



VISION & MISSION



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Vision

Disciples who make disciples for the glory of God and the good of the Bay Area

A CHURCH PLANT in the San Ramon Valley

Soma Communities San Ramon Valley is a new church modeled after the early church. It is born out of the pages of the New Testament where we see Christians radically reorienting their lives around a Christ-centered community that loves, serves, and shares Jesus with the people of their city. Soma Communities is getting back to the basics that characterized the explosive movement of the church throughout the first-century world:

- ▶ the GOSPEL as the power of God for salvation and transformation
- ▶ the church as a COMMUNITY sharing life throughout the week
- ▶ the focused MISSION of making disciples

We are giving our lives for the purpose of making disciples who make disciples until the San Ramon Valley and greater San Francisco Bay Area is saturated with believers who live for the glory of God and the good of their city.

A CHURCH PLANTING HUB in the San Francisco Bay Area

Soma Communities San Ramon Valley will become home-base for a Church Planting Hub in the San Francisco Bay Area that will plant many churches of missional communities. We will partner with many churches and organizations throughout the Bay Area to see the whole region reached for Christ. Ben Joyce will help lead the San Francisco Bay Area Church Planting Hub and will also join the team that oversees the Soma City Vision of establishing Church Planting Hubs throughout the western United States.

Core Values

Gospel. Community. Mission.

Soma Communities San Ramon Valley has three values that permeate every aspect of our life together: Gospel, Community, Mission. These three values were central to the vitality of the early church but have been neglected in many contemporary churches. The way in which these deeply-held values intersect in every aspect of our life together makes Soma Communities unique among Bay Area churches.



THE GOSPEL IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE

THE GOSPEL IS FOR ALL OF LIFE

“The Gospel is not just the ABC’s of Christianity but the A to Z of Christianity. The Gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.”

Tim Keller

Soma stands in contrast to many churches that have traded in the gospel for religion. Of those that do affirm its role in salvation, few affirm its role in transformation. The result is few people coming to faith and even fewer growing to maturity.

Core Value: Gospel

The Gospel is Good News, Not Good Religion

The gospel is good news that through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus has done everything necessary to restore people and creation to a right relationship with God. This news calls for celebration! And yet many churches have exchanged this joyful, God-centered message for a burdensome, man-centered message. At Soma, our foundation is the gospel, not religion. The two stand in stark contrast to one another:

The Gospel vs. Religion

Gospel	Religion
What God has done for us	What we must do for God
The power of God for salvation	The effort of man for salvation
A gift we gladly receive	A reward we dreadfully earn
Motivation through joy and gratitude	Motivation through fear and obligation
Results in love and willing obedience	Results in resentment and begrudging obedience

The Gospel Is for Salvation and Transformation

The message of God’s grace is key to both salvation and transformation. It is what we believe to be saved, and what we believe more deeply to be changed. Through belief in the gospel we are restored to a right relationship with God, and through a deepening belief in the gospel we are set free from habits that hurt us and those around us. Therefore, the gospel is central to every aspect of our lives and this church. We view the gospel as the hub to which every spoke of the Christian life is connected, rather than a first step on the stairway of the Christian life. We allow the gospel to inform and transform every aspect of our life together.

INDIVIDUALISM IS THE WAY OF THE CULTURE COMMUNITY IS THE WAY OF CHRIST

Core Value: Community

Community is More Than a Meeting

When God created human beings, he designed them to be in community both with Him and with one another. Sin damaged those relationships. But through Jesus Christ God is restoring people to right relationship with himself and with one another.

When the first followers of Jesus were filled with the Spirit, they began to live as a family that had God as its Father. They shared meals, met in one another's homes, gathered regularly to celebrate what God was doing, and lived lives characteristic of the radical generosity and love they had experienced through Christ. Church was not a service, a meeting, or a building. It was the family of God sharing everyday life as brothers and sisters, carrying out God's purposes by God's power. In our Missional Communities we share life like the early church did, blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others.

Soma stands in contrast to many churches that have reduced Christian community to a Sunday service or small group meeting.

