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DESIRING THE KINGDOM IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

James K. A. Smith is Professor of Philosophy and Adjunct Professor of Congregational and Ministry Studies at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. He is author of many books, including the prizewinning *Desiring The Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* and *Thinking In Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*. He was a plenary speaker at the 2011 Society of Vineyard Scholars conference. You can view his talk at http://vimeo.com/vineyardsvs.

Caleb J. D. Maskell is a graduate student at Princeton University and leads the Steering Committee of the Society of Vineyard Scholars.

Caleb Maskell: *Desiring the Kingdom* is a book that I've been recommending strongly to folks in the Vineyard, because it gets at the heart of some of the issues of self-understanding that I think we are currently facing as a community of churches. Some Christians have understood themselves to be defined chiefly by statements of belief: what we think about God most defines who we are. Other Christians have understood themselves more in terms of action: the things we do and our ways of being in the world most define who are. You take up this debate in *Desiring the Kingdom*, suggesting that we are actually described by what we love. Could you talk about that a bit?

James K. A. Smith: I think it's important to recognize that the picture of us as thinking things – or the picture that defined us by what we believed in terms of propositional assents to doctrines – is, in itself, a fairly recently acquired habit.

That shift in the picture of humanity which emphasized the talking-head, top-heavy, idea-centric, intellectualist model of the human person is a bit of an acquired taste, which we acquired from modernism and shifts that took place in modernism. As it turns out, that's just a bad picture of human beings. It's not a good functional appreciation for the complexity of who we are as humans.

That's why I think postmodernism and postmodernity is an occasion for the church – especially Protestant and evangelical churches – to wake up to the fact of how much we bought into that modern picture of the human subject. In doing so, we forgot something of the biblical and historical Christian wisdom which gave us a richer, more holistic account of who we are.

What defines me is not primarily what I think, or even what I believe in terms of the propositions to which I give assent. What defines me is what I love, what I long for, what I desire. It's located in the affective core of my person.

To get that point is not a matter of "getting with it" in a postmodern culture. It's not, "Oh, well, this is the new way of thinking about being human." It's actually just that a postmodern critique of modernism has been an opportunity for the Church to remember what we used to know. We can go back to appreciating a more holistic and affective picture of the human person.

CM: So this idea – that we're chiefly defined as human beings by an account of the things that we love – is an older idea than the idea that we're defined by our beliefs? It's not just some newfangled postmodern innovation?

JS: Right. But nothing is wrong with believing. Believing is good. It's just that believing is actually the articulation of what we love. It is a kind of understanding we have of God that can't always be fully articulated. That's why you can articulate what Christians believe, and it's not wrong. But this sense that what really defines us is what we love; what we long for; what we desire. That picture of the human being as lover is an ancient picture. I think Saint Augustine is one of the people who articulates so powerfully that we are made for love. The question isn't *whether* you love; it's *what* you love. That has all kinds of implications for how you go about evangelism.

But I also think it's a deeply biblical idea. In Colossians chapter 3, when Paul writes to the Colossian Christians and exhorts them to put on Christ, it is putting on love. Paul says, "Clothe yourselves in compassion." Immediately after that, he starts talking about the practices of worship: singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, being devoted to the word and engaging in prayer.

So there's a connection there that I think the Scriptures convey. It gives us a much more holistic picture of who we are as persons.

CM: I think there's a sense in which the picture of a human being as lover resonates deeply with some of the intuitive practices that we have in the Vineyard. For example, we've always prioritized worship – particularly worship songs directed toward God that express love to him, for who God is and what Jesus has done.

It's the idea that love draws us forward, but we're also met with love. It's the connection of our love with God's love in terms of being pulled towards the future that's not here yet, but is coming.

JS: Absolutely. I see this intuition that we are lovers implicitly operative in Vineyard appreciation for the affections. People can sometimes criticize what looks like a kind of romanticism of worship. But to me, it's a signal that the Vineyard recognizes that God is the Great Seducer.

