

Joy Equipping

“As each part does its work.”
Ephesians 4:16-18



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Good Guys, Bad Guys and a Longing for the Kingdom

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How to Live Like a Christian in a World Under Satan’s Domination.” This was the topic I had chosen to address in my adult Sunday school class. Since the topic was difficult, and I wasn’t sure I had the formula myself, I decided to be “creative” and divide the class into two teams—the “Good Guys” (God’s side) and the “Bad Guys” (Satan’s side). Each team had to come up with a battle plan.

The “Good Guys” chose loving one another as their strategy. They included practical ideas such as “praying for one another, mentoring new believers, holding each other accountable, and friendship evangelism.”

The “Bad Guys” strategy was to keep believers from doing what God wants. So their list included “causing divisions through arguments, encouraging power struggles, encouraging people to think of their own needs, making church leaders look foolish and the church irrelevant, etc.”

The exercise was revealing. We concluded that, with a few exceptions, the “Bad Guys” are winning the battle here in North America. The thought made us uneasy, yet we were also genuinely puzzled as to how we could make a difference.

Today, I feel that same uncertainty. I know Christ has put me here to tell others about him, but the task is too immense for me to tackle alone.

I listen to an interview with Dion Robert, an ex-policeman now pastoring a rapidly-growing church in the Ivory Coast. After spending a month speaking at churches in North America, he was asked what he thought of the Christians here. His response: “Christians here live like Americans instead of like Christians.”

What does living like a Christian mean to Dion Robert and his people in the Ivory Coast?

Since 80% of the people are unemployed, it means that those who have share with those who do not.

It means being with people, sharing sorrows and joys, listening, hugging, caring.

It means giving practical help and encouragement whenever needed and using spiritual gifts on a daily basis.

It means becoming part of each other’s lives so that you earn the right to challenge a brother or sister in Christ who is clearly not living according to God’s laws, or support a friend who needs forgiveness or wisdom in making changes.

It means spending hours with God in prayer, worship, and fellowship.

It means sacrificing—going out of one’s way—to reach out to those in need, and not counting the cost.

It is what Jesus meant: “A new command I give you: Love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)

Like someone who has unearthed a golden treasure box and, after many failures, found a rusty key that opens it to reveal priceless pearls, I feel that I have finally found the key to my dilemma. God never intended me to be alone!

I am drawn back to a time when I was in my late twenties. Every Saturday night, thirty or more teenagers gathered in our living room. Not to party. Not to watch movies. And not as part of an organization. These kids, aged 14 to 20, from several denominations or no church at all, met with us for three or four hours to sing choruses, share and pray, listen to a low-key talk by my husband, a guest, or one of the kids, and enjoy one another’s company. The talks were Bible-based, the questions penetrating. The desire for information on how to study the Bible resulted one summer in organized weekly classes on inductive Bible study.

And as we learned together, prayed for each other, and cared, not only on Saturday nights but throughout the rest of the week, lives changed. Sometimes it was scary, like when one of the girls, who had been involved in the occult,

began having demonic hallucinations. Sometimes it was tearful, as when a rebellious pastor's son explained exactly how God had refused to let him go. Sometimes it was joyous, as when one young man told us he enjoyed studying the Bible so much that he wanted to go to Bible College.

All varieties of personality were present. That was okay. We knew God made everyone unique. And we learned that everyone was necessary to make the whole group work. We were a team.

And as a result of our growth in love toward one another, we saw other things happen. I will never forget the moment when an intelligent, gentle young man quietly informed us that he had asked Jesus into his heart that morning. He was a school friend of a couple of kids, and he'd been coming out on Saturday nights for a long time. But accepting Christ involved a leap of faith that his scientific mind couldn't grasp. Until that morning, on a hike, when suddenly everything he had heard and seen fell into place.

The next Saturday night, he brought a friend with him.

That group might still be going on, but we became involved in planting a church—starting a Sunday school and a Sunday morning service and all those other things, and then our first son was born, and gradually we lost touch with most of our group of kids.

What I didn't realize at the time, but do now, is that this unstructured group was the church in action! The way Christ meant it to be. Not a building or a service, but people who loved one another with agape love—no strings attached—the way he loves each one of us.

Living as Christians means living in community with other believers. It means forgiving instead of holding a grudge. Stopping to pick up those who are hurting rather than using them as stepping stones to advance ourselves. Forgetting about what we deserve and treating others as we would like them to treat us. Seeing other Christians, not as blemished or faulty, but as individuals God can use to enrich our own lives.

If we could do these things, we would be living as Christians. And people around us would look on in wonder, and eventually want to know the One who makes us differ-

ent. And we would be fulfilling our job, the job Christ left for us—to make disciples.

Otherwise, he might just as well take us straight up to Heaven the moment we accept him. Because if there is no difference between us and the people who surround us, we are not demonstrating to the world what it means to be Christian. We are, on the contrary, letting the "Bad Guys" win a terribly real battle for the souls of people God loves.

We who believe in Christ as Saviour and Lord must come together as the body of Christ, first by committing ourselves totally to Christ's purpose for us—and then by loving one another in every aspect of our day-to-day lives! Only when we begin to live this way—the way the first Christians did—will we begin to copy them in turning our world upside down!



To test this conclusion, I ask myself when I have been most active in studying the Bible and witnessing and caring for others. Without exception, it's when I've been involved at a deep level with other like-minded Christians.

When have I been weakest in my own walk with God? Least likely to make an effort to get to know non-believers? During those

times when I've felt alone, without fellow believers to encourage me and spur me on. I'm weakest when I try to serve Christ on my own, strongest when I'm part of a group of Christians—not necessarily doing the same things, but encouraging each other and caring in practical ways.

Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of God. About how great it is. And about how we are part of it right here and now. But it is not visible; rather, it is somehow within us. Suddenly, his words make sense to me! I don't have to wait until I am in Heaven to experience the Kingdom of God! It is within us! It will emerge as we obey Christ by loving God and one another. The key to the Kingdom of God is our love—a love that is only available through our reliance on God.

The 21st century is fast approaching and the "Bad Guys" appear to be winning. It's time for all of us who belong to Christ to evaluate our lives and decide whether we're living like Christians or like North Americans. Christ is depending on us. We can't let him down!