



Compelled to Love

by Zoe Hansen

Following the twelve days of Christmas (which culminate on January 5th), the liturgical calendar moves us to the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. Centered around the story of the wise men as presented in Matthew 2, we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles and the good news that Jesus revealed God to all people, not just the Jews. Officially, “The Season After the Epiphany” lasts this year until February 13, the day before Ash Wednesday.

In this spirit of Epiphany and its traditional focus on the outward facing church, the next couple of Bellwether editions will explore the latter part of our church’s mission statement: “*Abiding as disciples of Christ, invited to rest; compelled to love.*” How are we compelled to love?

I have thought, talked, and written much these last couple of years about what it means to rest, because I find it so elusive—especially the kind that God invites us into. I’m not talking here about a lifestyle of “taking it easy” in some idealized euphoric leisure that we dream we might enjoy if we ever win the lottery. But Hebrews 4 refers to a Sabbath kind of rest that we are called to enter into: “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.” This is a kind of rest that is rooted in deep trust and full surrender to the will and love of our Creator. Jesus lived from this place of rest and invited us to do the same: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt 11:29).

Rest for our souls never implies perpetual inactivity (although we do need inactivity sometimes). Rather, it redirects us to a more life-sustaining fuel source. A rested soul lives in freedom—from slavery to its passions, from its needs to self-promote and self-protect, and from all the underlying fear that once drove it to exhaustion. Only perfect love can cast out that tyrannical fear (1 John 4:18). Living from that kind of love frees us to be who we were always meant to be in the first place—companions of God, co-rulers and co-creators energized to respond to our calling with a growing love of our own.

Rest is humility. Rest is love. Rest is trust. And these three are always manifested in responsive obedience. This is my goal.

From this place of rest, we are compelled to love because we cannot help ourselves. It is who we become, not merely what we do. We love sacrificially, more like the way Jesus loves, because it flows from who we are becoming and where we are abiding—safe and deeply rooted in the love of God.

If we find that we cannot love ourselves or our neighbor, the solution is not to simply will ourselves to obedience. That is impossible. The solution is to seek the rest of God, to draw closer to his heart and receive what we need to move forward. “*For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15).* And then we follow his lead, trusting that we will find our hearts enlarging.

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all . . . that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

—2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV)



Encountering the Alpha Course

by Martine LaPrevotte

My journey through Alpha began in 2005 in the midst of recovery from a head-on collision. I was in physical therapy three days a week, working to regain my ability to walk and trying to absorb the huge changes this reconstructed knee would bring to my life.

The accident opened my eyes to considering God's will and His desire to keep me here on earth for some reason. I needed not only physical reconstruction in that season, but some spiritual reconstructing as well. I had left a church years before and had not pursued another church family since. I needed a restart, a new beginning, to return to God, His church and community. Alpha was that restart for me.

A warm welcome from not one but many congregants from Christ the King [the church plant that preceded both Church of the Incarnation and Church of the Lamb] awaited me. Fran Kale and her contagious smile greeted me at the welcome table. I was given a seat at a beautiful table with other guests to this church. Alpha begins around a table, just as we at Church of the Lamb celebrate around a table.

I met my group's table host Zoe Hansen and other guests, including JMU students, high school students, and other participants of various ages who like me needed a start, or a restart, with Christ. Believers, non-believers, hurting people, no matter what, each was treated and loved with the respect of being heard because their thoughts mattered.

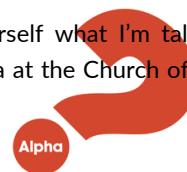
Nicky Gumbel, the worldwide Alpha leader and pastor, led with a video talk after each meal. Each topic over the eleven weeks set a

fire for God in this new church attendee's heart, restoring a broken person like me to the Lord that loves and never gives up on His children.

The combination of discussions after the video in our table groups led to wonderful open-ended questions and responses. The love poured out to each group of guests was apparent as the trust and communication developed and the participants freely shared their thoughts.

Alpha enables guests and hosts/ hostesses to join together in a very special way that only God can fully bring about. After my first Alpha experience, I went through it two more times, but these times as the person greeting new guests! My journey back to God and church has continued with many of those same faces here at Church of the Lamb that were there with me at my very first Alpha nearly nineteen years ago!

I hope that you will come and see for yourself what I'm talking about when we host our first in-person Alpha at the Church of the Lamb barn this summer!*



**Alpha 2024 is coming to COTL June 12 through August 14. Alpha runs all over the world and is used by every major denomination. How might you participate (greeter, table host, prayer team, kitchen help, etc.)? Who will you invite? Start praying for them now. The Alpha Course (alphausa.org) is great for those who need a safe place to explore the basic teachings of Christianity. We are especially grateful to the Larson Foundation for awarding a grant enabling us to provide this wonderful opportunity to our wider community. Email zoe@churchofthelamb.org.*

Introducing the Defnall Family



Josh and Sarah Defnall began attending Church of the Lamb in peak summer. While holding sweaty kids and swatting flies throughout worship they fell in love with the call to "abide in Christ". They delight in being invited into His rest and from there, "compelled to love". Their children Elana (9), Teddy (7), George (4), and Lulu (2) have enjoyed spreading out on Lamb's acreage and engaging with the beautiful Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Josh works as an Edward Jones financial advisor in Dayton. Sarah owns a private practice as a counselor. They are both originally from Warrenton, VA, but have called the Valley home for the last 17 years. They have loved raising their children with liturgical rhythms and have found Lamb's beauty, pace, and community a true gift.

