

Rebuild



And they shall rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the former devastations, and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

Ingredients for Community (Part Five)

Environment: The Most Overlooked Yet Important Ingredient...

Environment is one of the most overlooked, yet powerful influences on our lives. Nobody's unique genetic code is ever going to break free from its gravitational pull.

Virtually everyone can see how environmental factors exert consistent, unrelenting shaping power on one's physical or emotional life. We may be more than environment, but no one

Rebuild is a bi-monthly journal dedicated to the renewal of the Church through the restoration of Christian Community. If you know others who would enjoy *Rebuild*, let us know, and we would be glad to add them our mailing list (although *Rebuild* is costly, there is no subscription fee). You can either subscribe, or terminate your subscription by contacting us via any of the following: *Phone: 970-221-4847/E-mail: rebuild @ peakpeak. com/ Mailing Address: Rebuild, 2136 Sheffield Drive, Fort Collins, CO., 80526.* Those wishing to make tax deductible donations, can make checks payable to: "H.T.O.C.", memo: *Rebuild* . | - (Nov., Dec 98/Jan., Feb. 99)

lives outside of environment. Is the impact of environment as formative on the soul as it is on the mind and body? Few take time to even think about it. That is a mistake.

There are consequences to a fish who swims in a pond coated with motor oil. A woman who does aerobics in a place thick with asbestos is a prime candidate for lung cancer. A kid raised by cocaine sniffing, physically abusive parents is not going to leave that home "the better" because of it.

Environmental surroundings - whether physical, psychological or relational - make a difference between health or disease, life or death. Our spiritual environment can have just as great an impact. Ignorance or indifference to "where we live" is not going to neutralize what can hurt us.

The person doing the jazzercise routine may be unaware of the asbestos fibers that surround her, but unless she changes her environment (i.e., gets out of there), she's going to get sick. Unless the believer removes him/herself from an antagonistic spiritual environment - our individualistic, self-centered, materially oriented culture - that Christian's soul will get sick from the world.

The World. What is It?

The "world" I speak about here is not the world of creation (rocks, trees, and flowers, etc.), but the atmosphere of ideas, values, and relationships that are manipulated by satanic forces. These "spiritual powers" of the air (Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4) seek to "inspire" people to think and act as if God did not exist - or at least as if He were irr-

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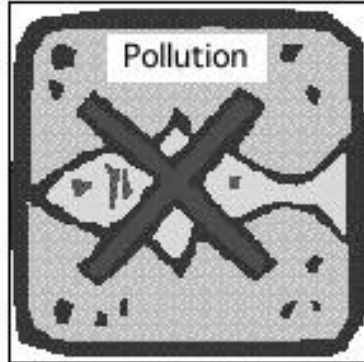
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levant. As people are pushed and shoved around in this spiritual environment, they feel vulnerable and afraid. They often frantically grab at anything that might keep them from drowning - career, money, buying something "new," getting into a romantic relationship. In general, these people have an inner compulsion to strive, attain, and do whatever they are doing faster, and better, without stopping to think why they are doing what they are doing. You would expect this from persons who might be driven by unseen powers.

The world encourages the average person to build a castle of one's personal ambitions, and hide in it. This person feels protected there, but the person is deceived; he has closed himself in a prison of his own making. To keep oneself in such isolation is not safe. On the contrary, fierce, cold winds of self-centeredness numb mind and heart in this place. Unfortunately, this is not only the home of the "unbeliever." Many professing Christians have taken up accommodations here as well.

Jesus prophesied that just before the End, the love of

many would grow cold (Matthew 24:12). This environment hastens the fulfillment of such a prophesy. I fear that many of us have so deeply drunk from the cisterns of this castle, that compassion has cooled and become indifference, zeal for the Kingdom has become practical apathy, passion for God has been diverted toward "created" things (Romans 1:21), i.e., money and "stuff."



Let's be honest. How many believers do we know who maintain a passion for God after their conversion? How many do we know who live a *life* that says, "I am madly in love with God?" How many churches can we point to and announce, "There is a Community who loves God and one another to the point of laying down the American dream for God's dream - to the point of laying down their very lives (1 John

3:16)?" I fear we have breathed in and out too frequently in places where we are not to live, in places where we have grown numb to the cold and can no longer feel. This is what the "world" does to people.

