

Recruiting new and younger leaders

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Thanks everyone for giving me 10 minutes to share with you some thoughts I've had of late, mostly caused by Kai and the leadership asking me to share on this topic. Even so, recruitment does ring my bell and if we are honest about it, it's the theme second only to actual evangelism, that bothers, blesses or aches our heart so very regularly.

And yesterday's talk with David and issues related to competition actually play out in recruitment as well.

I enjoyed reading Kai's book about Joseph Rabinowitz, the well-known Russian Hebrew Christian leader from Kishinev. He got saved in 1882. Then as early as 1886 he formed the congregation "Israelites of the New Covenant". He conducted a tremendous ministry in Moldova. Most of us would title it "a successful ministry," but his ministry at Somerville Hall is not here anymore. What's missing? What was missing? I believe two things prevented the continuity of the mission. One was his apparent refusal to have his people baptized by the churchman who brought him along, and in terms of this talk, mentored him.¹

Of course, the real anti-baptism issue might have been discontinuity with the Jewish people, and he did not desire such severing. Another topic; another time. The other prevention was the failure to find, recruit, train and hand the mantle over to a successor. I don't doubt the powerful work Rabinowitz performed and the people

¹ Kai says the following in his paper from North American LCJE (#8, page 8): Rabinowitz himself was baptized, but he never got permission to baptize or to administer the sacraments. The authorities would only allow him to function as a preacher. So when the term "Rabinowitz's congregation" is used, it should always be borne in mind that he was never given permission to establish a church proper. It goes without saying that a church proper cannot exist without Baptism and Holy Communion. And that being the case it is no wonder that Rabinowitz's movement crumbled after his death.)

who are in heaven as a result of his finding his 'elder brother Jesus' and the truths of the Gospel.

And yet.

And yet those decades from the end of his work and the beginning of so many of our works in the Former Soviet Union, imagine what could have been. If only.

If only what?

OK, maybe that's not fair to apparently malign our brother. And that's not my intention.

But the successor-- that's a huge concern to many of us. Not only as we age into our 40s, 50s, and up, but it's something about which we should be concerned from early days in ministry. Who will come along with us and to whom can I hand things as I'm called elsewhere?

You know the Bible teaches something about working as a priest for 25 years according to Torah.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "This is what applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting. But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work any more. They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep an obligation; but they themselves shall do no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations." (Numbers 8.23-26)²

² Concerning the length of service for a priest or a king, consider the following biblical references to beginning work at 25 or serving as a king for 25 years:

Now Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem **twenty-five** years. (2Chr. 20.31)

Amaziah was **twenty-five** years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. (2Chr. 25.1)

Jotham was **twenty-five** years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. (2Chr. 27.1)

He was **twenty-five** years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. (2Chr. 27.8)

What followed the work of service in the Tabernacle was to be the teaching ministry to younger priests. And how often do we dream of sitting around with younger disciples, sharing the tribal stories of our efforts? How would we enjoy being with Tevye the Milkman singing, “they would ask me to advise them, like Solomon the wise.”

We often look at our resources, even as we are doing here in these days. Friends, our greatest resource is the people around us. Jesus said, “I have finished the work you gave me to do.” (John 17.4) and he was referencing people. The apostles were his work. Of course, the cross, the healings, the teachings, they all play into what we call his work, but his work—I believe it was *people*.

And Y’shua entrusted his work to the likes of Peter and Philip, Matthew and Simon, Thomas and Paul. We might say, “Good luck with that one!”

And Y’shua continues to entrust his work to the likes of Brickner and Hirsch and Glaser and Jean-Paul and ...wait for it,... me! What was he thinking?

He was thinking what we all need to be thinking... passing the torch is the only way to make life keep going, and to ensure that the ministry of the living God gets to everyone on the planet.

And recruitment is not unto us, or our turf, but unto His ministry, and the team he desires to build. Let me unpack that a bit.

You can each read books and journal articles on recruitment. Perhaps you have given lectures or taught your staff about recruitment. You may feel like you have been successful. When I look back over my 38 years in ministry I can see somewhat clearly when it worked and when it didn’t. I got saved in 1971 in Kansas City, in the centre of the US. My world was filled with Jewish hippies and others who both

Hezekiah became king when he was **twenty-five** years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. (2Chr. 29.1)

Jehoiakim was **twenty-five** years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God. (2Chr. 36.5)

wanted to change the world, and were willing to put themselves on the line to bring such change to pass. That world no longer exists. We have changed, both in US and globally.