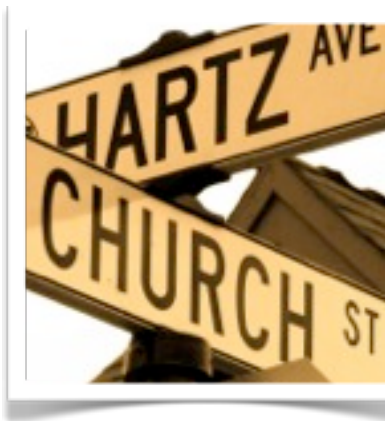
Community is the Context for Change

The scriptures are clear: the transformation from non-believer to new believer, and new believer to mature believer, happens best in community—community that is more than a meeting. When non-believers are introduced to a healthy Christian community, all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are brought to bear on their hearts.

One person may be particularly gifted in sharing the gospel. Another person may have the gift of hospitality. When non-believers hang out in a community with these two people, they both hear about the gracious welcome of Christ and experience it. The gifts reinforce each other. Christians who are sharing life as a community will also benefit from many spiritual gifts impacting their lives. As they learn to disciple one another in everyday life, every contact with someone in their Missional Community becomes an opportunity for growth. By focusing the life of the church on Missional Communities rather than Sunday services, Soma is helping people grow in Christlikeness throughout the week.

RATHER THAN BRINGING PEOPLE TO CHURCH

**WE ARE
BRINGING THE
CHURCH TO
PEOPLE**



Core Value: Mission

The Church Exists for Mission

God is on a mission and everyone in his family is a missionary. At Soma Communities San Ramon Valley we have the privilege of partnering with God in his mission to bring hope and healing to the San Ramon Valley and beyond. In the San Ramon Valley less than 10% of the population is connected to a church. Even fewer are vitally connected to Jesus.

The people of the San Ramon Valley need a community of Christ-followers who “go and make” rather than wait for people to “come and see.” The good news of Jesus is too good to remain hidden behind the doors of the church. So we see ourselves as missionaries, our homes as missionary outposts, and our neighborhoods and workplaces as the mission field to which we are sent. God’s mission takes priority over our personal comfort. Our hope is that the people of this valley will experience church not as a building on a corner or a one-hour service, but as a community of believers that love and serve them right where they live.

The Mission is to Make Disciples

Jesus made the mission clear: “Go and make disciples.” Every disciple is called by Jesus to make other disciples. Discipleship has become an inward journey in most churches, focusing on spiritual disciplines for personal sanctification.

While spiritual disciplines and personal sanctification are of utmost importance, we have forgotten why. The goal of discipleship is that we might be like Christ, living our lives for the glory of Christ, through making other disciples of Christ. Too many Christians have sat in church for 10, 20, or 30 years, never having led someone else to Christ or helped them grow in maturity. At Soma Communities we are committed to equipping people for the mission of making disciples who make disciples.

Rather than bringing people to Jesus by bringing people to church, we are bringing Jesus to people by bringing the church to people...right where they are. This is missional church.

Missional Communities

Living this Gospel-Community-Mission Life

At Soma Communities we define a Missional Community as a FAMILY of MISSIONARY SERVANTS living as DISCIPLES who make disciples. Missional Communities are the context in which we learn to live this Gospel-Community-Mission life. While we do have a regular gathering of all of the Missional Communities for celebration, sharing, and teaching, the heartbeat of the church is in the daily life of the Missional Communities. We are committed to being the church all week long, not just for an hour on Sundays.

Why Missional Communities? Are we jumping on the bandwagon of a new fad?

No.

Missional Communities are not new. They are very old. They were the primary organizing principle of the early church. Missional Communities were how the first Christians lived out their new Identity in Christ. We believe that today everyone who embraces these four identities we have in Christ—**FAMILY, MISSIONARIES, SERVANTS, and DISCIPLES**—will naturally form a Missional Community.

For a vivid picture of life in a Missional Community watch this video: www.somacommunities.org/mcvideo



MISSIONAL COMMUNITY IDENTITIES

WHO WE ARE

Family

We are children of God who live and care for each other as a family.