Where's the Treasure?

"By their fruits you shall know them," Jesus said (Matthew 7:16). The lives of those who are filled with the Spirit's indwelling - lives *characterized* by love, trust, peace, hope, humility, self-discipline, joy (Galatians 5:22,23). Would our non-Christian friends characterize us this way? If not, why not? A possible answer is that our minds and hearts have lingered in places where the spirit of the world is more comfortable than the Spirit of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Jesus says that what we care most about will be revealed by our investments. "Where your treasure is," He said, "there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). How can we discern a person's greatest treasure, what he or she deems greatest in importance? Watch what the

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person gets excited about. Ask the person his greatest ambition in life. Ask him or her to share with you their goals. It will not take long for you to discern his/her treasure. Those who prize the Kingdom *treat it as a prize*.

Of course, a simple way to find out what a person values is simply to ask to let you look at his checkbook. What the person spends money for is a good indicator of what he or she is willing to "be spent" on.

Jesus gives us perhaps one of the most revealing ways to see the state of our hearts, and what spiritual environment we have called home, when He said, "the mouth speaks that which *fills* the heart" (Matthew 12:34). Our speech is an undisputable x-ray of what fills our hearts.

What is inside in the American Christian's heart? Eavesdrop on a conversation after worship and find out. What's being *talked* about? The topics are usually not all that different from those one would find almost anywhere, discussed by anyone: status of home sports teams, latest home remodeling projects, Washington scandals, what's

going on at work, the Y2K crisis, the kids, recipes, relatives, the weather - virtually everything and anything but God, or the things of God.

The problem, of course, is *not* that the Christian and non-Christian have a lot of the same conversations. The problem is that both believer



and unbeliever are passionate about the same topics, and indifferent about the spiritual ones. Make no mistake. This is the result of the believer having contracted the world's virus.

The Big Question

So the Big Question is, "Do we want to hang frozen in the world, or move into the sunlight of the Kingdom?" God wants to thaw our hearts and extend His Fire, but He will not bring this Flame where cold, self-centered

independence rules. To leave "the vault of frozen pulses" we must move into a place where His Fire is welcome - the Community of His beloved (1 John 1:2,3; Ephesians 3:18). Here, in an environment where His love sets the pitch for life, values, relationships, and all of life is inspired to live in Covenant Love. Sated indifference melts away. Compassion and zeal come alive.

Moving from an environment where self-centeredness reigns to one where kingdom values flourish has a more profound impact on a soul than the sun's warmth on shivering flesh. Ways of thinking become clearer, the greater priorities give way to the lesser, relationships come before personal ambitions, and success itself is redefined around eternal realities rather than Wall Street census takers.

The kingdom of God may not be here in its fullness, but it *is* present. To the degree we *live* in love with God, *and* His People, it will be seen, felt, and tasted.

The call to us then, is to be intentional about how we can truly live together in love and commitment. There is

no way we can honestly say that this is our treasure and refrain from making this a priority.

There are those who question the need for an explicitly Christian environment. "A devotional life ... attending church services ... ministry ... is all that is needed," they argue. These responses fail to see the pervasive power of the world to freeze-dry souls; they fail to understand the expansive nature of God's vision which will never settle for being the "subculture" but must embrace all of life - everywhere, everyone, everything. To believe individualistic responses can push back the

world would be similar to saying a Chinese man can declare himself a democracy in Red China. In a similar way, the Christian is not fully able to live what he or she believes *alone*. God's government is expressed and experienced within a *People*, not alone - and certainly not alone in the world.

Next Issue: What specifically is a Christian environment and how it differs from being immersed in a multitude of Christian activities.

*** What Happened to the Last Issue of *Rebuild* ? ...**

*Unfortunately technical problems (i.e., a computer crash, adoption of a new software package) as well as the extra time it took to redesign *Rebuild* put me behind schedule. These problems forced me to skip an edition. Please accept my apologies for any possible confusion or inconvenience this may have caused.*

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