

THE DIVINE DESIGN

GOD'S *Plan for* **RESTORATION**
in a **COMMUNITY** *Setting*

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The Divine Design: God's Plan for Restoration in a Community Setting
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ISBN: 978-1-935769-95-8 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-935769-96-5 (ebook)



True Potential, Inc

PO Box 904

Travelers Rest, SC 29690

www.truepotentialmedia.com

Printed in the United States of America.

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FOREWORD

In reviewing my time at CARE with Jo and Cheri, I thought about all that I learned in my ten years in a community setting.

Three steps took me from a self-centered individual to a self-less participant in redemptive community. Each step was pivotal to submerge me into a life where Christ-followers join in close proximity to discover who they really are in Christ. This reality, when expressed with humility and grace, can develop into the colorful expression of God's redemption for individuals and groups alike. While there are different levels of participation, it is clear that all of us are called to genuine fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

The Investment

Every child has the fundamental need to be seen. Being a recipient of this deed goes beyond others viewing or watching us as one would the evening news. True seeing, when practiced, involves much more than looking or peering as a spectator. Seeing and being seen involves joyful attunement that forms personal identity, builds character, creates belonging and grows security. Jesus saw Nathanael under the tree and made a believer out of him. Jesus spotted Zacchaeus in a tree then joined him for supper. The God who hung from a tree and rose from the grave calls each and every one of us to deep, interactive fellowship. It is here that a certain type of seeing creates deep change. Seeing who God created us to be makes us feel recognized, cherished, special and valued. God has placed within us an inherent need to be seen for **who we are, who God designed us to be, and who we can become in His Light**. This is eventually fulfilled upon the entrance through heaven's gates, a time when we will see things as they are. Until then we express God's love here on earth through joy-filled relationships where we see others as they were created to be instead of their malfunctions, distortions and brokenness.

Cheri was the candle who lit within me a burning desire to know, follow and serve the God who sees. It was Cheri's presence that expressed joy and love. Her stories and investment of time became key elements that would eventually ignite a fire. One day this fire would lead me to Baldwin, Michigan. Baldwin, of all places, is the place I would serve God alongside of Cheri and Jo in one of the most unconventional methods. I would be involved in the development of a redemptive community. This move, however, started years before.

Observation One: **God invests in us. We should invest in others.**

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.
John 17:6 NKJV

The Invitation

It all began with a phone conversation in 1997. I still remember the words that were woven together to form the invitation. Cheri's warm voice mentioned the opportunity for a summer internship. My job description was simple. I would serve under Cheri and Jo, answer phone calls, organize files, observe ministry sessions and learn. I accepted. Little did I grasp that this was far from a normal summer internship. Those two summer months would lead to both unimaginable adventures and severe heartache. This journey would open my eyes and alter my life. I was given a new lens to view the world.

The internship started at the ministry headquarters in Kokomo, Indiana. During the training I discovered a new reality. When observing ministry sessions, I watched God mend severely broken saints. People were healing, growing and recovering from a lifetime of unimaginable abuse and neglect. It did not take me long to conclude that most of my life was spent looking but never really seeing. I had somehow missed the reality of God's presence in this world and the devastating effects of mankind's cataclysmic departure from glory. In the end, I returned to the university, no longer feeling like the same person. My life changed, my eyes opened



and my heart softened. I finished my final year of school and then returned to Indiana to team up with Jo and Cheri.

Little did I know in just a few short months the three of us would pack our belongings, drive to Michigan and narrowly escape a blinding blizzard—by minutes. God was calling us north. Life as I knew it was about to take a dramatic turn as the unmarked terrain of redemptive community loomed on the horizon.

Observation Two: God calls us to deeper fellowship. Intimacy grows in relationship.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.
Revelation 3:20, NKJV

The Intensity

We left our comfort zones in Kokomo. Unsure what to expect and unaware what the future held, God was calling us to something new and unfamiliar. Our passion was to train and equip churches to effectively care for the wounded. While this facet of ministry would continue, God had a greater vision. In a short time, individuals and families started moving near us to pursue genuine fellowship and join the work of setting captives free. *Relationship* would fill the landscape of our lives along with training and equipping churches. Our plans to build a training center shifted to a more organic process where motivated believers gathered to exchange life, deepen their faith, build joy and find healing.

The flames of a furnace are hot. Sharing life together with people from different walks of life is demanding. Redemptive community is by far the best and the worst of times, the most rewarding yet the most excruciating. With each relationship, we can soar in states of joy then plunge to depths of despair. Our weaknesses are exposed. Pride is flattened and rough edges are smoothed. Every day holds countless opportunities to develop character skills and practice humility. I still remember the ex-



citement of following God, as Abraham did, out of the familiar into something new. Little did I know the lessons I would learn, the wisdom I would gain and the love I would feel as I lived in redemptive community.