God has always desired a people, an earthly family, who would live in such a way that the world would know what he is like. Through Jesus we have become Children of God and Brothers and Sisters with each other. We are members of one family with God as our Father. Seeing the church and our Missional Community as our family radically changes the way we relate to one another. Gathering regularly in our Missional Community to share meals and meet personal and spiritual needs becomes the norm.

The Family Identity stands in stark contrast to the culture of rugged individualism in America. Our culture prizes the self-made man, but God prizes community and made us in his communal (Trinitarian) image. The Family Identity also stands in contrast to a shallow church community that has been reduced to sitting side by side in a service. God's intent is that his Church would be a family that shares life and cares for one another all week long.



Missionaries

We are sent by God to restore all things to himself.

The Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit, and the Spirit sends us into our culture to restore all things to a right relationship with God. Just as Jesus lived among people in such a way that they could see what God was like, we have been sent to our neighborhood, workplace, and community to give people a clear picture of God's character. We live this missionary life with our Missional Community, partnering together to make disciples who make disciples.

The Missionary Identity of making disciples stands in contrast to the personal mission of many in the Bay Area, which is wealth and personal comfort. Jesus' mission is other-focused rather than self-focused, but he promises that it is the path to abundant life. The Missionary Identity also stands in contrast to many churches that focus on attracting and keeping people rather than equipping and sending people. As a church of missionaries, Soma is committed to equipping people to engage the surrounding culture in a redemptive way.



Servants

We are servants of God who serve others as a way of life.

Though he was fully God, Jesus became fully human, taking on the posture of a servant. Jesus said, "I came not to be served, but to serve." All those who follow Jesus are called to be servants, joyfully serving by doing whatever, whenever, wherever.

The Servant Identity stands in contrast to the culture of entitlement that exists in many of the wealthy pockets of the Bay Area, like the San Ramon Valley. A church of Servants will stand out to the surrounding culture and be a blessing that draws people to Christ. The Servant Identity also stands in contrast to the recent phenomenon of staff-driven churches in which the members are served by a paid staff. A church of Servants embraces the truth that we are all servants called to do the work of ministry. The role of those who are paid is to serve the church by equipping others for ministry in everyday life.



Disciples

We are disciples of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others.

A disciple is someone who believes the good news of Jesus, is becoming more like Jesus, and is making other disciples of Jesus. Jesus invited people to be his disciples, entering into a transformational relationship with him. Immediately Jesus brought them along on his mission of preaching, serving, and healing, so that they could learn to walk in his ways and honor God with their lives. Eventually, Jesus sent them out, commanding them to make other disciples. As disciples who make disciples, we take responsibility for our own development and the development of others.



The Disciple Identity stands in contrast to the surrounding culture that views self as the highest authority. A disciple recognizes Jesus' authority in all arenas of life and humbly submits to him. The Disciple Identity also stands in contrast to a church culture in which the congregation expects church leaders to spoon feed them rather than equip them to feed themselves. Soma is committed to equipping people to grow in the context of Missional Communities. It is also committed to equipping families to disciple their children all week long, rather than delegating their spiritual development to a one-hour Sunday School class.

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY RHYTHMS

HOW WE LIVE

Churches are often filled with lots of programs that suck people out of everyday life and the mission fields of home, neighborhood, and workplace.

At Soma Communities we believe in one program: life. Life is the program. We are learning to live everyday life with gospel-intentionality by practicing the following rhythms:

Listen

We set aside regular times to listen to God both backward and forward.

Jesus listened to the Father in prayer to discern His will. We are also called to listen to God. We listen 'backward' by regularly interacting with God's Word and the Spirit. We spend time actively listening 'forward' to hear what God is saying to us today so that we can follow his will.

Celebrate

We gather together to celebrate God's extravagant blessings.

God calls people to regularly celebrate his goodness and grace. We gather weekly in Missional Communities and regularly as a larger family, to share stories and celebrate all that God is doing in and amongst us. We invite everyone to these celebrations as a way of displaying God's glory.



Bless

We intentionally bless others through words, gifts or actions.

