



RESURGENCE

6s and 7s

Michael Mewborn

I recently spoke with a fellow seminary student and we talked about our experiences and requirements in various classes. He told me about the requirements for one of his classes which was to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting. The particular group with which he was required to interact was at levels 6 and 7 in the 12-step program. After he described the scene of the room and sense of encounter to me, I perked up to receive the conclusive and valuable insight regarding how to deal with the needy. Then he said something that shocked me. "Michael, I felt more accepted and received amongst that group of individuals than I do my own church family." I was taken aback and jolted. I expected to get valuable insight on how to attend to the needy however I realized that he along with I, had been thrust into an encounter with brokenness for which we very much wanted to be involved. Instead of identifying someone else in their brokenness as though we were observers or onlookers, he and I came to understand that we were as broken as they were and very much in the middle of our own significant struggles.



My friend spoke of their openness and their desire to readily and honestly associate with any struggles they faced. They were transparent and open emotionally. Unbeknownst to them, their honest openness was startling and generated a certain discomfort in my friend due to his inability to both communicate his deepest struggles and unknowingness about the real conflicts in his life. Nothing he had seen or participated in had prepared him for such an encounter with personal revelation, not even the Church. The group offered for him to join them in discussion. He was first hesitant because he thought that practically he was unlike them. And then he was hesitant because he had never been prepared or participated in such open and forthcoming discussion. But then my friend transitioned to a third phase, where he found himself welcoming the opportunity to openly discuss struggles and demons. In a sense, the struggles and demons had brought commonality.

There were stark contrasts between the nature of the AA meeting and the nature of his church. The attendees at the AA meeting were more reflective and descriptive of their needs, aware of their struggles and openly honest about their emotional and mental situation, than were the members of his church. This disturbed him and in turn forced him to question the present nature of his church, congregational interaction and fellowship. He also questioned the way in which his presence, conversation and participation were meaningful to his local congregation. He questioned both his commitment and eservice and the responsibilities of his local fellowship. In what ways were he and his fellowship supporting and promoting honest and even startling demonstrations, facilitations and acknowledgements of present struggle, shame and embarrassment? In his estimation, the

church where he was a member was still debating as to whether such a question was proper to consider, much less answer.

Interestingly, when he questioned his local fellowship's desire for openness and transparency, he questioned everything else about his place of worship. Does the willingness of congregants to admit, discuss, enjoin with and minister to any and all personal struggle affect the way in which it worships, relates in ministry or even interprets Scripture? After doing a few momentary theological calculations, my friend was startled at the answer-Yes. He realized that he had gained much more from the AA meeting than he expected. He gained insight and perspective on his own insufficiencies and the shortcomings of his church. Through this encounter, his perceptions on the proper way of "doing" church were attacked.

If many church goers are unwilling to share their struggles or even worse, are unaware of their struggles, how much difficulty and resistance will they face when ministering to others? Perhaps church goers need some sort of 12-step program, some way of identifying their most disparaging selves. My friend concluded that alcoholics were more advanced and superior at communicating their struggles and need for support than himself and his fellow church members. But this superior place and position was achieved through a decision they each made. They choose freedom over bondage. He sarcastically concluded that if a "church 12-step program" was initiated for members, most would undoubtedly be labeled 1s and 2s.

Discouragingly, he understood that if his church friends did not realize and articulate their struggles, then they, regardless of how much Scripture and doctrine they understood, would be unable to realize and articulate Christ to themselves or others. The capture of our struggles and shame leads to the capture of Christ and our true selves. This is the essential story of the broken believer who rightly conceives of his brokenness. My friend continues to attend the AA meetings, not because he is an alcoholic but because of his desire to participate in uninhibited, pure and honest fellowship.

Co-Founder Michael Mewborn