So I will not argue from a uniformitarian stance, that is, everything which we have now has been and will continue to be. I don't believe that at all. I believe we are constantly changing and our worlds are never static. As such, we have to be alert to principles, rather than actions, which can be transferred into new situations.

So I looked back, most actively one year ago, when a retired pastor from Lawrence, Kansas, asked for my help. He was doing a review on history from 1971; in fact, he was going to try to write the history of a church I started, The Mustard Seed. Nick became the pastor when I left in 1977 or so. He asked me to help fill in some blanks. Nick Willems is nearing his 90th year and wanted to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and remember what God had done in those turbulent and glorious 1970s. Would I help?

Sure, I replied. And he asked questions and wanted photos and such. So I helped him and Nick published that book earlier this year. I read it with pleasure in February. And then I preached at the church again in April and saw what he had done. What we had done. What God had done.

What was God's action then? I did the work of planting a church, evangelizing, pastoring, and gathering mostly young people who found the team/community nature of The Mustard Seed worth all the energy and commitment we employed. It was the work and the team of witness which worked together.

Then I think about my 11 years in Australia and wonder when anything will happen. When will God do what He is so capable of doing in Willow Creek or Philadelphia or Yoido, this time among our people Down Under? I've handed out tens of thousands of Gospel tracts, taught hundreds of churches about our Messiah, written 30,000 postcards (smile), and yet, how many staff, how many volunteers, how many people are putting up their hands to say they want to work with us?

And that's the rub, isn't it?

That's the ache for you, isn't it?

God has done stuff, and He wants to do more stuff, and we ache for people to get it done. We could write more and translate more and reach more people and evangelize and pastor and equip and... if only. If only we had those resources which do not fit inside a donor envelope.

So my thoughts on recruitment are fashioned by need and stirred by memory.

When have I been successful? When we worked in teams. Younger people today want to join communities, whether on Facebook or twitter or McDonalds and then in their homes.

They demand privacy, more than we have ever seen in Western history, and yet, they long for human touch. Bob Mumford taught me what sociologists had taught him, they long for four things: love, security, recognition and adventure. All of those of course, are found in the Gospel and Gospel ministry. But the young do not know that yet. They are celebrity-driven and celebrity-focused. They see stars in sports and Hollywood or Bollywood and also see their obscene paychecks. They see those same stars burn out and fade away. They see their marriages; laughable to call it marriage, really, and watch the celebrities become human again. And it's not only secular viewing. In the Church, pastors and evangelists fade into both secular humanism and scandal-based irrelevance.

Thus young people do not enter into marriage.

They do not enter into commitments in work.

They do not enter into commitments at all.

Maybe they have too many choices. Maybe they are prevented by their own fears. Maybe they don't know that the only way to make crops start growing is to put their hand to the plow. And to keep our hand there.

That's what Y'shua taught in Luke 9. Luke had introduced this section with "he was journeying with his face toward Jerusalem." (v. 53) Isaiah said, "I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." (50.7) When dealing with

dropouts, and disappointment, Y'shua encountered a triad of people and quick conversations. One said he would follow the Master anywhere. The second told of the father's imminent burial. The third wanted to farewell his family. To them all, Y'shua invoked the "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62).

Someone asked me last week 'What has made you keep on, after all these years? To what do you owe your success?' I replied, "Hand to the plow." That's what it is for us, isn't it? Even so...

Friends, the activists of the 1960s are no more. But activism still is compelling and requires a continued response from us.

I believe we have to gather teams who see each other and relationships as significant and then who can actually turn their relationships into serious ministry work. *Recruitment then requires the work and the participatory team.*

I've seen that in our Australian branch as we have collected individuals into CoLabourers, most significantly in Singapore, but throughout the region as well. And now our internship program is actually gaining steam and bringing in the young people for whom I've desperately longed.

Avi Snyder continues to be the one in Jews for Jesus who has made such an impact and done what I'm speaking about today. I'm not so sure that Avi did anything like it when he ministered in Chicago or Los Angeles in the 80s. I'm sure what he did mattered and brought Y'shua great pleasure. No doubt there. But on the topic of recruitment and team building, what Avi has done in the Former Soviet Union and its people worldwide is remarkable.

What did he do? He went and did the work, and others got saved. Then he brought them along and they brought others along and it continues to this day. It's both the work itself and the team he built which are of note. It's what Moishe did with some seriously-rag-tag young adults in the early 70s. It's what Y'shua did with fishermen and theologians and Centurions. He did personal ministry to them and then invited them to join him. They did. The results are historic.

God is glorified in the Church and He will be glorified again, even through us, my friends. How good is THAT!