God desires that all nations, all people, would be blessed through Jesus. And now, as his Body (soma), we believe we live out this mission as we bless others. We intentionally seek God's direction for who he wants us to bless each week.

Eat

We regularly eat meals with others to invite them into the community of God.

Meals are a daily reminder of our common need for God and his faithfulness to provide both physically and spiritually. Following Jesus' example, we regularly share meals with one another and with those who do not know Jesus, using those times as opportunities for discipleship.

ReCreate

We take time to create and recreate in ways that reflect God to others.

After powerfully and joyfully creating the universe, God rested. As people created in his image, he made us to create, work, rest and play in ways that reflect what God is like to our community.

Storyform

We understand, experience and intersect with God's Story and Others'.

God has been unfolding his Story since before time began. We believe we are participants in God's story,

playing our God-given role. Therefore we are committed to knowing God's story through the Scriptures, and sharing the story with others. We also take time to listen to others' stories and help them find their place in God's story.

Background

Story of The Open Door Ministry

In the autumn of 2008, God called Ben Joyce to a radical reexamination of his life and ministry in light of the scriptures. It was the beginning of a new work of the Holy Spirit in his heart that resulted in a ministry at Community Presbyterian Church, Danville, called The Open Door. Both Ben and The Open Door ministry were influenced by Soma Communities. The Open Door began with just twelve people praying that God would grow their hearts in love for Him, grow their love for one another, and break their hearts in love for those who don't know Jesus. In May of 2010 there were just twelve.

By the following May nineteen people had come to faith through those twelve, and many more had their hearts renewed through the Spirit and the gospel. The Open Door ministry continues to see people come to faith in Jesus and radically reorient their lives around his mission. Some who have come to faith through the ministry are already making other disciples and being sent out to shepherd new groups. The Holy Spirit is moving in powerful ways transforming lives, families, and neighborhoods. (To read stories of changed lives through The Open Door ministry, see Appendix 4. To view the Baptism Video from May 2010, go to <http://vimeo.com/24518617>).

Story of Soma Communities, Tacoma

Soma communities began with a handful of people in Jeff Vanderstelt's living room committed to living as God's missionary people sent to make disciples who make disciples. They launched with four Missional Communities in the autumn of 2004. In the seven years since, they have grown to over 1,000 people in Missional Communities in the Tacoma region, have planted eight churches, are partnering with 19 church plants in the western United States, and have trained over 400 church planters who are leading churches of Missional Communities in faraway places like Estonia, Sierra Leone, Tokyo, and Australia. While many people have talked about being missional, they have actually lived it. As a result, God has increased their favor and influence around the country and world.

The Soma City Vision

God has given Soma Communities, Tacoma, the vision of starting church-planting hubs in ten major cities in the western United States in order to see those regions saturated with Missional Communities living for the glory of God and the good of their city. Already, nineteen churches have begun partnering with Soma Communities and many more are on their way. Ben Joyce has been asked by Soma to lead the effort of establishing a church planting hub in the San Francisco Bay Area and also join the team overseeing the larger Soma City Vision. (To learn more about the Soma City Vision, see Appendix 3.)

A Joint Venture

Soma Communities San Ramon Valley is a joint venture between The Open Door ministry www.opendoorcpc.org, Soma Communities, Tacoma, www.somacommunities.org, and Community Presbyterian Church, Danville, www.cpcdanville.org



“Jeff Vanderstelt is one of the leading practitioners of missional approaches to church planting to emerge in the last few years. He is as theologically articulate as he spiritually passionate. Watch this space!”

Alan Hirsch

Ways to Participate

Pray for the Mission

We believe that God is the one who builds His Church, so prayer is our most important work. Please participate in this mission by praying for a powerful movement of God's Spirit in which many people come to faith in Jesus, become more like Jesus, and make other disciples of Jesus. Let us know if you will partner with us in prayer and if you would like regular prayer updates.