God is not pushing us; God is pulling us. God is drawing us. God is attracting us. I see Vineyard worship honoring the dynamics of that lure, that draw, that wooing, in some sense.

CM: On that point, I have seen something interesting emerging lately. I think a lot of worship leaders in the Vineyard and similar movement who have valued that "affectional" aspect of worship have been struggling in some ways with the converse, which is that worship songs also put words in people's mouths about what we believe about God. The expression of affections needs to be very well articulated—because it essentially distills what we believe!

So I love the idea that beliefs are shorthand forms of practices. The songs we sing and things we do in our churches are intended to give a microcosm of what the larger picture is supposed to look like.

JS: Yes, and I also think you want room for a sort of feedback loop. When we go through the exercise of articulating our beliefs, that articulation can also be the basis for a critique of our practices.

So we need to keep our practices in account. For example, our worship shouldn't slide off into emotivism or the "Jesus is my boyfriend" kind of thing. Critical reflection and articulation can serve the practices.

CM: Responding to that desire for critical reflection, some Vineyard people attend Vineyard Leadership Institute, some people end up going to seminary, and some fools like myself even get PhDs. How should the training in critical reflection that people gain in these venues help to build the "feedback loop" that you're talking about in the context of the Church?

I THINK GOOD PREACHING IS NOT SO MUCH ABOUT FILLING THE INTELLECT AS IT IS ABOUT RECRUITING THE IMAGINATION.

JS: For those of us who then feel this impulsion and engage in intellectual reflection for the sake of the Church, the ultimate goal and *telos* of our reflection is to have faithful practice.

But if the price of admission to critical analysis is to buy into paradigms of reflection that are simply not hospitable to our communities of practice, we must have the courage to push back.

If we're asking how this kind of reflection can serve the Church and happen in the Church, we have to have congregations and a fellowship that has enough courage and trust to receive this reflection as a gift. The reflection will help us to be better practitioners; it will help us ultimately to be better disciples and followers of Jesus.

That also requires that those of us engaged in this kind of reflection will need to take a diaconal stance. We must come in as servants, not experts. We should say, "How can I, with my gifts and expertise and training, help us to think anew about our practices?"

To me, that's what the Church has historically called "reform." The condition of reform and renewal has always required us to find just a little bit of sympathetic distance from our practices so we can evaluate them in light of Scripture and in light of kingdom goals. It's a two-way street. As long as everyone sees that kind of reflection is good for the community, we'll create space for it.

CM: That's clearly a place where movements over the course of the history of the Church have had to grow, right? It's not always clear that someone with an intellectual voice of suggestion or critique is intending to be helpful!

JS: Right. And sometimes they're not helpful! Sometimes there's just a snobbishness that comes when people get inculcated by academic and scholarly communities.

The other dynamic is that sometimes, in the most vibrant movements where the Spirit is afoot, you can understand why its participants are given to a certain pragmatism. They're just trying to get things done. There's work to do. The harvest is ripe.

I have a Pentecostal background. In the 20th century, you can see that parallel in Pentecostalism. It was highly pragmatic. Not until later did we actually begin to see the virtue of reflection. But the virtue of reflection is that it is for the practice. It digs deep wells that you can drink from for a long, long time.

So when I'm teaching students at a seminary, if I'm trying to convince students why they need to know Hebrew, there doesn't seem to be any immediate payoff. But they must imagine that by learning Hebrew, they are drilling this deep well that will withstand the drought that will come 10 years into ministry. Somehow, learning Hebrew will have pastoral implications for them to carry out. This isn't just an academic hoop I make them jump through. This is a way of digging reservoirs in the desert that they will drink from later.

What might sometimes look like arcane, arid academic learning might actually be teaching us disciplines that will become very important for pastoral ministry later. We need to resist the cultural demand that everything pay off right now. Scholarly reflection just doesn't work that way.

