God's dream. You need something like a commitment to meet, so that you'll stick with it when you get disillusioned. *That's* when it's working — when you drop your illusions and dreams and realize you're all a stinky mess, like an old manger; when you drop your dream and start looking for God's dream, a baby in a manger.

Jesus in them,
 grace over them,
 the adulterous Bride washed in blood.

Well, anyway, Chuck shut off the tape player, and I laughed at the Church.

Some of you laughed when I told the story. But there are different ways of laughing. Were you laughing *at* the Church or *with* the Church? If you were laughing *at* the Church, you must not be a part of the Church. If you were laughing *with* the

Church, you're laughing at yourself! And there's no better kind of laughter.

Two weeks ago when Tom Larson shared his story of how God used him, "an unemployed pothead," to bring fresh water to thousands, open doors for the Gospel, and break down dividing walls, you *laughed*. When I heard the tape, I almost had to pull my truck over to cry and laugh . . . with absolute joy!

You see, I could dream a mission program, but I wept because I could never dream a dream as good as Tom and Dana. And I laughed because I *know* Tom and Dana, and Aram and Andrew, and Dan Hiatt, Pastor Bayo, Elida, Dick Blair . . . and I know me.

I know the people in that story, and they're all *broken dreams* through which God dreams His dream. His dream isn't just some program; His dream is *them*, and that's only a foreshadowing of what's true about you.

And you laughed because you began to believe what's true: that "God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise," and "we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God."

God was in the church in Danville, and God was in Bel Air Pres, and God was in 1st Presbyterian. God was in the people: the ushers, Woody, Dr. Dilworth, and maybe especially in that poor gal confessing her sins. And God was in my youth pastor (Gary Reddish), and God was in my pastor (Dan Hiatt).

I can dream all kinds of programs; I can dream sermons, missions projects, and activities. But I could never dream anything as good as Gary Reddish. I could never dream anything as good as Dan Hiatt, my dad. I really don't even know what they *are* really and truly, but they're both a piece of Jesus. I've met them, and I meet *Him* there. But I have to die to my dream to meet God's dream.

I have my dreams for this church. But I must constantly surrender my dreams to meet God's dream: *you*. You laughed, and may your laughter get louder and deeper; for there is something profoundly hilarious about this fact: The King of Glory is lying in a manger, and you, my friends, *are* that manger.

I think the Church is a joke — a hilarious, ecstatic, breathtaking joke . . . upon the kingdom of Hell and the Prince of Darkness grim.

So on the night Jesus was betrayed and offered up a prayer, the night Peter denied him and all twelve ran in fear, that night He took the bread, and having given thanks He broke it, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Take and eat in remembrance of me."

In the same manner, after supper He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in my Father's kingdom." And I think they're going to be laughing a lot.

Surrender your dreams and believe God's dream. Bring your dreams to the cross and drop them. The cross is an instrument of

death where things get crucified. So that means those dreams you bring to the cross are dead.

But God has ways of raising dead things. So if God begins raising dreams in you, hallelujah! If you're not sure whether they're God's dreams or not, keep bringing them to the cross. But they're no longer you're dreams; they're *His* dreams — not your dreams to enslave others to your dream world, but *His* dreams to serve others and set them free in His world.

And what does that look like in a small group? I'll use an example.

I have all kinds of dreams. I want Aram and Gary to do things, so I take them before the Lord. (It's important that we pray for each other.) I say, "I'm kind of ticked off at Aram, because I want him to do this and that."

In prayer, something happens. The Lord says, "Yes, Peter, Aram is as messed up as you. But love him as I love him." And God has dreams. But first I have to see that Aram *is* God's dream, and God is dreaming His dreams through Aram. Then I no longer become an accuser of the brethren but a servant of the brethren.

Maybe this is another way of saying it: You can't dream God's dream until you become God's dream and see God's dreams. Then you realize He dreams His dreams through you—His body.

In Jesus' name, may you thank God for His dream. It's you. Amen.