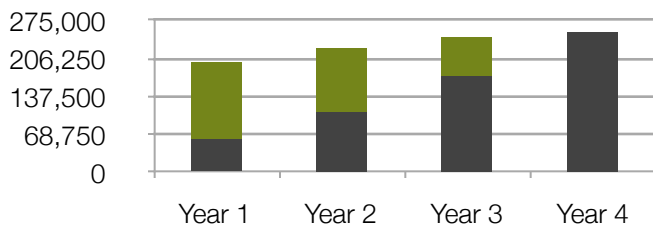
Join the Mission

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the field." We are praying for more people to join us on this mission. Do you have the desire to be obedient to Jesus' command to make disciples who make disciples, but you just don't know how? We will equip you to be faithful to Jesus' mission. Let us know if you would like to join Soma Communities San Ramon Valley.

Fund the Mission

In the book of Acts some were sent to spread the gospel and start new churches, while others remained in their present churches and helped fund those who were sent. Some went. Others funded. All prayed. The result: the gospel spread throughout the world. Please help fund this mission to start Soma Communities San Ramon Valley, a church that is not only committed to saturating the San Ramon Valley with followers of Christ, but equipping and sending people throughout the San Francisco Bay Area so the whole region is reached for Christ. Let us know if you will support Ben and Becky Joyce and this mission with a monthly gift for the next 36 months.

■ External Support
■ Internal Support



"The success of the gospel in church planting depends not only on God's sovereignty, BUT ALSO on the faithful preaching of the gospel AND the faithful prayers of God's people. Prayer is the mysterious means that God has chosen through which he releases the transforming power of the gospel in your life and ministry."

Steve Childers



Appendix 1: Why Start New Churches?

(Adapted from *Why Plant Churches?*, By Tim Keller)

The Need for New Churches

- ▶ Between 50 and 75 U.S. churches close their doors every week.
 - ▶ More than 80% of the churches in the U.S. have plateaued or are declining.
 - ▶ In the United States alone, there are over 200 million unchurched people, making the U.S. the third largest mission field in the world.
 - ▶ Since 1991, the number of adults in the U.S. who do not attend church has nearly doubled.
 - ▶ 51.9 million people in the U.S. between the ages of 20-38 are not connected with the existing churches. (Gallup Poll)*
- *Unless otherwise stated, these statistics are used with permission from Barna Research Online.

We do not need more of the same type of church, but we do need new churches! As Rick Warren says, “We need all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people.”

“The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city. And the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city.”

Tim Keller

The Benefits of New Churches

1) New churches best reach the unchurched.

In the first seven years of a church's life, 80% of the people who become members come from people who have not been going to church. After seven years it begins to flip. At fourteen years 80% of the people who join a church come by transfer from another church. The average new church plant will bring 6-8 times more new people into the life of the Body of Christ than an older congregation that is the same size.

2) New churches best reach new generations, new residents, and new people groups.

New congregations empower new people more quickly than older congregations and, therefore, reach them with greater facility. Younger adults have always been disproportionately found in new, less traditional congregations. New residents are almost always reached better by new congregations because it is easier to enter into leadership, not having to establish a long tenure of participation in an older congregation. New socio-economic and racial groups are also reached better by new churches that are able to quickly respond to different people and their needs.

3) Planting churches renews the whole body of Christ.

Planting new churches is one of the best ways to renew older churches. New churches bring new ideas to the whole body. New churches surface young, creative, strong leaders who are often entrepreneurial individuals. New churches challenge the status quo of older churches, encouraging them to examine what they do and why they do it. New churches become evangelistic feeders for a whole community by winning converts who then want to go to a more established church.

4) New Churches have the motivation and freedom to experiment.

New churches are not encumbered with tradition and ways of doing things that take time and consensus to change therefore they can experiment and adapt much more quickly.

5) New churches broaden the base of leadership in the kingdom.

New churches create opportunities for more people to be in leadership roles without waiting for the established (entrenched) leadership to move out.

6) Church planting is an exercise in Kingdom-Mindedness.

Since 20% of those who go to a new church plant may come from other churches, this encourages churches to value kingdom-mindedness and working together to reach a whole region. The church that voluntarily births and launches a new congregation has to make a sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom, but often the excitement, new leaders, and ministries washes back into the mother church strengthening and renewing it.