Evangelism is Normal

by C J Goeller

“Always be prepared to give an answer...” (1 Pet. 3:15) was a banner evangelism verse for my generation. The focus was on having the right answers and being able to explain the gospel to those who would ask. Not wrong. Just limited.

The Greek word for ‘be prepared’ carries the meaning of fitness or being in shape.

If you asked me to play basketball with you, ‘being prepared’ is NOT having the shoes, shorts, shirt and basketball. That’s merely external preparedness. Being prepared to play basketball is a state of internal conditioning. It is being able to run the courts without collapsing. That’s a whole lot different than having the right clothes.

In the late '90s into the early 2000s, Gatorade ran a clever series of commercials. They were all shot in black and white. Only the Gatorade was in color. Red. Purple. Orange. The commercials would show an athlete preparing for their sport. Lacing their shoes. Stretching. Drinking Gatorade. Then quick clips of the athlete competing. As they gave it their all, they began to sweat. The commercial was still black and white, except the athletes’ sweat. Their sweat was in color; the color of the Gatorade they drank. The commercials would end with the athlete sitting and wiping the colored sweat off their body with a towel. A voiceover (Michael Jordan, of course) would say, “Gatorade. Is it in you?”

“Fitness Evangelism”. Natural. Organic. Overflow. What’s in you comes out of you. “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). We speak spontaneously of what we love.

Ask me about bourbon and you’ll get an earful. I need no notes, internet searches, videos or pictures. I can tell stories, describe labels, share taste profiles and more, all from the heart. NOT because I’ve sat down and memorized them. But because I’ve experienced them so regularly over extended periods of time that they’re in me.

Bourbon. It’s in me. (Always and only in moderate quantities.)

If you ask me about bourbon and show enough interest, I’ll invite you to come over and try some. If you show even more

interest, I’ll likely see if you wanna visit a local distillery. It’s natural for humans to speak freely and casually about what’s in us. To share what we love. Evangelism is normal to being a Christian.

Gospel. Is it in you?

I’m not asking, “Are you saved?” But, “Do you daily believe and delight in the gospel?” Do you take in gospel like an athlete consumes Gatorade?

Evangelism of others begins with evangelism of yourself. If you need help taking in the gospel, these books are great resources to get you going:

The Gospel Centered Life by Thune and Walker
Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning
From Fear to Freedom by Rose Marie Miller
The Return of the Prodigal Son by Henri Nouwen
Romans
Galatians



CJ (pictured right) has served with InterVarsity at JMU faithfully for over 27 years. When not being present to his beloved JMU students, he might be found at home, sipping a Manhattan while reading a good book or playing Mario Kart.

Also, check out this amazing article/ video that Ernie Didot published about him in the *Apostle Online Magazine* a while back.
<https://anglicanchurch.net/stable-single-joyfully-serving-students/>

Providing Mercy and Hope

by Zoe Myers

Before six years ago, my thoughts of homeless people would have been the ones panhandling on street corners, people who often have chronic substance abuse and mental health problems. Six years ago, I was asked to serve on Mercy House's board of directors, and I learned about the shortage of affordable housing in our area and the devastating effects it has on families. Local landlords have learned that renting to college students is vastly more lucrative than renting to lower income families. Mercy House, a Christ-based non-profit serving Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, offers short-term shelter for homeless families, works with them to obtain housing, and continues working with them to prevent future homelessness after they have moved into permanent housing.

Most of the families Mercy House serves are working families. They have just enough money to pay the bills until something like a child's illness results in medical or prescription costs, or an adult's illness results in not earning a paycheck for a week or two, or a car breaks down. These families have to weigh buying medicine or getting the car fixed or paying the rent. Once they get behind, they have no way to catch up, and any future emergencies push them to eviction.

One of the clients I got to know, "Susan," has four children and had left an abusive relationship when she became homeless. She worked three jobs including one in a poultry factory. When she finally found housing to rent, it was a large farmhouse near Mt. Clinton at \$1500 a month. Several months later, the chaplain at Mercy House let me know that Susan could use some financial help. Church of the Lamb approved a generous donation to her through the Rector's Discretionary Fund. When I took the check to her, Susan teared up. "Zoe, when I went to Walmart yesterday for groceries, my car broke down. I didn't know how I'd get it fixed. I prayed that God would help me, and he's heard my prayer."

Today Susan has worked her way up to the maintenance department in the poultry factory, the first female in its history to have made it into maintenance.

To learn more about Mercy House, please visit themercyhouse.org or you can ask me!



Join us in helping with the Mercy House Food Drive this January!



Church of the Lamb has been invited to contribute items for the Mercy House food pantry.

Mercy House is a faith-based organization that serves homeless families in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. This year, they have served 140 families, a total of 341 people. Mercy House's food pantry supplements the food needs of current residents of Mercy House's shelter as well as former residents with whom the staff continues to work in order to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

This year, Virginia reduced the amount of food stamps that people receive, increasing financial hardship for many families. Hunger is a real issue in Rockingham County. The Lacey Spring food pantry run by Grace Mennonite Church gives out 5,000 lbs. of food to 500 people per week.

We will hold our food drive in January and encourage you to bring food items to your Parish Group. If you are not part of a group, we will have a container at the barn each Sunday where you can drop off your donated food.

While all canned food donations are appreciated, suggestions for non-perishable food items that are especially needed are: fruit cups, crackers, snacks, juices, condiments, salad dressings, canned fruit, canned meats, ground coffee, tea, creamers, cereals, breakfast or granola bars.