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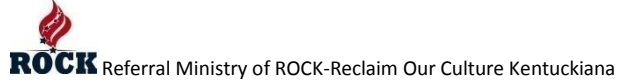
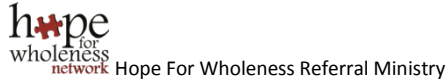
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NEWSLETTER—May 2016

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## **THIS MONTH'S MEDITATION SCRIPTURE: *And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common. Acts 2:44***

This article first appeared in our November 2013 newsletter. It is just as relevant in our Christian culture today as it was two-and-a-half years ago, if not more. I have just finished reading "Messy Grace" by Caleb Kaltenbach. Much of what he says in this project released last year is in line with this month's repeated article.

### **[Can We Be a Better Church?](#)**

Well, let's see. Most of our churches are characterized by these things: corporate meetings where we worship by singing, praying, preaching, teaching; we eat together; we do "outreach," whatever that looks like in each of our different circles; many congregations are involved in sending out missionaries to various parts of our communities, states, and other countries. While all these things are good, and it's important for us to be thankful to Father for the congregation to which He has directed us, are we being the best reflection of Jesus we can be to non-believers, and to each other? Many of us born-again churchgoers still live our safe Christian lives, showing up whenever the doors are opened, yet we only just scratch the surface of who the Body of Christ is called to be. Many of us never get past the Sunday-best outfits; the superficial pleasantries exchanges; the smiles on our faces that appear as soon as we hit the church parking lot, then disappear (just as suddenly as they showed up) as we depart the property.

We call this togetherness fellowship. I checked a Webster's dictionary and found the primary definition for fellowship is, "companionship; friendly association." Seems characteristic of those superficial pleasantries exchanges. I also checked out a Webster's thesaurus, which shows that one of the synonyms for fellowship is intimacy. Now, there's a word you don't hear real often in very many of our church gatherings (unless, maybe, we're talking about sex in marriage).

Intimacy suggests familiarity with other individuals, a closeness that goes beyond surface knowledge. In order for true intimacy to occur in our relationships, there must be an open and honest disclosure of ourselves: the good and bad, the pretty and ugly, the neat and messy. It takes courage, trust, bold truthfulness, and vulnerability to develop intimate

relationships. And that is exactly why many never get past the surface pleasantries! What if they don't like me when they get to know the real me? What if they reject me? What if they make fun of me? If we're totally honest about it, as unfortunate and un-Christ like as it is, these responses do occur in our churches. Why would any girl want to disclose her eating disorder? Why would any married couple want to share about their long-standing anger and fighting with each other? Why would any guy share about his same-sex attractions or his cross-dressing? Why would any parents open up about their tendency to verbally or emotionally abuse their children? Why would the teenager who's being sexually abused by the youth pastor ever want to tell someone he's being molested repeatedly? Why would the widow share about her financial struggles? Why would the man who has trouble keeping a job disclose his alcoholism he uses to not feel the pain of his perceived failures? If the church isn't a safe place to be who we are along our journey to holiness, it's no wonder we opt for surface-y! Let's face it! The Church, by and large, does not know how, or want, to deal with messy. Unless it's the socially acceptable kinds of sin: gossip, tax evasion, speeding, etc. We just want to go about our lives, making sure our own business doesn't get found out, and keep those smiles ready for plastering on our faces. But.....that's not what God has called us to do.

What if our congregations became known for openness, honesty, authenticity, intimacy? What if our churches became known for welcoming those whose lives are messy? Not just past messiness; but present, on-going, "help me work through my issues" messiness? What if pastors, elders, deacons, and church leaders created an atmosphere in their congregations that it is OK to show up with our messy lives and emotionally deficient baggage, assuring congregants that Father, both directly and through His people, can bring hope and healing to our dysfunction?

I would like to think that the early church that is described in the Acts passage above shared more with each other than just possessions. They did life together in its fullness, including the messy, and learned how to love each other in their messiness so much that they became known in the culture for their love of one another. And as we read in the epistles, there was often the messiness of church members that was addressed, even some publicly. There is no Scriptural support that the early church leaders ignored church member dysfunction, or pretended it didn't exist. It was acknowledged and dealt with. There was no provision for secret sins and issues being swept under the rug; no elephants in the living room not being addressed.