Appendix 2: The Joyce Family

Ben grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and headed to the northwest for college so he could spend his free time fly fishing (good way to choose a college, huh?). He and Becky met as students at Willamette University in Oregon. They dated through college and married in July 2000 at the park where Becky spent summers as a Park Ranger in her home town of Sandy, Oregon.

In August they packed up their little Honda Civic with some clothes and Ben's Bonsai Trees and drove cross-country to Princeton New Jersey, losing their air conditioning somewhere around Nebraska. Ben was fortunate to receive the Presidential Fellowship to Princeton Theological Seminary and began a three-year Master of Divinity program.

A year in, Becky began her Masters of Social work at The University of Pennsylvania. After graduating they had a short stint in Houston, TX, before moving to Danville, CA, where Ben began as an Associate Pastor at Community Presbyterian Church, and Becky counseled troubled teens in Hayward, Fremont, and Oakland.

God has blessed the Joyces with two delightful children: Samuel (3 y.o. in March) and Maddie (5 y.o. in January). Together they are growing in their love for Jesus and desire to serve their neighbors in the San Ramon Valley. They love cooking great food for friends, camping and fishing, all things related to fire trucks (mostly Sam), dress-up (mostly Maddie . . . but also Ben), and growing a community that loves Jesus, one another, and the people of this valley.



"I am so excited to see Ben being commissioned to plant a Soma Communities church in the Bay Area. Ben will not only be a blessing to the church or churches he plants because of his unique gifts and incredible character, but I also believe God has called and gifted Ben to help lead a church planting movement in the greater Bay Area."

Jeff Vanderstelt

"I am glad to join every man and woman on our pastoral staff in strongly confirming Ben's call to both plant churches and help cause many other churches to be planted. Ben has the gifts of evangelism, teaching, prayer and leadership to support this call. Ben has been part of God's blessing on our congregation for nearly eight years. In a profound sense, I believe this season has powerfully prepared Ben for new ministry in God's larger church."

Rev. Scott Farmer, CPC Danville

Appendix 3: Soma City Vision and Church Planting Hubs

Vision:

To establish a movement of Gospel Communities on Mission saturating North America with Gospel Centered churches planting churches. This starts by establishing a Church Planting Hub in key North American cities.

Western cities in which Church Planting Hubs already being established:

Seattle/Tacoma	San Diego
Vancouver	Boise
Portland	Salt Lake City
San Francisco	Phoenix
Los Angeles	

The San Francisco Hub has been identified as a key strategic initiative for the next several years.

What is a Church Planting Hub?

1. One or more **Soma Communities Churches**, and other partnering churches working together as one family to reach a city and its outlying region.

SF Status: Soma Communities San Ramon Valley will be the first Soma Communities church in the SF Bay Area. Three more churches will become Soma in early 2012 and two other churches are already partnering in the establishment of the Hub.

2. An **Equipping Team** of high capacity leaders with the ability and time to help establish new gospel works in the city and surrounding region through evangelism, establishing disciples and appointing elders to lead new churches. This team will provide pioneering leadership in evangelism, gospel proclamation through preaching,

theology, missiology, the arts, pastoral care, spiritual formation and administration.

SF Status: Ben will be the first official member of the Equipping Team. Already a handful of pastors are partnering together in equipping.

3. **Church-based Theological Training** that develops members theologically and practically while in the context of ministry and mission, leading to the equipping of everyday people for ministry, pastors equipped to lead and shepherd churches, and church planters prepared and sent to begin new gospel works.

SF Status: Starting in early 2012 Antioch School will be established in the SF Bay Area, which is an accredited degree program (M.Div., Th.M.) for training pastors and church planters. Already, over a dozen pastors have been trained to teach the classes and oversee the program. Visit Antioch Northwest (<http://antiochnw.org/>) to see what Antioch School SF will look like.

4. **Immersion Training**, similar to Soma's one-week Soma School (see <http://tacoma.somacommunities.org/learners/soma-school/>), for the ongoing equipping of Missional Community leaders, local pastors and new church planters. During this week, leaders from all over the world live in and participate in the life of our Missional Communities to experience and learn what everyday gospel ministry looks like, learning how to transfer these same concepts into their own culture.

