

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29)

Jesus uncharacteristically modeled a very open life of relationships whilst cultivating an intimate life of solitude with his Father. Yes, it was in the outflow of the fullness of his relationship with God the Father that he proved faithful as God the Son. Relative to the Western world's professional and scheduled relationships, Jesus extraordinarily established an intimate discipling community. The whole of the disciples' daily lives were subject to their Rabbi, including home visits, travelling and reclining at meal times. The disciples were encouraged to emulate Jesus' life and ministry. This obviously cost them other material and natural relationships. "See, we have left everything and followed you;" Peter asks, "what then will there be for us?" Jesus assures his disciples that the sacrifice of ordinary relationships is multiplied in eternal inheritance.

You may have encountered that those closest to you; your spouse, children or longtime friends, remain the least influenced by your faith. Paradoxically, cultivating a relationship with God forces us out of loneliness and convenient relationships into a new kingdom community. The spiritual family is connected by a deeper bond than genetics, "It's precisely in the hub, in that communion with God, that we discover the call to community. It's remarkable that solitude always calls us to community. In solitude you realize you're part of a human family and that you want to lift something together."¹ As Salvationists our lifting may be heavy but it is not apart from the ministry of Jesus we are called to emulate him. Jesus' needed his relationship with his Father and to invite his disciples into this place so that together humanity would minister to the world. He drank with the woman at the well, fed the 5000, touched lepers, healed the sick and resurrected the dead. Further, he was anointed with perfume and tears, served by Martha, loved by Mary and invited his disciples to his most terrifying hour's from Gethsemane to Calvary.

Jesus continues to invite 21st century disciples into this intimate fellowship with God and to go and make disciples. In the Western world's professional and scheduled rhythms, much instruction on self-care overemphasizes boundaries and healthy limits, incorrectly reciting, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Many infer and teach that in relationships and ministry you ought to first give yourself the pampering you imagine another desires. Jesus' life and example was full of open relationship with those who might neglect, deny and betray him. Yet, Jesus, who entrusted his life to the Father, was able to live openly and love widely despite people's sin and circumstance.

Nouwen correctly observed, "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives."² Truly, relationships are difficult to cultivate because those we come so close to are as broken and ignorant as we are. "Patience, like forgiveness, is at the heart of community life;" Vanier implores, "patience with ourselves, with the laws of our own growth and with others."³ We have the

1 Henri Nouwen, "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry" in *leadership* (Spring 1995).

2 *Ibid*

opportunity to wade deeper into God's love, not by being hermits, but by creating a space for God where we discover our unconditional acceptance and seek His gracious love for those brought into our lives as co-ministers and co-healers. By diving into the risky world of relationships as Jesus did we find that wherever we encounter emptiness and suffering we will discover together the redemptive joy of the Father.