Then, what if it is our church leadership who paves the way with their own references of personal faults, fears and failures, and life challenges? We don't need to know every sordid detail of our leaders' stories, but our congregations do need to know our leaders are human with clay feet, just like the rest of us. Where did we ever get the notion that our pastors have to show themselves perfectly perfect, beyond sinning in thought, word, or deed? If we are going for authenticity and intimacy in our dealings within the Body of Christ, it must include our leaders. And if we ever expect to have any eternal effect on the unsaved, we must be seen as real and authentic people who know how to love, be humble, seek forgiveness, extend forgiveness, repent and worship, as we travel this journey of being conformed to the image of Jesus. The Church, in today's culture, is often seen and described as hypocritical, because our actions don't match up to what we preach. As a leader, I want those participants in my care at Abba's Delight to know that I am not above being tempted, even after almost 21 years into my

recovery journey; that I can expect temptations as a part of everyday life as long as I'm following Jesus, and that it's OK to say "no" to those temptations; and that there are triggers I face regularly that I choose to bring into the light with trusted brothers who know me. They need to know that as long as I am in this body of flesh, I will be susceptible to attack. They need to know I make mistakes in judgment, that I don't always show Father's love in the best ways possible, and that none of those shortcomings and sins will ever remove me from His loving care.

In my home church, we've been on a series over the last several weeks of being awakened—awakened to the leading of the Holy Spirit; awakened to opportunities to pray for various needs and in various situations; awakened to receiving fresh revelations of Jesus and His Kingdom from Father; awakened to encouraging each other; awakened to being willing to see things about myself that are not befitting a son of God, and being willing to go through a change process; awakened to, and participating in, whatever honors God. I long to see the Church be awakened to the myriads of possibilities in the Lord through authentic, intimate relationships within the Body, so that we are making disciples of Jesus, not merely filling seats to up the count to show how wonderful we are.

I realize that this whole concept bucks the system. I'm sure that there are church leaders who would fear for their positions by disclosing some of their "stuff," and that's a shame to think that someone who is working on their healing in an area would automatically be disqualified. Fear is often what made us go into hiding in the first place. Would that we could find a way to leave the fear behind, and love one another more perfectly, as that would drive away the fear.

### [Responses From You](#)

From a Pastor in OH: Daniel, while we do not communicate often, please know that your ministry is appreciated and you are among those in pastoral and ministry roles that I pray for on a regular basis. The statistics on porn use in this present newsletter edition are absolutely stunning. I suspect that a stat that revealed porn use within the church among Christians might be equally sobering. Glory to God for every victory He brings forth and grace to you as you continue to labor so faithfully.

From a brother in Lexington, KY: Daniel, thanks for forwarding the very timely article on pornography. Having raised sons we've faced this much more than we wanted, and even secular media and science is starting to acknowledge its threat to our society.

From an IN brother: Thank you Daniel. Hope you are well my brother.

From an IN M.D.: Wow, I had no idea of the statistics! Thanks for sharing. I had not seen the Time Magazine article, but am encouraged of a potential turn around on the trend.

### [Upcoming Ministry Meetings](#)

Family & Friends Group: Tuesday, May 24, 2016; Tuesday, June 7, 2016 **Canceled**; Tuesday, June 21, 2016

Overcomers Group: Thursday, June 2, 2016 **Canceled**; Thursday, June 16, 2016; Thursday, June 30, 2016

### **Upcoming Conferences**

Hope for Wholeness Conference, "Jesus Above All," June 1-5, 2016, Ridgecrest Conference Center, Black Mountain, NC [www.hopeforwholeness.org](http://www.hopeforwholeness.org) and [www.ridgecrestconferencecenter.com](http://www.ridgecrestconferencecenter.com) to register

Presenting 2 workshops:

**Finding Your Destiny in God's Kingdom on Earth** Because salvation and eternal life with God are gifts which we do not have to earn, what does Father desire of us as long as we're here on earth? We'll discuss our individual and corporate destinies in God as we honor Jesus above all with our lives.

**Bringing Clarity/Definition to Being a Man of God** The world has definite ideas of what a man is supposed to be, and so does the Church. But are the pictures of a man painted by the world and the Church a true reflection of what God's word puts forth? We'll examine some characteristics of men and masculinity from the Scriptures. Bring your Bible!

### **Conference Scholarship Assistance**

There are some who would love to go to the Hope for Wholeness conference, but do not have all of the necessary funds to participate. If you have the funds and are unable to go, please consider donating to Abba's Delight towards assisting someone else to attend. Simply mark your checks "conference scholarship." Thank you for your consideration. **Please send your checks to be received no later than Friday, May 27, 2016**

If you do not wish to receive the Abba's Delight Ministry Newsletter any longer, please let me know. If you do wish to continue to receive it, please be certain to put our email address in your address book, so that this mailing does not go to your spam, and report to your carrier. Thank you.

***Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 24-25***