

HOW AND WHY THE WINVIN GOT INVOLVED IN THE SYCAMORE COMMISSION [“SOZO” MINISTRY]

Four years ago, a member of our congregation returned home from visiting Destiny City Church in Tacoma and encouraged us to go to a Leaders Conference at Christchurch Fulham. It was obvious that this man had changed dramatically and we were so impressed by this that we thought we would try and do as he suggested. On telephoning the church office we were told that there were no places and no spaces on the waiting list either! Undaunted, we spoke to the Lord and just said that if He wanted us to be involved in what was then called “Jesus Ministry” then would He please fix it. Within 24 hours, through rather extraordinary circumstances, we were invited to have supper with Mike and Cindy and our lives began to change

At our first meeting, we somewhat “did ourselves down” by saying that we were “Just Pastors”. Mike rounded on us and said that to be a Pastor was a fantastic calling. He went on to say that he believed that we were struggling with insignificance, hopelessness and futility!! Amazingly, instead of taking offence, we were actually hugely encouraged by this approach and we instantly felt something rise up in us and we thought “you are right”! From that moment on we became friends and we realised that the message that the Riches were bringing was one we needed

My husband and I lead the Winchester Vineyard and, to all intents and purposes, the church we lead looked good and relatively “successful”. We were, and are, so grateful to our own movement, for its Kingdom values, teachings and priorities, but we knew that what we had achieved was falling short of what the Lord was calling us to. In short, we were just “doing Church” rather than corporately living a biblical lifestyle. We had done our best but that wasn’t enough. We cried out to the Lord for help for a number of years and we believe that meeting the Riches was his answer to us at that point

On meeting Mike and Cindy, we saw a way of learning new ways of reaching our destiny. This included:

- New ways of praying for people – alongside our own excellent and effective model. It was as though we were being given additional arrows in our quiver
- Being reminded again to enquire of the Lord in all circumstances. In practice, this meant not just presuming we knew what the Lord was doing – just because it had worked before
- Having fresh information that led to revelation and then the start of transformation

We also came to realise, personally, that we ourselves, had issues [strongholds] we had no idea about! However, rather than feeling condemned by this we were greatly encouraged by the truths of Jesus Ministry that remind us that each of us has an Original Design, a destiny and purpose and that the Lord was wanting to help us achieve this rather than detract from it. Furthermore, in his love, he wanted to show us the strongholds that had come in to prevent us fulfilling that purpose. As we worked through these things in our private lives together we began to change and our church members kept marvelling at it! This gave us the equity to help others to change too - “If they can change – so can we!” became the order of the day!! The atmosphere in the church also began to change as we learnt to walk in forgiveness towards one another and began to recognise where we had taken offence. [Colossians 3:12 – 15] We started to honour one another in a deeper way and we are now on a journey of learning to be unoffendable We have begun to embrace, corporately, the revelation that we need to take ownership of our own issues and personally and corporately come out of living in a blame culture

All this meant that there was a clear need to change some of our previous church structure. To use a computer analogy, we realised that we needed to adjust our Operating System. This was not easy. The recommended introduction to JM is to start implementing this in concentric circles from

the Senior Leader, through the Leadership Teams and then to the main body of the church. However, this did not work for us. We felt led to deal with our own personal issues, and then honestly but sensitively share them with our church. As we personally changed, and as our fellowship began to see a change in us, so the whole Body of the Church caught the vision. This was not an easy transition but as we both experienced the power of God, so others recognised this and wanted it for themselves. As a result we needed to take the whole church through this change at the same time. This would never have been our way of doing things, but we realised that it was God's wisdom and it worked!

LIVING FREE

We communicated this part of our journey mainly through an excellent course that comes out of JM called "Living Free". We encourage everyone to attend this 6 week course which we emphasise is the start of a fresh lifestyle and not just another programme. This teaching has resulted in an awareness of our ethos of loving one another despite our foibles. We are learning, as a church community, to be honest in asking and receiving forgiveness. We are learning to appreciate our different callings and to honour those who are different to ourselves. We are learning to be more loving and understanding to one another and pray we are becoming a place where Jesus would like to visit

As a result of this, our corporate identity has changed; we are slowly growing in more love and acceptance of one another. There is so much that has changed but some of the main points would be that we are now a church where:

- We, as a People, know that individually each member has a destiny and purpose
- As a community, we are living in the honest reality that there is a war on, that we have a spiritual enemy and that we have been given authority and power to defend ourselves and others from him by extending the Kingdom
- As a community, we understand that not only is Jesus our Saviour, and is called to destroy the works of the devil – but also that he has called us, as a royal priesthood, to do the same
- As a community, we are in the process of being gradually healed up we become more confident of who we are in Christ
- As a community, we are beginning to understand the authority we have and subsequently are receiving the courage and the boldness to know that as Christians we are, and should be, on the offensive. That we are to expect to see the Kingdom advance both in our own City and far beyond
- As a community, we are becoming more aware of the importance of teachability – that we are all disciples and it is never too late to learn more
- As a community, we are understanding the tactics of the religious spirit and are seeing many come into a new place of freedom as they are released from this cruel tactic of the enemy. Ginny includes herself in this

FREEDOM PRAYER

We have also been taught to train up Freedom Prayer Teams. These are gradually growing in love, confidence and power. These Teams are a huge blessing to those who want to have the privilege of a dedicated group of Christians listening to God *for* them. The Teams discern the great plans the Lord has for the person they are praying for. After a brief explanation, and if invited, they then gently share any strongholds that might be stopping this plan from being achieved. These prayer appointments have been a huge blessing to many, and life-changing, to some

PASTORS' DAYS

As we ourselves have been released and further set free, we came to see that many other Pastors needed a place to be real, honest and accepted. As a result, Mike encouraged us to start a JM Hub and this has evolved into bi-monthly Pastors Days for Senior Leaders of all denominations. These are powerful times and the unity amongst leaders from different Streams is deeply appreciated by everyone involved. They are proving to be times to be encouraged, to laugh and cry. A place where one can take a deep breath and gather together with others who are also called to shoulder responsibility

A place where one can stand together and be encouraged, prayed for, be real and honest and as a result to be further equipped

IN SUMMARY

As we continued to pursue the Biblical truths and revelations that previously we had somehow forgotten, or been blind to, we are seeing our church being slowly but radically changed. The Transition wasn't easy but it was vital. Some people left us as we changed tack and this was sad but we were reminded we are called to please God and not man. As a community we now know that we are on course to fulfil our destiny corporately and personally. Many people comment on the atmosphere at the Centre and we value His Presence so much as we continue on this journey. Our vision, some of which we are beginning to see come to fruition, is to be a Church where:

- **Everyone will be passionately in love with Jesus**
- **Everyone will be able to hear God's voice**
- **Everyone will be moving in their God-given calling**
- **Everyone will be serving gladly**
- **Everyone will be praying with power**
- **Everyone will be seeing miracles and healings**
- **Everyone will be sharing the love of Jesus**
- **Everyone will have a heart for the poor and the broken hearted**
- **Everyone will have a heart to give generously**
- **Everyone will be stewarding their resources faithfully**
- **Everyone will be "getting to play" as a Royal Priesthood**