SF Status: We plan on hosting our first Soma School Immersion Training in early 2013.

5. **Shared Resources** such as communication tools, administrative support, financial accountability structures, assessment and training tools and traveling equippers with the goal of supporting and freeing up local missionaries and pastors for the everyday mission of making disciples.

SF Status: Those churches partnering in the establishment of the SF Hub are already sharing resources for training leaders, equipping conferences, children's ministry, Theological training, worship leading, coaching, and much more.

Appendix 4: Lives Changed through The Open Door Ministry

Peter Economos



For most of my life I felt that in order to be accepted, I needed to achieve and attain things. I became a star athlete at Monte Vista High School. I went on to play Division I college football and baseball at UC Berkeley. I've made great friends. My parents love me. I've been successful in business. I married a beautiful woman. I have three wonderful children, all healthy.

So at the age 36 after having moved from one achievement to the next, I could not understand why I was left so unfulfilled, burdened and scared.

I searched for the answer in all sorts of books. The Power of Now, The Power of Intention, The Power of This, The Power of That, Buddhism, Taoism, even The Cat in the Hat.

While each of these provided a temporary dose of inspiration, I could find no lasting fulfillment. Then I was invited by a friend to attend a weekly Open Door group led by Pastor Ben Joyce going through an experience called The Story of God.

On the first night Ben talked about the world God intended for us to live in. It is obvious we do not live in a perfect world. So the idea of what the all-powerful God intended really intrigued me. Ben painted the picture of God and man walking through the garden. God provided for our every need and we rejoiced in his love. We were

fully content and we had no desires to ever be apart from him. I compared my life with the life God had intended. I realized that despite the temporary glory of all my achievements, none of them felt nearly as satisfying as that perfect walk with God.

As we dove further into God's story I learned my purpose in life is not to achieve things. It is not to look good or to try and be loved by others. In my sea of brokenness, God threw me a lifeline. His name is Jesus Christ.

Once I surrendered my desire to find the purpose of life in myself, I was finally able to comprehend this scripture that Jesus spoke in gospel of John: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." I'd heard that scripture a million times before, but this time when Ben said it, every cell in my body started vibrating. We were all sitting quietly in the room and I uncontrollably blurted: "That's it! I'm in."



In that moment, God changed my life forever. I finally surrendered, and He rescued me from myself.

God has taken my lifelong addiction to achievement and shown me how much easier things unfold when you put Him first, in front of everything. He is also changing my entire lens on life. My wife would tell you how God is transforming me as a father, a brother, a friend, and a husband. He is changing our whole family. My oldest son has now become a Christian and was baptized the same day that I was.

I am so thankful for The Open Door ministry and all my friends for supporting me and giving me the confidence to continue opening my heart to Jesus.

John Krause



The Open Door community has been a phenomenal help to me as I have integrated back into society from prison. When I met the people in Open Door I had been out for six months, didn't have a job, was in a terrible living situation and felt all alone. I had no family, no direction in life, and only a slight knowledge of Jesus. In the last year, God has changed all of that. I am now surrounded by a community that speaks truth into my life, supports me emotionally, counsels me, prays for me, and loves me.

I've had an opportunity to watch and learn from older Christian men and meet consistently for one-on-one mentoring, which has been invaluable. I grew up without a father or positive role models. Through the Open Door community I was able to connect with a job and have now been with that job for nine months, learning valuable skills in the workforce.

I have also been given a new living arrangement in a loving home. I am learning how a healthy, Christ-centered family functions. This experience is invaluable because I am working toward getting custody back of my five year old son. Through this ministry and the grace of God my relationship with him has been restored.

In the last year I have experienced more generosity and felt the love of Christ more than I have my entire life. I am so grateful for my experience with Open Door. Without it I honestly do not know where I would be.



Katrina



I grew up constantly trying to fill my heart with things like alcohol, the approval of others, or relationships with men. I grew up with many hurts and without spiritual or moral guidance. I was surrounded by people who either didn't believe in God, or had made up their own idea of God. I had no relationship with God, and as an adult I was antagonistic toward people who talked about a loving God. I blamed God for the troubles in my life.