SEPTMBER 2003

Good Housekeeping

goodhousekeeping.com

Quickie Decorating
101 GREAT IDEAS (cheap & fun)

Atkins to South Beach
What Really Works in FAD DIETS

15 Fastest Dinners Ever

A YOUNGER YOU
Instant hair & makeup tricks

RAISE YOUR MONEY IQ...
And cash in!
Simple self-help, p.61

Worried About Your Period?
What's OK, what isn't

EXCLUSIVE
TWINS AT 52!
A younger husband. An incredible risk.
JOAN LUNDEN on the joys and fears of being an older mom

Joan with new babies Kate and Max

The 60-Second Quiz That Will Save Your Life

\$2.50

0 9
0 748519 0
08355

McGraw-Hill Good Housekeeping

Exhibit A



Exhibit B

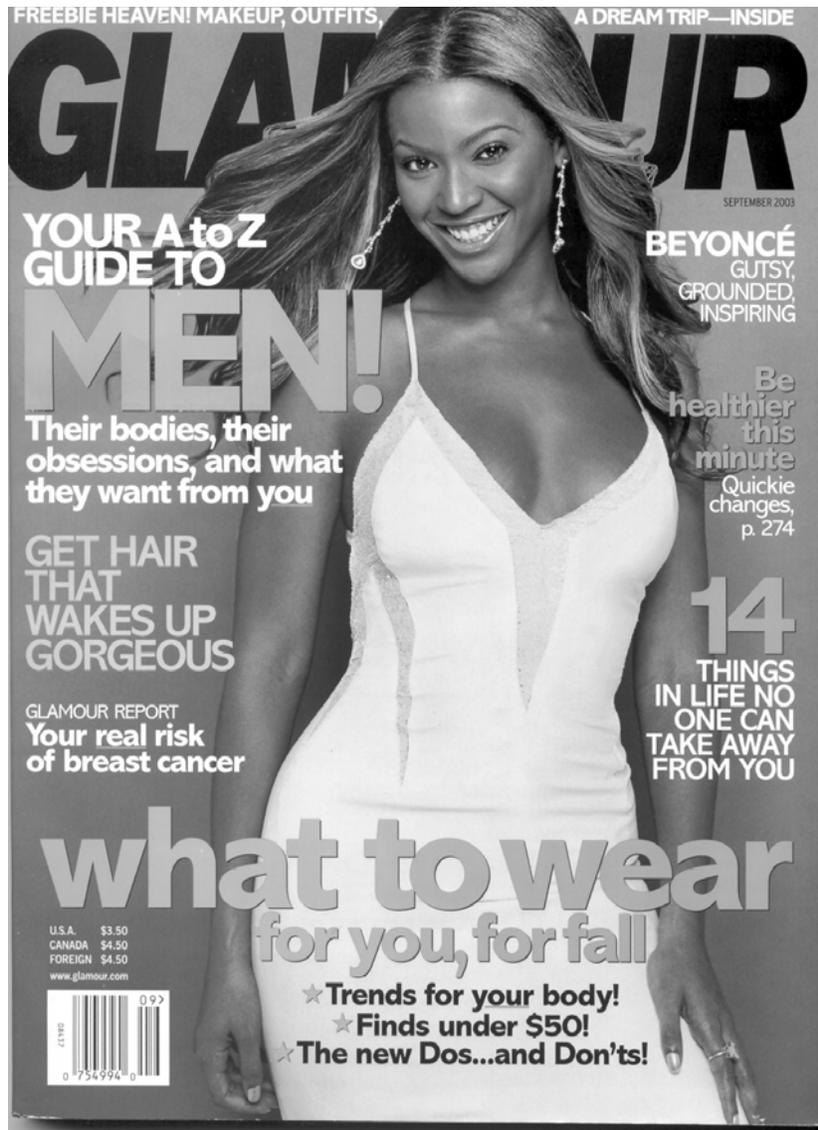


Exhibit C

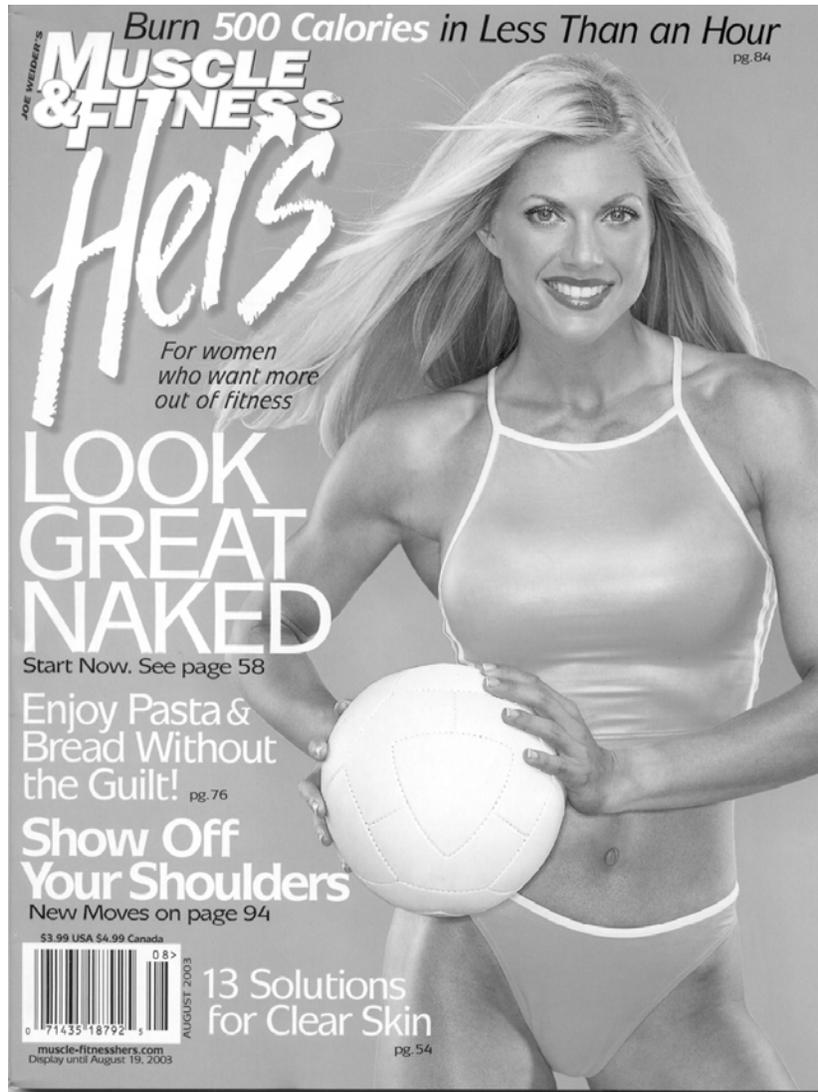


Exhibit D

Further Reading

He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. . . .

Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by the one Word and Deed which really binds us together – the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship. . . .

Because Christ has long since acted decisively for my brother, before I could begin to act, I must leave him his freedom to be Christ's; I must meet him only as the person that he already is in Christ's eyes. This is the meaning of the proposition that we can meet others only through the mediation of Christ. Human love constructs its own image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love recognizes the true image of the other person which he has received from Jesus Christ; the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all men.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

When a man dreams his own dream, he is the sport of his dream, when Another gives it him, that Other is able to fulfill it.

George MacDonald, Lilith

It is only inasmuch as you see persons as they really are here and now and not as they are in your memory or your desire or in your imagination or projection that you can truly love them; otherwise it is not the people that you love but the idea that you have formed of them, or persons as the object of your desire, not as they are in themselves.

