

I want to share with you some of my experiences in reaching Jewish suburbanites with the Good News. The Lord has allowed me to begin a two congregations in the Chicago area. I also led Adat Hatikvah Congregation for 12 years. Those experiences have helped me to understand some of the dynamics of reaching Jewish suburbanites and discipling them in their new faith.

The character of the congregations I planted reflected me and my family. Our approach was to reach Jewish people and families like ours. My wife Joanne is not Jewish but has a heart and love for Israel and the Jewish people. We wanted to raise our children so that they would be comfortable in both Jewish and Christian worlds. We believed that they needed to have an appreciation and love for both realms.

Joanne was an integral part of our children's outreach. Having four children who were born and raised in our congregations was a significant element in attracting other families with children and similar backgrounds. I believe this was a key element in the growth of each of the congregations we planted.

The congregations were in communities where there were many mixed married couples. We targeted our message and ministry to help those families learn that Yeshua is Israel's promised Messiah, and that Biblical Christianity is Jewish. We helped Christians to see that Christianity at its core is Jewish.

We named the first congregation The Olive Tree, based on the teaching of Paul in Romans 11. He rebuked the church at Rome for their arrogance and pride. Many in that church believed that God was through with the Jewish people because of their resistance and enmity to the Gospel. But Paul reminded them that at its core faith in Yeshua and the Kingdom He brought is Jewish. Paul saw the Kingdom as the

commonwealth of Israel which now included Gentiles through their faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

Most of us in Jewish ministry understand what Paul meant he said he was turning to the Gentiles in Acts 13. His words in Acts 13:46 "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles." Those words have been taken out of context by the historic church. We know in the next city he came to, once again, he went to the Jewish community first.

The church's failure to understand this in context has sadly led to a disconnect from the Jewish foundation in the New Covenant with those raised in the church. It has proved over the years to be an impediment for the church in reaching the Jewish people with the Good News of Messiah. In every city Paul went, as the Book of Acts describes, he would always begin with the Jewish community. The result was that both Jews and Gentiles came to faith through Paul's method of preaching the Gospel to the Jew first.

I believe a failure in the modern Messianic Congregational movement is our reluctance to follow Paul's pattern of going to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. In my experience the congregations we planted thrived because they consisted of both Jewish and Gentile Christians in both membership and leadership.

Both congregations we planted in Chicago initially began with worship on Sunday. This was intentional at that time to identify with the Body of Messiah. We wanted to convey the unity we were called to in Israel's Messiah. It was also designed to help both Jewish and Gentile spouses see that Biblical Christianity is Jewish. We wanted those who visited us to see that we were a Jewish oriented church and fully a part of the corporate Body of Messiah. We wanted Jews, Christians, and Gentiles

to feel welcome and that this could be a safe place to grow in faith through the study of God's Word from a Messianic Jewish perspective. We wanted to convey that Christianity and the Church was not an "other religion."

Over time with the acceptance by the Body of Messiah to see the importance of the Sabbath as a part of Jewish worship we were able to move our day of worship to Shabbat. We believe that biblical Christianity must always be presented so that the unity between Old and New Covenants should be both taught and seen. Our congregations strove to be biblically Jewish and Christian. We did not worry about the opinion of the Rabbi's or the church because we were transparent about what we believed in both our doctrinal statements and practice. We wanted our people to fix their eyes on Yeshua the Lord of both Covenants.

In our communities there were many mixed married couples who wrestled with the dynamics of raising their children in both Jewish and Christian heritages. Our goal was to help them see and understand what a relationship with the God of Israel looked like and what the Scriptures taught about faith and practice. We prayed that when people came into our sanctuary and home Bible studies that they could behold a Jewish Messiah who came to save a lost and dying world. We shared how the Jewish Messiah came to bring life and health to our families through His Word and His Spirit.

I began my congregation planting life while I was a full-time student in the Jewish Studies program at Moody Bible Institute. I worked part time for The American Board of Missions to the Jews now known as Chosen People Ministries. When my wife and I came to Chicago from New York, we began attending the established Messianic congregation in Chicago.

When the congregation chose as their new leader a man who did not hold to the deity of Yeshua we could no longer attend. He later left the congregation and moved into traditional Judaism and eventually became an anti-missionary.

The other alternative in our community for fellowship was an evangelical church whose pastor strongly supported replacement theology in his teaching. He openly sided with the Palestinians in his politics and preaching and saw Israel as the bully in Palestine.