Even when I'm doing more high-level scholarship in peer-reviewed journals, I ultimately hope that there's an investment in the community which shows its worth later on. The point is not, "We'll be smart Christians. Other people won't think we're naïve or dummies." The point is that it will make us a better community of practice.

The point where pragmatism makes intuitive sense is the tension of Jesus' priorities: pastoring people, caring for the poor, and so on. Intellectual reflection requires time and energy. At times, the two seem to be in opposition.

CM: In *Desiring the Kingdom*, you talk about the best account of human beings being driven by love. You then spend a lot of time reflecting on this idea that human beings are formed by things that draw their love out. Could you explain how you've been thinking about formation and the way that church practices play into that?

JS: To make the core claim that human beings are lovers and that we're defined by what we love is really only the beginning of this package. Then the question is, "How do I come to love what I love?"

The tradition and work I've drawn upon emphasizes that your love is much more like a habit than a decision. It is a fundamental orientation that you acquire, but it is a product of a process that philosophers call "habituation." That is, that you are trained to love. It's a bit complicated for charismatics, but it's not the case that there is just some magic event that stimulates love to the right track and then you're all set. I think we all know this just doesn't work.

Your heart is the fulcrum of your love, and the heart is subject to training and to formation. The way our hearts get trained is through immersion in practices, rituals and routines and rhythms that, over time, inscribe the right disposition within us. These practices orient us so that we are becoming the kind of people trained to the goal of loving well.

It doesn't have to be mystifying. It's similar to how we learn to play the violin or how to drive. Historically these practices are called spiritual disciplines; they habituate our love over time so that we become those kinds of people.

CM: Now, is this similar to what someone like Dallas Willard would say about the spiritual disciplines and formation of the heart?

JS: Absolutely; there are tons of overlap. The difference that I try to amplify in *Desiring the Kingdom* is that Dallas still tends to paint a picture of spiritual disciplines that maybe doesn't have quite the centrality of gathered Christian worship about it. My emphasis is on the practice of gathered Christian worship as the hub for that formation. All of our other spiritual disciplines spiral out of that hub and live off the energy and formative power of the centrality of the Church.

You need the Church to pull off spiritual discipline.

CM: What it is about the Church in particular that makes it the hub of formation? Why do you think the Church is so important?

JS: I'm not sure to what extent the Vineyard will go with me, but I'll say this. One, I think that gathered Christian worship is the hot spot of the Spirit; I think it should be sacramental. By that, I mean the Spirit is most powerfully present in what we receive as the sacraments, and what the Church over time has discerned as core worship practices.

So if you want to be formed by the Spirit and sanctified by what the Church over history has said, then you immerse yourself in these practices: the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, the Word, and baptism. One of the reasons ecclesial worship is essential is because of its sacramental character.

Secondly, for me, the core of the practices of Christian worship are catholic – not that they are Roman Catholic, but that they are the common inheritance of the people of God, over history, led by the Spirit. In that process, the Church together has discerned a kind of form or shape of Christian worship that the Spirit works in.

The entire narrative of what God is doing through Christ is re-narrated every week in catholic Christian worship practices. So catholicity, to me, simply means inheriting a core commitment to certain components of Christian worship that have their own logic about them. They are liturgies. They tell the story of the Gospel over and over. In doing that, they initiate us into the story.

What worries me is, if you don't appreciate that catholic heritage of worship, I worry that you lose components of the story. Then you lose certain opportunities for formation and counter-formation to the secular liturgies we are immersed in.

CM: So you're saying that as humans, we are always being formed in one direction or another, and the church provides a crucial location for Christian formation over against other dominant sources of formation in culture. In the book, you talk about the "liturgy of the stadium" and compare that with what's happening in the Church. Could you unpack that a bit?

JS: I take the "liturgy of the stadium" to represent American civil religion. The entire book of Revelation is God's critique of the liturgies of the empire and how Christian worship is counter to that. (By the way, you can't underestimate the function of the principalities and powers in these other liturgies, the rival liturgies.)