Therefore the first act of love is to see this person or this object, this reality as it truly is. And this involves the enormous discipline of dropping your desires, your prejudices, your memories, your projections, your selective way of looking, a discipline so great that most people would rather plunge headlong into good actions and service than submit to the burning fire of this asceticism. When you set out to serve someone whom you have not taken the trouble to see, are you meeting that person's need or your own? So the first ingredient of love is to really see the other.

The second ingredient is equally important: to see yourself, to ruthlessly flash the light of awareness on your

motives, your emotions, your needs, your dishonesty, your self-seeking, your tendency to control and manipulate. This means calling things by their names, no matter how painful the discovery and the consequences. If you achieve this kind of awareness of the other and yourself, you will know what love is.

Anthony DeMello

The task is not to find the lovable object, but to find the object before you lovable – whether given or chosen – and to be able to continue finding this one lovable, no matter how that person changes. To love is to love the person one *sees*. As the apostle John reminds us: “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Soren Kierkegaard

Because of the great, eternal love that God has for all humankind, he makes no distinction in love between the blessed soul of Christ and the least soul that shall be saved. It is very easy to believe and to trust that the blessed soul of Christ has a place of honour within the glorious Godhead. But it is also true, as I have understood from what our Lord has shown me, that where the blessed soul of Christ is, there too is the essence of all the souls that shall be saved by him.

Julian of Norwich

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. . . . Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:28-29, 12:27

© 2003 Peter Hiatt

Lookout Mountain Community Church
534 Commons Drive, Golden CO 80401
Phone: 303-526-9287 Fax: 303-526-9361
E-mail: info@lomcc.org