There were a few who had come to faith in my first year in Chicago and I could not bring them any longer to either of those two local congregations. My supervisor, John Bell, suggested that we should start a church. He came to Chicago as a church planter and began his work using the CPM building where I was living. He grew in his love for the Jewish people and accepted a call to work for ABMJ. I assumed that he would be the pastor as he was a Bible school graduate and knew what was needed in planting a church. I knew nothing about planting or leading a congregation. John however said I should and would be the leader. I can't tell you how many times he talked me off the ledge as I led this work.

The summer before we began our first service at The Olive Tree Congregation, we went door to door in the neighborhood. Some of our first attendees came to us because of our conversations with them in their homes. Word of mouth also brought many mixed married couples, and it was also a time of revival in the country and many Jewish people were coming to faith.

After three years the congregation became financially and spiritually stable so that we were able to turn the pastoral duties over to one of our elders. The congregation then became independent. In hindsight I

have come to realize that was not necessarily the right way to go. Though it is not the goal of this paper to discuss why I believe that.

It truly was the Lord who built and established The Olive Tree Congregation. A key ingredient to its success apart from the blessing of God were Moody undergraduates in the Jewish studies program who partnered with us. Several Jewish students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Wheaton's graduate school joined with us as well and provided Messianic Jewish and theological credibility to the congregation.

Two years later, we were led to begin a new work. John Bell and his family and another full-time worker with CPM and his family along with our family began a second congregation in Buffalo Grove that is now called the Rock of Israel. This was a fresh and fast-growing Jewish suburb with new homes and families. Between our three families we started with 8 children and left the congregation seven years later with 13 children. There is nothing like a crowd to build a crowd. We had a solid team working together to provide a children's program so that we could reach the parents of this fast-growing suburb with the Good News.

Having a vibrant children's program with teachers committed to helping families understand the Jewishness of Christianity attracted more and more mixed married couples. John Bell appealed to the Gentile Christian families who were far more stable and accustomed to church life. These were families familiar with tithing and had a foundation in faith.

The inter-married and Jewish couples were mostly new to the faith and Biblical doctrine. They felt comfortable with me leading the congregation. The Jewish people who attended felt that I was authentically Jewish and that they could relate to me as their leader.

My wife Joanne and her solid Christian heritage helped the Gentile women who were married to Jewish men to feel comfortable because they could relate to her.

Three years after we began, we merged with a Baptist Church in the community that was down to a few members. They had a building on five acres of land in our community and were aware of our work among the Jewish people. They wanted as their legacy that they did their part to reach the Jewish people of Buffalo Grove. They embraced our constitution and leadership and turned the building and property over to our care and use.

One summer the women of the Rock of Israel joined with the women of the Olive Tree, and other Messianic congregations in the Chicagoland area along with the women of Jews for Jesus to oversee and run an annual "kids kibbutz". This was a Messianic vacation Bible School that brought unity to the Messianic community and was a blessing to the families of our Chicagoland. This was great opportunity to invite new families to experience the joys of a diverse Messianic community who were working together. The unity honored the Lord, and all the congregations were blessed by it.

Sadly, because of a change of leadership in Chosen People Ministries, I was forced to give up my position in the congregation seven years after we began. It was a wonderful, thriving congregation and from my perspective we left too soon. With little time for transition the congregation became independent of Chosen People Ministries.

Shortly after that both John Bell and I left CPM. John became a pastor of an evangelical church, and I found temporary shelter in another missionary organization. From there I was called to serve as pastor of evangelism at Moody Church in Chicago for seven years. While serving at Moody Church I led a weekly Jewish Fellowship and

outreach on Friday nights and taught an adult Sunday school class. While ministering in the church was important, I felt the need to return to a closer relationship with the Jewish community for myself and my family.

Through my experiences in ministry, I have learned that we are all pilgrims at different places on our journey. Perhaps the thoughts I am about to share can be an encouragement to some of you in your walk in the works that the Lord has prepared for you.

I learned that there are no Christian organizations - that there are only Christians. Of course, I refer not just to the Gentile Christian world but to the Messianic world as well. My disillusionment came not just from my time with various Jewish mission agencies but also as a student at Moody Bible Institute, and while serving at Moody Church, and with other Church's and ministries we interacted with and one other church that I served as staff.

When I was forced to give up a thriving and growing Messianic congregation, I felt betrayed and disillusioned. It would take many years for the Holy Spirit and God's Word to open my eyes to my own sin. Yes, there was plenty of sin in the organizations I worked with, but I came to learn that I am not responsible for their actions I can only be responsible and accountable for my actions.