The claim that Christian worship is counter-formative to the formation of the liturgy of American civil religion only works if you have received the intentionality of the shape of historic Christian worship. If you've mistakenly thought that you can take the content of Christianity and drop it into any old form you want, and if you've said, "Well, in the name of being relevant and accessible, we're just going to do worship like the mall or like the concert or the stadium," then, I'm sorry, but you don't have any counter-formative possibilities.

You've just lost the logic of the practice. Instead you just have this pastiche thing. You've distilled Jesus into this content that you can drop into any old form you want. But the fact remains that the form itself is already a liturgical formation. If you Jesu-fy the mall, you've just commodified Jesus.

I think that many so-called "seeker-sensitive" strategies misstep on this point.

CM: Is that part of what you were saying earlier about how you felt there's a strong connection between this way of thinking about love and formation and evangelism?

JS: In some sense. As St. Augustine says in the opening of his *Confessions*, his spiritual autobiography: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

He doesn't say we're looking for answers or knowledge. He says we're looking for a home for our restless hearts and our wandering loves. *Confessions* is a long documentary of someone looking for love in all the wrong places.

Too much of our evangelism has been informed by picturing human beings as "thinking things." So when someone sees that bumper sticker, "Jesus is the answer," they might think, "But what's the question?" But if you look at it from Augustine's paradigm of human being as lover, people aren't looking for answers to questions. They're not looking to solve an intellectual puzzle. They want to love. They're looking for love, and they're looking to love. What we bring to them is the Lover of their souls who alone can satisfy that longing.

But this means that you must recognize and build on the fact that so many things people do in contemporary culture is a manifestation of their longing, of their desire. Christianity is not fundamentally the answer to a set of intellectual questions that people have; Christianity is the love story that finally lets people make sense of their desire.

I think grasping that truth would change how we do evangelism, missions, outreach – even in deeply secularized contexts, where people aren't asking religious questions at all, but they are engaged in all kinds of practices of desire and longing and love.

CM: Let's return to the question of beliefs for a moment — I want to raise a flag for the importance of articulate belief. To what extent does the content of propositional belief begin to play a role in that experience of having one's desire fulfilled? Because as you go on the journey, it seems like the content of belief becomes more and more important to informing the journey.

JS: I think so too. But why did the Church begin formulating creeds and confessions in the first place? Because we needed to find out who the Jesus we were praying to actually was. We were searching for the nature of the triune God we pray to.

The articulation of the content is clarifying who we worship and who we long for. That's important to keep on track so you don't end up effectively putting an idol in its place. The articulation of Christian truth, the preaching of the work, and the articulation of Scriptures are always making us sure we know who we love.

What you can get in "secular society" is a kind of backhanded affirmation of some of our disordered loves too. So when you see a culture that is riven with consumerism, you realize they're looking for something. I wonder what it looks like for evangelism and mission and outreach to almost honor or recognize that this is the manifestation of love; of disordered love. It's like when G.K. Chesterton said, "Any man knocking on a brothel is secretly looking for God."

CM: So from this perspective, you could say that the pursuit of right belief is essentially an assault on idolatry – but it has to be understood in the context of a community of love or else itself become an idol.

JS: Exactly.

CM: So we've talked a lot about spiritual formation and communal liturgical practices. But Protestants, in particular, pay a great deal of attention to preaching – especially preaching the Bible in an expository way. I know that's something you appreciate too. But how might this sort of shift in thinking about practices potentially affect the way that a church planter thinks about preaching?

JS: None of this diminishes the importance of preaching, but I do think it recalibrates how we think of preaching. From this perspective, preaching is not primarily the dissemination of information. Instead it is the storytelling of the narrative of what God is doing in Christ to redeem the world. It should be something that is more like poetry than discourse.

There is something irreducible about a story. It's not a mistake that historically the Church has been narrating one huge story. Here's where N.T. Wright's model for seeing the drama of Scripture in its multiple acts just becomes a new frame and context for seeing how our preaching of the Word invites people into the drama. It is a story that effectively pulls us into what God is doing.

