



The Journey of Thomas

Our Own Journey

By John J. Smid

Followers of Jesus Christ – Impacting our communities with the gospel!

As I think of the main purpose of The Journey of Thomas, I find myself continually coming back to what started all of this in the beginning. My heart changed a while back and a new burden developed for the lost, the wayward, those who are not connected to healthy fellowship or the Lord at all. I was comfortable in a ministry to Christians seeking God for a better life. I didn't think so much about those who were lost assuming that was someone else's burden and that God was taking care of that. When I thought about sharing Jesus with the world I discovered some adverse feelings.

- Does sharing the gospel with others scare you?
- When you think of talking about your faith do you want to run away?
- Are some of your family relationships so tangled up that you can't imagine talking with them about Jesus?
- Is your schedule so full that you can't take any more time out for those that seem to be lost?
- Can you picture yourself building friendships with people who at one time were enemies to your walk with Christ?
- Do you think sharing the gospel requires a lot of Scripture memorization and training in a specific program of evangelism?
- Have you more often thought the gospel was for those called into evangelism?

I hope that as you read these questions, you already sense an awareness growing in you that the practical applications of the Core Values counteract these concerns. Perhaps you are already seeing how Active Participation, or being Non-judgmental, or practicing Transparency and Respect cause the underlying timidity in these questions to fade away. I hope that what is left is the truth that you have the tools necessary to be competent in personal evangelism. And in that truth, a growing desire to reach out to a lost and dying world.

As I have made further examination of these teachings, I see that growing in my life. Recently I was talking with a friend whom I hadn't seen in a couple of months. As I shared my heart with her I found a passion coming out of my mouth. "We must get out of our church buildings and into the world!" The Journey of Thomas can help make that possible in your life.

In The World?

Several months ago a friend of mine accepted a position as a photographer for an independent movie project here locally. I offered to help him with his equipment. I thought it would be interesting to be involved and I went with a great deal of curiosity. As it turned out, this was a production about urban life in the "hood". I was very uncomfortable at the beginning because we met in places that were unfamiliar to me and with people that I prejudged to be different from me. I remained quiet and just began to take it all in.

Very quickly I could see that God had something more in store for me. I began to experience kindness, acceptance, and overall friendliness from virtually everyone involved. I was humbled by their overwhelming acceptance.

Within a week God began to work deeply in my heart. I began to lose my preconceived view of these people. I still noticed a difference in color, but not as much of a difference in them. I felt free and open to speak and relate to those I might come in contact with in a new way.

Ironically—but not coincidentally—this was all occurring during the session I wrote for this book on Authenticity. I found that I wasn't being very authentic with the people I was spending virtually every day with on the movie set. I felt convicted to go to share this with the Director of the film. I needed to be more authentic with him in order to share with him who I really am inside. My own personal journey was about seeing these people like Jesus does and to reveal myself to them. I found that my role there had less to do with the movie and more about the people and relationships. It became a challenging and yet encouraging experience.

I began to see my walk with Christ in a new way. I had been inside a lot of churches, heard many teachings, and shared rich fellowship over the years. Now I was experiencing my true faith walk quite a distance from those church walls. There was something very exciting about being in the “real world” God was revealing to me.

Looking Outside Our Walls

Can we serve Jesus fully if we remain comfortable within our own buildings? Will the Great Commission be fulfilled simply by inviting people to church? If we put more of our effort on how we greet visitors than reaching the lost, we are likely to attract many more “church jumpers” than new believers in Jesus Christ.

Our Journey—the one that you and I are being invited to—is about building relationships with those in the “real world”. Since these relationships will potentially be with people we are not used to being around, we need live a life more honest, authentic, and transparent. We need to become more actively involved in their lives, less judgmental, and protecting their confidentiality. We need to become more sensitive, respectful, and honoring of them as people!

What? You Want Me To Be a Friend of His?

Another part of my own journey began a few years ago. I was confronted with protestors standing on the sidewalk in front of the controversial ministry I was directing. They were picketing our youth program and were stirring a lot of media to action. They were also being antagonistic towards us and to me in particular. One of the protestors was filming the event to produce a documentary with a clear agenda to change what he believed was wrong.

After a few weeks had passed he requested a meeting with me. I reluctantly said yes, and went into the meeting with some hesitancy.

Once the meeting began I found him to be quite different than I expected. He was quite warm and engaged in an honest and transparent dialogue. He was very easy to talk with. I found he was nothing like what I expected him to be. His honesty was disarming and the conversation was actually comfortable. To put it simply, I liked him.

We have had many more meetings over the years.. We have enjoyed getting to know each other and he admitted to me that he found me to be different than he expected as well. We have shared with each other that we actually found a friendship that we appreciated.

Our relationship has taught us both a lesson. Don't judge a book until you have read it! Yes, we have differences. But in the end, our differences are not the focus of our friendship. I have learned a lot from him. My life is richer from knowing him. He has opened my eyes to see the world very differently. I see Jesus' calling on my life to see the world as a place where He wants me to be. He has called me to reach out, to be in the world around me while not being of it. And another special outcome from this is that the documentary he intended to be an expose' on the ministry he was opposed to has changed its purpose. It has now become a documentary about two men from opposite points of view on something who developed a friendship.

I have several new friends now that are different than me and may not have the same spiritual or social convictions that I do, but I like them and learn from them. I hope they like me too.

None of these relationships would have been possible without an intentional application of the lessons taught through the Journey of Thomas. As his journey becomes our journey, we will learn to see others as Jesus sees them.

Springs Of Living Water, As Unto Salvation

The ravaging of the church occurs continually over doctrinal disputes, congregational splits, and denominational fracture. The unfortunate result is the undermining of the Body and distraction from the Great Commission. And yet there are springs of living water as unto salvation coming up from the sidewalks of our cities. The springs are full of life but many Christians are without the tools or experience to know what to do. How can we respond to the needs that are so apparent? I would suggest maybe we should look for people we feel inspired to get to know on a more personal level.

A lady told me recently that her greatest burden was to reach the tattoo crowd. Well, I am not sure what she meant by her description of the people that she wanted to reach, but in her heart was a growing burden.

How will she reach the people she has a burden for? Are they going to come through the doors of a church? Chances are she will have to go to them. She may have to find a new hobby, a new club, or a new place to hang out. She may have to be willing to face ridicule or misunderstanding; it might not be comfortable at first. But I believe that as the grace of God empowers her to go where He sends her, she will find some great new friends, discover God's purpose on her life, and build an incorruptible treasure in Heaven.

The Great Commission has to be in the streets of our neighborhoods and communities. It might be in a bridge club, or a hobbyist club. It might be at the PTA, or Neighborhood Association. You might find God calling you to play in a secular band, or audition for a community theater. Or, it might just be your next door neighbor that He calls you to serve with sacrifice of time or resources.

This is something I would love to see the Body of Christ move towards! So many organized churches plan a place whether they see it or not, that is a "bless me club" including a well organized sermon, entertaining highly technologically developed music, donuts, coffee, meals and programs for

children and teenagers. But, will you find the lost there? Unless we are intentional about our pursuit into the world, we will find ourselves far too comfortable in our surroundings and a lost and dying world will be left untouched.

What would happen if we let ourselves get into the streets of our lives and gathered together for refilling, and to process our experiences? I believe we will find that Christ will lead us into the world if we let Him. As we become faced with our own life experience and that of our peers, we will likely need Christ desperately! Rather than protect ourselves in a church program, we can empower ourselves towards inspirational living. Imagine our churches replacing programs with preparation towards ministry, teaching us what it means to be in the world, but not of the world?

Where is Your Mission Field?

Another friend of mine is a DJ artist. He loves Electronic House Music. He had a gig at a local club and invited several of his friends to come. Wanting to bless my friend by showing my support of his talent and interests, I went. It was at a midtown club that was in my view, an unpleasant environment. The event was smoky, loud, and involved all kinds of people that seemed incompatible with this grandfatherly guy.

When he asked me later what I thought, I had to be honest and tell him that at first I couldn't understand why he would be in such an ungodly environment. But after I evaluated my own life I thought about the movie production that was also very ungodly and smoky, and unattractive. But God gave me the grace to be there because it was about building relationships and reaching others with what I have experienced myself. I have experienced the love and grace of a forgiving God who cares deeply for my life. It is my desire to share this with others. I wasn't of the world, but I sure was in it!

My friend has a tremendous burden for the people that come to experience Electronic House Music. They respect him and that is a mission field for him. I am now very supportive of his burden and pray for his outreach to be very successful!

Where is your mission field? Are you feeling a burden for a place where you might be called by God?

God is calling you to share His grace with others

A lady I know had a dad who owned a prominent gay bar in San Francisco. He was Jewish and the men whom he got to know from the gay bar would come into their home. She would ask her dad why he did that, knowing he didn't agree with the practice of homosexuality. His response was, "Dear, we have our own standards that we live by but we cannot expect the world to know them or live by them. My responsibility is just to love and respect them". This lady grew up to become a very committed and spirit filled Christian. It was a lesson in her life that drives her to this day.

Is it overwhelming for you to open your eyes to see the real needs right around you? You can close your eyes, but it doesn't remove the need. It is easier for me to go to "church" and hear the nice music and to receive the friendly Sunday morning hellos and hugs from my friends than it is to go into the streets and expose my heart in a real world.

I believe the Journey of Thomas has the tools and principles that will relieve our fears, motivate our desires, and help us to keep healthy boundaries that will be necessary to reach the lost for Christ. I also believe it will alleviate some of the pitfalls that discourage us from reaching out.

I hope you will join the Journey.

Prayer for today:

God as I dig into my heart I admit feeling intimidated to open myself up to the lost. I really don't want to leave my comfort zone with other Christians, but I cannot ignore Your heart cry for those who are estranged from you or never knew you in the first place. I ask you to pry my heart open and to prepare me to share the love of Christ with those you ask me to. Give me courage Lord to move into your world and learn more about Your heart for those You are calling to Yourself.

Practical Application:

Take this week as an opportunity to apply this concept. Ask the Lord to show you three people that He is revealing to you that He may ask you to approach with a simple introduction of yourself that you haven't known before. Look for people that cross your path on more than one occasion and see if maybe God is providing a divine appointment to meet them for His kingdom purposes.

Write three feeling statements regarding entering into the Journey of Thomas:

"I feel _____

About sharing my faith with others

Because _____"

"I feel _____

Discovering more about myself and my life in general

Because _____"

"I feel _____

About relating to those around me that may be very different than I am

Because _____"