

To all the saints at Williamsburg:

I applaud your emphasis to look beyond what attending church can do for us. I recently prepared for a discipleship seminar and found Robert Bellah's assessment of the problem of focusing too deeply on a church made in our image. He writes, in *Habits of the Heart*: "Americans want freedom from rather than freedom for, an attitude of 'I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it. No one better tell me otherwise...' To the extent that church is reduced to an aggregate of individuals who shop like consumers to meet their needs, we do not have the basis for **community** in any biblical sense. How can we possibly build countercultural communities out of such porous material?"

I truly don't know how this assessment may reflect your church in Virginia but Bellah's observation was exactly what my church needed. Here are some of the expressions that we see weekly in Vancouver.

- Last week our church took 3 hour prayer shifts to pray for 24hrs/day for 7 days.
- Meals are shared in church members homes that include the homeless and people marginalized by prostitution
- People have given up living in the nice area of town to live alongside the poor.
- Young adults use their spare time to mentor inner city children.
- Members give their vacation time to care for orphans in China
- College aged students give a year of their lives to serve and learn more about Christ through our church discipleship program.

While these are good things our church is doing, we must be careful to remain focused on Jesus' Power as the vehicle for true transformation.

In the eleven years of living and serving in "Canada's poorest postal code," we have seen our good be a temptation towards pride. We have seen people burn out or feel less than Christians because they cannot endure the schedule or lack the passion to pray. In our times of need, Jesus encouraged us with His word in 1 Corinthians and John 13:33, 34: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Most notably, this is not done by one particular group but is spread out across our whole church. Who is doing all of this? Well it is Jesus' church! In prayer, vision and activity the whole body is engaged as they are able and when our neighbours look at us, they know we are regular people who love each other and the world because we are Christians. We are the body of Christ. Could this identify with your hearts in some way? How would Williamsburg see the chapel? Do you love each other well in grace or do you bicker and gossip? Would your community see you in service to the world or more of a social club? I truly don't know the answers to the questions I ask, but I do know by the request of this letter that Jesus is doing something. I also know it isn't going to be strapping up our boots or doing a better job that will make the change. Jesus' body is animated by His Spirit. If God's Spirit has you as an open vessel, he will fill you with boundless love. You will experience His presence and you will serve Williamsburg how Jesus would.

I ask that God would do that.

Amen.

Jonathan Evans