There's a great book by a friend of mine. It's some years old now, but it's by John Wright, named *Telling God's Story*. I believe it is a brilliant introduction to reconfiguring preaching as, "Here is what it looks like to preach in a way that communicates to people on a heart level. It communicates to their imaginations." I think good preaching is not so much about filling the intellect as it is about recruiting the imagination. Wright's book is an excellent resource to prime people to think about that.

CM: And in a lot of ways, having that narrative perspective can heighten the sense of significance around what churches do, day in and day out. It underlines the holiness and profundity of the very existence of your little church plant in Whatevertown, USA. You're not just trying to succeed; you're trying to participate in the mission of God from the beginning to the end.

JS: That's right. One little congregation is as much a stage for that drama as any other.

CM: That's probably something that anyone who has planted a church will know that they need to hear more than once, because you're going to get the kitchen sink thrown at you from day one. Knowing that you're in a story of immense cosmic significance makes all the difference in the world.

JS: This is another one of those places where I think the Vineyard has indigenous intuitions along this line. Anecdotally, my impression is that a lot of Vineyard churches have always tried to make room for the arts. They understand the kind of aesthetic register on which God can get ahold of us.

So, in a way, this is about trying to think of the entirety of worship on that aesthetic register, not just so it's pretty or "aesthetic," but because we are aesthetic kinds of animals, and that's how God gets ahold of us. It's not like we move from worship, which is singing; and then we move to preaching, which is information. Instead, all of this is a piece of an aesthetic affective mode by which God is getting ahold of us.

CM: I think especially in churches like Vineyard, where we pay attention to things like prayer ministry, there's a trajectory in which the hope that the imagination is being opened to God "getting ahold of us" leads directly to a hope for an encounter with God's living presence. Something like that changes the equation profoundly! Coming out of a Pentecostal background, this is probably familiar to you – where the hope is that all the ideas and the practices and the preaching are lit on fire by the real presence of God. In that sense, the whole thing becomes sacramental in the best of all possible worlds.

To stay on this topic but pivot slightly, in the Roman Catholic tradition — among others — people take very seriously the wisdom of the Church over time. It has for them a kind of authority that Protestants do not know of. In your position with a foot in the Pentecostal world and a foot in the more historic forms of the classical traditions of the Church, do you have suggestions for ways that less "liturgically informed" churches can meaningfully connect to a catholic tradition without, say, having to become Roman Catholic or Orthodox or Anglican to own it?

JS: I think so. Part of that step is just not being intimidated by Roman Catholics or Anglicans who might give the impression that this heritage is their own possession. It's not. It is the common inheritance of Christians. Modernity encouraged us to forget that, and we bear some blame for it. That is what Charles Taylor calls the trajectory of "ex-carnation" that characterized Protestantism. Other church movements can do this authentically in ways which are true to their own DNA strands.

Here's an analogy. My Pentecostal friends who appreciate these points and are trying to remember catholicity in worship can tell themselves the story, "You know, we really kind of grew from the Wesleyan tradition." John Wesley headed a renewal movement within Anglican Christianity. In fact, a lot of what he wanted to do was to revivify and enliven what looks to us now as pretty historic Christian practices. So Pentecostals can find ways internal to their own traditions to reconnect themselves to those roots without feeling that it is inauthentic.

For the Vineyard or other traditions to go about narrating that story, it's very important that you look for resources, signals, triggers and hooks internal to your sort of "indigenous spirituality" that you can leverage. You're Christians. You didn't fall from the sky. Your traditions came out of a heritage. There's some indebtedness in there somewhere. So look for those hooks. Because, otherwise, the worst thing that could happen is what I call "liturgical chic," where people say, "These candles and stuff are really cool. Let's try this out." But that doesn't get the logic of the practice.