As I have been welcomed into the Open Door community and surrounded by a community that loves God and loves me, my perspective on God has completely changed. I now understand that Jesus is the way to God and He died on the cross for my sins. I now trust God as my Father. I am able to trust him because I now understand that his character is revealed through Jesus Christ. God is for me and not against me. He is seeking the good of this whole world.

As I have become a part of the community in Open Door and developed a relationship with God through prayer, my empty heart has been constantly filled with love from God and the community. People I hardly know generously care for me. Sharing meals with new friends, small talk, and gathering regularly to pray for and encourage one another has made this journey of learning about God a personal one. I am trusting God and people in ways I never imagined possible.

I am so grateful for how God has used The Open Door community to refocus my whole life on God.



Kelly Holbrook



I am so grateful to God that at a very young age He made His love and presence known to me. Growing up in a Christian home and in the church, God set the foundation in my heart that I was created for something greater than this present world. Short term mission trips, serving at Christian youth camps and retreats gave me a taste of a life lived solely for Him but there was inevitably a letdown as I re-entered the "real world". As I got married, entered the workforce and had children my, Christian walk became simply a quest for personal sanctification. I became incredibly frustrated because my self-focus and sin led to a general lack of joy, purpose and peace in my heart. These heart postures were daily reminders that I wasn't living the life God desired me to live.

When our small group decided to stop simply being a small group and become an Open Door Group I was terrified! I had been living in this smaller story with myself as the main character. As we immersed ourselves in the gospel, I felt free to take a step outside the small world in which I'd been living. I began by asking God to change my heart, to give me love for others and to give me the faith to live a life where He is Lord of all. Once I did this, a peace and joy washed over me and my soul shouted, "Yes! This is what I'm made for!" Now, by the grace of God, i am actually making disciples who make other disciples.

Being a part of the Open Door has helped and challenged me to live the life God wants me to live: a life fully devoted to glorifying Him, sharing His love with others, and overjoyed by His grace.



Jenn and Jarren Nagy



Jarren and I were emerging from backgrounds of hardship and addiction when we met the Open Door Community. I had recently come back to Christ and Jarren and I were engaged to be married. God heard my deepest prayers for Jarren, and after going through The Story of God in an Open Door Group he gave his life to Christ. We had the joy of beginning our marriage as followers of Jesus.

As a newly passionate believer, I was struggling with what I was reading in the Bible and what I was seeing in the church. I dove into serving the church and meeting new people. You would say that I was connected, but there was something missing. Something wasn't lining up with what I was reading in the Word. I longed to see more action, more application; less comfort, more truth. In my prayer time I was crying out for spiritual direction.

Over the past 18 months my desire has been met. Not only are Jarren and I being discipled, but The Open Door has become a place where we can bring our broken-down friends who are in search of a family and direction. I know they will be graciously welcomed, pointed to Christ, and discipled.

It's difficult to bring the sick in need of a Physician to a church service that is put on like a theatre performance and expect them to connect. The same goes for a Bible study. Open Door is a place where Jesus Christ is the head and the rest of the body functions together. It's a place where I can confess my sins to others and know I am not judged, but loved. This kind of love blots out shame and true transformation is taking place in my heart. It is a place where the Spirit is free to work, and if He interrupts the study or program we are excited for it.

It is a place where I am getting the solid, un-watered-down, heart-piercing, life-transforming truth of Jesus Christ. I am learning who I am to Him and what my life should look like if I am following Him. This kind of love doesn't allow sugar coating. "Give me what I need because I am dying with what I want."

This community has become our family. They have helped pay for childcare, watched my son on school breaks so I can work, provided healthy homes for friends who are just getting on their feet, mothered and fathered us, and we have been able to flourish and be raised up as leaders because of it.

After being rescued from a radical life living in darkness, Jarren and I desire to live even more radically for the thing that saved us: Jesus Christ and good news of his Gospel. Open Door shares our heart and mission.