It was not all fun and games. Within a few short years we had been accused, harassed, heartbroken, threatened and exhausted. By the grace of God, we persevered. We developed a deep, abiding character that better reflected the God we so loved. We learned about relational skills, maturity formation and joy. We made mistakes, and we found new opportunities to grow, even blossom. We witnessed miracles, encountered God and dug deeper into the heart of our Father who cares for orphans, feeds the father-less and mends the broken-hearted. I learned that redemptive community, in all its wrinkles, is a gift and a necessity.

Observation Three: Community is where the weak and the strong join together and persevere.

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 1 Corinthians 12:20, 26 NKJV

Had I chosen to remain in my comfort zone, I would have missed the remarkable opportunity to encounter the God who sees in a most profound way. Cheri and Jo are courageous pioneers who took me under their wing, believed in me and gave me a new way of seeing.

Chris M. Coursey



PREFACE

When we began working as licensed counselors in the field of mental health, we encountered some of the most devastating problems of horrific proportions endured by human beings—childhood sexual abuse, human trafficking and ritualistic abuse. How does one recover from such devastation? Compassion from the LORD for these precious wounded ones rose up in us, and we had to try to assist them in their healing journeys, although our educational training and skill soon failed us as we faced the damage done to them from such histories. Our desire to help these individuals started us on a long journey in aiding them to heal and find redemption through their suffering. Our passion was to help them believe in God's goodness when in their past many of them had only been exposed to cruelty, shame, humiliation and a very skewed understanding of love. We did not stop looking for answers until we found ourselves in community together.

The main purpose of this book is not about how to recover from severe childhood abuse and trauma, although it is a byproduct. This is a book about community. Community is the soil in which the landscape for healing is created. While trauma recovery is our passion, it is what God used to help us discover His passion: true fellowship among brethren committed to living life together through the community experience. We didn't know it at the time, but He put us together with His lost sheep, people with backgrounds and problems that couldn't be helped in the way of traditional counseling. He used our passion to draw us all into His life-saving redemptive plan. This thing we call community is God's divine design. Why do we call it life-saving? Because we found it to be life not only to those who carried wounds of severe trauma, but it was life for the healers also. After fifteen years of community life together, we are convinced that God intended community for all His people in order to save us from ourselves and mold us into His likeness. No other design but the intensity of community life together can accomplish this.

This book is very personal to us. We watched those who have contributed to this book come to community and pour themselves into their healing and establish or re-establish a loving and reliant relationship with the LORD. We have watched them grow and mature into wonderful disciples for the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is very personal.

As this book developed, we realized that God has taken us on a journey to teach us about Him and how much we need to depend on Him to do the Kingdom work He has chosen for us. Along the journey He wanted us to see that because of sin, each of us has had some type of trauma in our lives and we limp along dragging the remnants of the trauma with us. We will share our journeys and how it shaped our lives and prepared us for helping others heal in God's divine design, which is community.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have had many mentors and colleagues on this journey whom we want to thank for sharing their wisdom, knowledge, experience and kindness.

We want to thank Herb Rowan, Doug Riggs, Dr. Jim Gaskell, Dr. Fred Dickinson, Dr. James Friesen, Dr. James Wilder, Karen Sackett, Dr. Tom Hawkins, Dr. Ed Smith, Dr. Alice Moody and Norman Duley, M.D. These people are only a few who were instrumental in giving us the tools to help others.

There have not been many forerunners in community to pave the way for us. Besides Moses and the early Israelites, who lived in tribes, Jesus and His disciples, who daily broke bread together, there are two men in our modern times, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Art Katz, who have lived in the intensity of community life and have provided invaluable resources of their experiences. We have frequently quoted them to allow their wisdom to guide and shape our understanding of community life. We are grateful to these men for the pioneering they have done for us.

We want to thank our most patient teachers, all the men and women of our community who have taught us about maintaining dignity during their darkest days. They have taught us about the resilience and strength God gives those who are poor in spirit. What an honor and a blessing to be a part of God's restoration process!!

A very special "thank you" and "praise your most Holy Name" to our Great, Awesome and Wonderful God. You are faithful, forgiving, wise and have given us the best seats for watching You on this journey to set the captives free!

"You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He.

Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior, I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am He. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act who can reverse it?” (Isaiah 43:10–13)



INTRODUCTION

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NKJV)

“All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” Do we really believe that? That is a tall order! How do we understand things working for good in the face of trials and tribulations, grief and loss, emotional and physical pain? The human experience is wrought with many of these difficulties that each of us have or will encounter. During difficult junctions in life, we are challenged to find purpose in suffering, to believe in God’s goodness and to trust in His redemptive plan, even when there appears to be no answer, no justice, no redemption forthcoming.