CM: You raise a helpful point when you talk about simply not being intimidated. But inquiring into these older ways, while staying rooted in the knowledge that God has called this movement to exist for a purpose, gives a great deal of freedom to explore. Then you're building on something that's already good, as opposed to making up for a gap where Protestants think they might be falling short.

JS: Right. The injunction to articulate your catholicity is not saying, "Well, I should just go be Anglican." It's realizing your own accent on that catholicity, the Spirit-led improvisation that the Vineyard brings to the whole body of Christ.

CM: Getting very practical now: In the Vineyard, there is an increasing number of practitioners, pastors and church planters who are also becoming interested in the life of the mind. But for many of those people, the journey might not necessarily include going to seminary or getting a PhD. So what are the most important resources that busy, pragmatic, often bivocational church planters might need to pursue the flourishing life of their minds?

JS: I feel a little inadequate to answer, only because it seems that the answer might be relevant only to a particular cross-section or context. But let's start with this. One of the things that people who are able to pursue more dedicated reflection should do is to find ways to translate, collect and disseminate what they think are important reflection resources for the "busy church planter." These people should recommend them regularly to others.

Some of it is essentially the mundane stuff of developing really good reading habits. But peer communities and scholars working to suggest resources would be good for reflection as well. They could identify reflective practices to carry out once a month or once a quarter. Discern the moment and see what is relevant.

The Christian scholar needs to be an amphibious creature who has enough of a foot in academia that she has ears to hear and is attentive to the shifts. But she also has a foot in the community of practice to where she knows where the questions are pushing, what people need to be thinking about.

YOUR LOVE IS MUCH MORE LIKE A HABIT THAN A DECISION. IT IS AN ORIENTATION THAT YOU ACQUIRE... YOU ARE TRAINED TO LOVE.

CM: And for those who do pursue further intellectual training, could you reflect on the significance of regular church life for Christian scholars?

JS: The local church is the space of gathered worship and shared pursuit of the spiritual disciplines. I believe gathered congregational worship is still the central incubation space for our imagination. So if I'm going to be a Christian scholar, there is no way my intuitions and sensibilities and interests and concerns are going to be functionally and effectively Christian if I'm not regularly immersed in the practices of the people of God, with the people of God.

I might have all the great Christian theories and ideas and perspectives, but I need to be part of that people.

The other reason is, there are just such crucial virtues that will be formed in me by being part of that local congregation. I'm going to have to learn patience, humility, compassion and forgiveness. Learning humility is especially important for people who have scholarly predilections.

And thirdly, we must follow what Cardinal Newman called "the sense of the faithful." At the end of the day, I see the plumber down the pew who is wiser than I am. I don't care how many degrees I have; he is wiser than I am. He's actually a better follower of Jesus than I am. If I fall into the intellectualist trap that people who think the most are the most faithful, I'm doomed. So I need to stay in spaces where I'm disciplined in that regard.

CM: Added to that, from your own experience, are there ways that you can suggest or imagine for churches – individually and at a movement level – to most effectively make space for nascent scholars in their midst?

JS: I've seen ways in which it does and doesn't work. I can think of two churches. One was a church plant we were a part of, and the pastors and leaders of that community had a strong enough sense of their mission and calling and identity in the Lord that my presence there as a scholar was received by them as a gift. I was sort of like the theologian-in-residence for that church plant in Philadelphia, and it was fantastic. But you need the sort of leaders who are comfortable and confident enough in themselves to be able to do that.

And I was in another congregation where, even when I was turned on to humility full-tilt, some of its leaders felt threatened in the presence of a scholar. Looking back, I do think it was because of their own insecurities.

Now, that doesn't turn into a strict formula, but it's something to watch for. Scholars need to do a very good job of affirming the callings of congregations and what they're doing, to signal that they're there to serve. And then congregations need to find ways to receive scholars as gifts that God brings to them.

