

What is Jesus Doing?

WHAT IS JESUS DOING IN SIMI VALLEY, CALIFORNIA?

For those who may not know Simi Valley, California, it is a quiet bedroom community Northwest of Los Angeles, where many police, firemen (and women), FBI, DEA and other law enforcement types make their homes. It is also a community which happens to be one of the most prevalent centers of prescription opiate abuse and heroin use by teenagers in the U.S.A. The story I am about to tell is a praise report because this is one of the great things Jesus is doing in Simi Valley.

I have a good friend who was an associate pastor at one of the large “groundcover” churches in Simi Valley when I first met him. When I say “groundcover” church, I am referring to a very large (2000+ members) church where the pulpit is called a “stage,” the congregation is called an “audience” (making the pastors actors, I suppose), and the act of worship is known as “singing songs to God.” These churches are large and spread out as far as the eye can see, but they don’t grow very deep (like ground cover). They are “seeker sensitive” and the Word that is taught is more about how having a relationship with God makes you a better person, and less about how our lives should be about glorifying our beloved Savior and the Father and accessing the power of the Holy Spirit to awaken a world that desperately needs Jesus. Becoming a better person then becomes the effect of our relationship with God certainly, but it should never be our sole motivation, and to put a fine point on it, I have found that when God is most glorified in the purposeful praise and worship and acts of His people, then they (we) are most joyful.

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Having said this, I do believe that anyplace that Jesus is acknowledged and His Word taught, He will use for His Glory in drawing His children to Himself.

Anyway, back to my friend. He is a pastor trained in a seminary, and like many, he was taught to color in between the lines of the Gospel story, teach the standard Biblical messages, and learned the “business” of religion, with little or less emphasis on relationship with God or other people. This is the type of pastor that you typically see in bedroom community churches like the one described above. Now admittedly, this is my own biased impression, undoubtedly with many exceptions, but it is based on pastors I have known and heard about from other believers who have been turned off by hypocrisy in the churches they have attended.

Then something happened to my friend. The Senior Pastor left the large church in Simi Valley where he worked, and then shortly thereafter, my friend left also, and went back to the Midwest, where he was originally from, and took a Pastor role there. It did not work well for him and his family, and after about a year and a half, he returned to Simi. Since we were friends, and I had become a prayer partner to him before his egress, when he returned, he contacted me and we met for coffee. During our meeting, he seemed very downcast and was desperately seeking another pastor job in town. Not being a fan of “professional pastors,” I suggested to him that he might be happier if he took a regular job and sought God’s leading for a ministry within that context (being a car salesman, for instance, gives you the opportunity to speak subtly into many people’s lives). He was chewing on that thought when the Holy Spirit hit me with something specific. I asked him “why do you think the Lord led you back to Simi Valley and what is the thing you are most passionate about, that you would do even if you weren’t being paid?”

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I saw the light come into my friend's eyes then and he said "John, I love the skater kids in Simi so much." He told me how his son was a skater and how he had a lot of friends who did drugs and were in and out of jail, and how sometimes they used to come over to his house for a meal.

Then, all of a sudden, he remembered that when he was a poor kid growing up in a small town, that he was a lot like those kids, always getting into trouble, and getting hassled by the local law, and how there was this wonderful lady who used to open up her home a couple of times a week for him and his friends and she would make meals for them, and bake cookies, and read scriptures from the Bible and they would all listen and enjoy the Word of God. Right then, we looked at each other and we both felt the Holy Spirit and we prayed for what would become his ministry. I came to find out later that my Pastor at Abundant Life Church had also been speaking love and truth into my friend's life since his return from the Midwest. God always orchestrates these things, I have found.

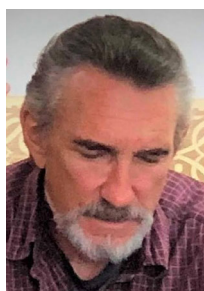
My friend and his wife shortly after our meeting started a ministry called "Journey Home" which did exactly what that lovely saint from back in his hometown did. They open their home several times a week to kids (ages 13 to 21) who are at risk, to give them a safe place to hang out. My friend reads scripture to them and answers their questions about Jesus. He has services on Sunday nights for the kids and their parents and other adults who want to support the ministry, and on Monday nights, he has a service just for the kids. As of last Monday, they had over 50 kids and the place was packed. My friend has led dozens of these kids (whom he loves, and who love him) to know Christ and begin to walk intentionally with Him. He even has a couple of FBI guys who are on fire for the Lord, men of God that attend these meetings and speak into the kids' lives.

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Also, one of his good friends, a younger man whom he had discipled, has expanded the ministry by starting up a Wednesday night service for younger kids (ages 9-12) and that is also growing by leaps and bounds. God is being greatly glorified through the power of obedience and faith in Simi Valley!

Now my friend is being courted by the City Hall crowd and just became a partner with the local anti-heroin task force group “Not One More.” Many local churches are beginning to support his ministry, and most importantly, the Lord is supplying all of his and his family’s needs, through His incredible provision, so that my friend does not need a “pastor job.” The Lord sent ravens to feed Elijah in the desert, and He will always provide for His true servants.

I encourage you to support local ministries like this with our prayers, our time and our donations; then we, the Body of Christ, can have an incredible impact in our communities, in pushing back the darkness that is encroaching everywhere. If the world is getting darker, then we just have to shine brighter. Jesus told us that we would do the things He did and greater things than these. I have chosen to believe that the reason is simply that there are more of us.



Blessings of His Joy and Strength to all the brethren.

- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi