

Dwelling in the Word

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Preface

When two people decide to throw in their lots together and work at something, you never know what's going to happen. When two people with maybe too much education, drive, determination, ego, and enthusiasm, not to mention a sense of God's calling for them, decide to throw in their lots together and work at something, you can almost predict an interesting, short-lived, potentially badly-ended period producing one or two results that look pretty good but never extend beyond the two partners into a life of their own.

In 1989 your two authors met and figured out almost immediately that each of us had gifts the other needed in order to get something done in God's mission. We shared a deep concern for congregations and how they would make the turn into a new age of mission in their Christendom shape. We actually studied how armies and ships turn, how groups of adults learn, and how shared stories, analogies, and metaphors affect congregations and their shared work. Once in awhile the Lord blessed us with an extremely simple, brilliant idea. These were seldom notions either of us had invented. They were mostly habits someone else had used, combined with the scriptures and a place and time to allow the Holy Spirit the elbow room to work.

At the time of the writing of this little book, we can say that, in almost 18 years of working together, in classrooms, large church body gatherings, retreats with church staff members, and consulting projects around the world, the most innovative thing we've introduced to people is the habit of Dwelling in the Word.

We have written materials about small groups as a way of being church together, about conflict as the energy that fuels mission, about the shared journey of the *Partnership for Missional Church* as a way for congregations to discern in the company of others their missional vocation, and even about how to use online tools as a way to understand a church's history and culture and calling to serve its neighbors. But perhaps none of these things will stand the test of time as well as the habit of Dwelling in the Word.

The blessings that the two of us have received from our work together are staggering. The partners we have been given all over the world have enriched our lives and expanded our understanding of what it means to be the

church in a myriad of particular places, cultures, climates, and languages. Praise God, we never are allowed to forget that what drew us together and what has blessed our work with so many others is God's very life; we have been taken into God's work by sitting quietly in God's Word with a great cloud of witnesses to the faith. Our work would be pointless except for the fact that it begins by listening for the *viva vox*, the living Word of God, in the scriptures, in one another, and in so many who began as reasonably friendly-looking strangers to us.

Never will it be said of either of us that we had sufficient humility. No one who knows us would confuse us with shy persons who would hesitate to boldly go where no one has gone before. But God is bolder still, and persistent, bringing us again and again back to one or two simple ideas that help people listen for God's voice.

And when you have sat with a conflicted church governing board and have seen them recognize for the first time in a long time a moment of *shared* understanding, or when you have stood in a room that holds persons who have historically shared only hostility and fear and then seen them move toward one another, greet one another, bend their heads toward one another, listening for God, you will know something of our joy in this work we have been given. It feels like watching a child learn to walk and then run.

It is a privilege to write this book for you. We hope it helps.

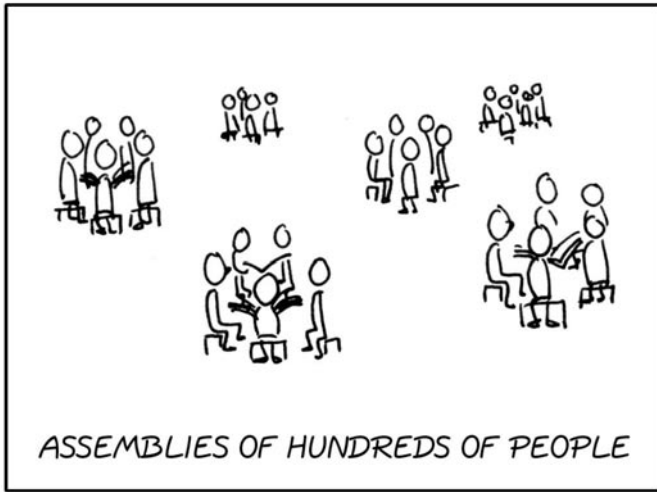
Introduction

Do you have a couple of cousins you really like? Perhaps they live far away from you and you don't see them very often. When you do get together, what happens? It takes awhile for you to become well-acquainted once again, but when you do, it's amazing how your stories reconnect, how you remember your roots together! You claim your shared heritage, and you rediscover your relationship.

Even better, you could invite them to stay at your home, or you could go to stay in theirs. What happens then? You spend more time together, you play together, you cook for one another, you prepare sleeping places for one another, you live with one another's pets, and you really take in the life that is theirs, and they take in yours. This staying together, dwelling together, makes some parts of your relationship blossom in ways that they never could if you remained apart.

Now, sharing a dwelling place for several days, we could agree, is a way to get to know people pretty well. After sharing a dwelling place, we'll be less likely to shallowly misinterpret something they say, less likely to dismiss their concerns or fail to consult them when something important happens. Instead, they are part of our imagination, just as we are part of theirs.

In much the same way, we have discovered that dwelling in the Word of God as a ritual part of our life together has become part of our imagination at Church Innovations. We have invited a few cousins to live with us at every staff meeting: verses 1 through 12 of Luke 10. These verses are read every week at the beginning of our staff meeting. They are as integral a part of our staff meeting as the coffee. In a two-hour meeting we spend at least 30 minutes dwelling in the Word, seeing how this living Word, from the God whose children we are, might speak to us that day.



We have invited these verses to be a part of every Partnership for Missional Church cluster, every consultant training, every staff covenanting retreat we've ever held. Some of us have even invited them into synod assembly work with hundreds of people at a time reading and talking about

them together. We hope after reading this little book that you will invite them into your group, too.

Chapter 1

First, just do it.

Here are the steps for dwelling in the Word:

1. Start with Luke 10:1-12, knowing that at some point, you may want to select your own passage, a story that is related (like a cousin, perhaps) to the story of your group's work. But start with Luke 10: 1-12, because it works for many people all over the world – it is a good beginner's piece.
2. Have Bibles available at every meeting so that the story can be read by different people each time you meet. Or make copies of the passage (at CI we have the passage printed within a piece of clip art of a small house. Luke 10 is inside that house to remind us that Luke 10 is our dwelling place together).
3. When your group assembles, be sure you set aside at least 20 minutes for this activity. Begin your meeting with the reading of this passage. Then allow some silence to unfold as people let the words have their impact.
4. Instruct folks in this way:
Find a person in the group you know least well (we call this person a “reasonably friendly-looking stranger”).

Listen to that person as he or she tells you what they heard in the passage. They may mention something they'd never heard before, something odd or something comforting, or something about which they'd like to ask a Bible scholar.

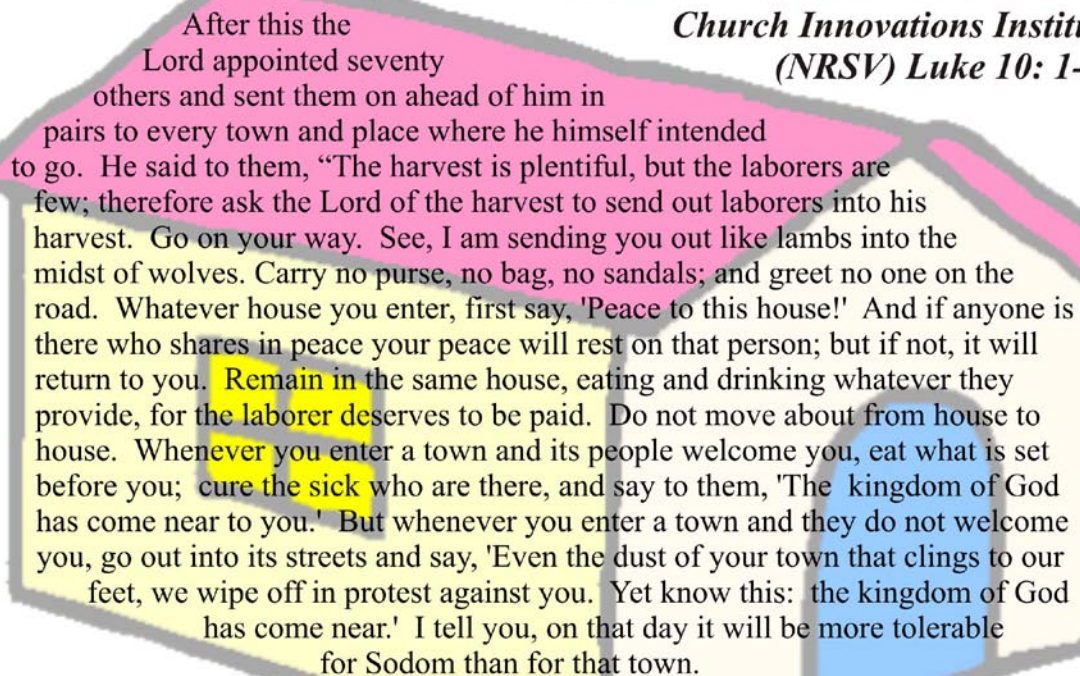
Listen well, because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your *partner* has said, not what you yourself said. Some people even take notes to help them focus and remember.

5. Then, turn folks loose with their partners for 6-10 minutes. Notice how *they* are paying attention. When you draw them back together to report what they have heard, ask for what they learned from their partners.

6. Then wrestle together as a group with what God might be up to in the passage for your group on that day.

The Word In Which We Dwell

Church Innovations Institute
(NRSV) Luke 10: 1-12



After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.