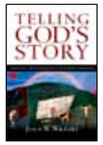
[END]

Book Recommendations:

Desiring the Kingdom
by James K. A. Smith

Confessions
by St. Augustine

Telling God's Story
by John Wright



The Worship Sourcebook
by John D. Witvliet

CELEBRATING TRANSITION

By Phil Strout

Phil Strout is the pastor of the Pathway Vineyard in Lewiston, Maine and is the regional overseer for the Northeast Region of Vineyard USA. He gave the following talk at the Vineyard Leadership meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona early in 2011. It is worth noting that when this piece was finalized for publication, the new National Director for the Vineyard had not been named.

Several months ago the board got together to share our ideas and thoughts about the Vineyard. As I started my piece, I really wanted to say all the things I was thankful for. There's a passage in the Bible, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which says thanksgiving is explicitly the will of God.

Here's what I said: "I love that we are a community of churches connected by a mutual love for God, love and appreciation for each other, and the adventure of discovery of all God is doing. I love that we are a movement committed to planting churches everywhere possible, in any way necessary. I love that we are led by a group of elders, and that all of you have led for so long in this movement. I love that the Vineyard has given opportunity for so many people to participate in so many ways."

24 years ago, I heard my first tape from John Wimber. It set a course for what I am doing today. The reception I gained when I came to the Vineyard was open, unconditional, and enthusiastic. The first time I ever went to a Vineyard meeting of leaders was in Denver in 1990 or '91. By the end of the first day, I was invited to speak. I was welcomed.

It has been a privilege to participate in the missional development and missional philosophy in the strategies over these many years. I love the Vineyard for the hundreds and actually thousands of friends this movement has afforded me to make, develop, sustain, and cherish. All over the globe, there are Vineyardites that look nothing like the people in this room whatsoever. I'm thankful for that.

The simplicity of the Vineyard is that we love God and love people. I have no intentions of complicating those two things. The Vineyard has given me understanding and practice in worship, ministry to the poor, healing, and the liberation of demonically tormented people. We've all come to love the phrase, "Thy kingdom come."

I love the Vineyard's ever-increasing ethnic diversity. The face of the Vineyard is changing. Every time I hear a mission report at our regional conference, I sit there and grin and cry to think that I have brothers and sisters whose names I can't even pronounce, whose realities are so different than mine. Yet, in their own language and culture, they say, "Come, Holy Spirit."

I love it when I see young people and teenagers up and down the East Coast coming together for missional purposes, for mutual edification, to be challenged, to answer the call of God. This past two or three weeks, we've had 700 teenagers in the winter retreat up and down the eastern seaboard with Kristen Dunn. We had to split it up, there were so many kids. Those kids are on fire. I mean, they're prophesying fools. One 18-year-old single mother experienced a transformation and later preached.

Missional thinking is our bread and butter. I love the Vineyard in a way that is mature. By that, I mean I recognize we have our issues. Just look around the room.

We have warts, and they're real. Thank God we have some transition coming soon. Would you want to just keep doing the same thing? No; the Lord is stirring this. But it doesn't change the fact that my heart has been warmed by history. I love the Vineyard for the sacrifice that I witnessed in your lives, for the leaders in this room who have given everything you've had or could have had to make this movement possible. We have a commitment to relationship that is personal and face-to-face, even when we are ticked off at one another, or disappointed and disillusioned. But we've bought "in for a penny, in for a pound."

That's reality. This is not for the fainthearted. One of the first things I heard John Wimber say was, "If you could do anything else, do that. I can't. But if you can, then go do that." I remember thinking, "What is he talking about?" But now I understand. It's hard to raise up a movement, to walk in the reality of the kingdom of God.

Everything else takes a backseat to the greater glory of God that Christ be formed in us. That's where transition and change – particularly the Vineyard's transition soon – could be the greatest thing in our lives toward that end.

There are two things we've got to remember when it comes to transition. I speak from the experience of moving between different countries and taking my family; learning a language, planting a church – then being thrown out of a country, going to another country, and starting over again. We've changed. We've led our kids in change.