For those of you who are passionate, like we are, about helping the severely wounded find help and healing, you will enjoy the attention given to the accounts of survivors’ healing journeys and how their lives were greatly impacted through community. In this book we will also define the specific problems related to trauma, discuss the impact of trauma on the brain and share with you the recovery model we found most helpful in healing: the Thrive Model developed by E. James Wilder, PhD, who based his theory on the research of Daniel Seigel, MD, and Allan Schore, PhD. The Thrive model examines what each of us needs for healthy growth and development and concludes that all human beings need the following five essential elements to thrive in life: a sense of belonging, to learn to give and receive, to learn how to recover from distress, to mature and to develop a coherent identity. This is what God intended each of us to learn through good healthy parenting and bonding in a family experience. Sadly, many grow up lacking good parenting and healthy bonding. Bessel Van Der Kolk, in his new book, *The Body Keeps The Score*, states, “Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-be-

ing.”¹ Throughout our combined fifty plus years in the mental health profession, we have never seen conventional counseling in an office setting be a sufficient substitute for meeting developmental needs. Consistent role models and opportunities for genuine bonding occur through a sense of family in community settings. Without exception, community is the most comprehensive design for meeting needs that were lacking from childhood.

When a person is systematically abused verbally, emotionally, mentally, physically, sexually or ritually, it causes life-long trauma. The symptoms that a person exhibits may be anything from post-traumatic stress disorder, borderline personality disorder and dissociative identity disorder to addictions to socialization problems, attachment disorders and a host of physical problems.

Dr. Kathleen Young, a licensed clinical psychologist on trauma disorders, stated on her website:

Sometimes therapists talk about “big *T* trauma” and “little *t* trauma”. This is in no way meant to imply that any traumatic events are insignificant! We understand it as a way of expanding the definition and understanding of trauma to include things that may not be found within the DSM IV (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) definition. We are all familiar with examples of big *T* traumas: childhood sexual, physical or emotional abuse, natural disasters, war experiences, severe car accidents and rape. Little *t* traumas can be just as damaging, especially because they tend to occur over time, and build upon each other. Examples would be ongoing emotional abuse or neglect, experiences of shame, humiliation, being left out, bullied or ridiculed and feeling not cared for.

If you watch the news, read the papers or pay attention to the media at all, you cannot miss all the traumas that happen every day from shootings in schools and in theaters, murders, children missing, a child being sexually abused by a parent or stepparent or both, teachers abusing children.



This names only a few of the DAILY horrific occurrences that happen around the world.

There are people who have had horrific backgrounds walking around, holding down substantial jobs, married with children. Inside they feel like if you “really” knew them, you would abandon them with hatred. They hate themselves and don’t trust others (even a wife or husband). They put on a mask and hide behind it with self-loathing. They live in fear: fear of being exposed, fear of the past, fear of their emotions and fear of everyone around them. Many are extremely lonely, angry and spiritually bankrupt.

Generally, when people come to see us, they feel they have tried everything else and want to try the community approach to healing. Many churches have rejected the severely wounded because their problems and behaviors are too overwhelming for churches. Our approach to healing recognizes that “talk” therapy does not impact most of the areas of the brain that are affected by trauma. People need people; that is the way God has created us. Adam needed a *helpmate* (comforter, companion, supporter, encourager) of his own kind. Jesus sent the disciples out among the people two by two. Today, as in the past, companions and encouragers are necessary. Art Katz dramatically states how critical our need is for one another:

The powers of the world are increasing. There are things that captivate the souls of men, rooting them in time. There is a blocking out of any consideration for the things that are eternal. We cannot, however, come to freedom from this evil influence by ourselves. The separation is so painful and those powers are so pervasive and strong. And it is only through the support, the encouragement, the prayer, the wisdom, the counsel of others and the atmosphere that we generate together as the community of God’s people that we can live and maintain that freedom without again being sucked back into the power of the world. Community is not an option. It is GOD’S PROVISION TO RESIST AND TO OVERCOME THOSE POWERS. Sons



and daughters of God are those who will overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, and I cannot see that we can be this people EXCEPT in community.²

Art Katz passed away in 2007, but he left us an understanding that we have not found anywhere else—the power of community. Survivors of trauma need others who understand, who have experienced the pain and healing of trauma to help them on their journey.

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1. van der Kolk, Bessel A. *The Body Keeps the Score*. Viking, N.Y., N.Y. 2014, p.38.
 2. Katz, Art. *True Fellowship: Church As Community*. Art Katz Ministries. 2009.