I personally came to understand and embrace the sovereignty of God. Not just on paper and in my theological understanding but experientially. That He really does work all things together for good. Most of you probably have had that understanding for years, but not me. I mean I accepted that truth in theory but not fully and truly in faith and practice.

Two testimonies helped me in understanding this. The first was the ministry of a former pastor who left the ministry of his church to teach and model the life of a fully devoted follower of Yeshua. He lived in complete dependence and confidence of God's ability to provide. His teachings were more caught than taught, though he did have an outline based firmly in Scripture. I found his curriculum difficult to teach others, but it had a profound impact in my walk and life.

The second was the course "Biblical Self-confrontation". This curriculum is produced and published by the Biblical Counseling Foundation. In my opinion it the most thorough and complete study in learning to think Biblically about most of life's problems. Its subtext is learning the importance of getting the log out of my own eye before I can see clearly to get the speck in my brother's eye.

I completed the course myself and began using it as an essential tool in discipleship. Sadly, because it is so intense and involves much homework, there are few who are willing to commit to the time the course requires. But I saw personally and in the lives of a number of Jewish men who I brought through this course how theirs and my life became transformed.

Since those two key events, my life has never been the same. Some of you might chalk it up to me just getting up in years and mellowing, and I am sure that didn't hurt, but since then I have become far more confident and at peace in my personal walk and ministry. My marriage has never been stronger and more joyful. The same has been true in the fruit of my ministry. I recall a statement by one of my professors "the hardest thing about being a Christian is being a Christian."

In my earlier years I would find myself rationalizing fleshly ways by telling myself that the ends justified the means. After all I was serving the Lord and seeing people come to faith and helping people

grow in their faith. But God's grace was faithful to discipline me through the various trials, reversals, and betrayals. God used them all to help me learn the difference between discipline and the work of the Cross in my life.

Those times when I thought I was a victim it was really the unseen hand of the Lord and His Spirit working in my life. A key factor in helping me in my walk has been the daily reading of God's Word, obeying His commands, and walking in His Spirit. Seeing His hand in discipline and embracing the cross has helped me to have more credibility in my discussions with those who are a part of my weekly Bible Studies and in my pastoral counseling.

The Biblical Counseling course of self-confrontation has given me the tools I was missing in helping others in how to deal and understand their trials and possibly God's discipline in their lives. I have an authority and confidence in my teaching that I never had before.

I have also become a better listener. One of my favorites verses is Exodus 14:14 "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." the Schwarcz translation is the "Lord will fight for you if you keep your mouth shut." In counseling I have let anatomy instruct me: The Lord has given me two ears and one mouth - so that I try to do my best to listen twice as much as I talk. While listening I am praying, both to be silent and to respond appropriately with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

As I am now in the fall and winter of my life, I am beginning to learn how to let go of my tendency to want to be in control. I have learned I was never truly in control of my work and ministry all along. That as John the Baptist told his disciples "No man can receive anything except what is given by God." This has helped me to personally experience the word of Yeshua concerning the call to lose my life and as a result finding it.

God in His grace has provided a younger man to pass the baton of my work in the Midwest. He puts up with me and my Baby Boomer tendencies and I am learning to not criticize him and his generational shtick as he goes about building his ministry and taking over the work I have begun. This transition is allowing me to do things I have prayed for over the years.

Currently I am the interim leader of the CPM Congregation Shaar Adonai in Manhattan that was founded by Steve and Carol Fenchel. When I first joined with CPM 46 years ago, I served in the Capital District of New York. It was there that I came to faith and grew in my walk. It was there that I was licensed as a minister and recognized by my home church as one called to Jewish ministry. But my heart and prayer was to return to the 72nd street building on the upper West Side where Joanne and I were married and to serve as a missionary in the city and borough of my birth and where my remaining family and friends live. Forty-five years later he has answered that prayer in part.

As I close, I confess to you that I am not an expert missionary and congregational planter. The Lord has done it all despite me. Yes, of course, he used the gifts He endowed me with, and I have seen those gifts utilized more effectively as I have learned to walk in His Spirit as opposed to the flesh. I can say with confidence that God takes weak and broken vessels and uses them to bring others to Himself through Yeshua. We are a testimony of His love and grace.

I can testify that if we will put Him first and walk in His ways, He will do His work.... whether it is to suburbanites, city people, Jews, and non-Jews. He will use us to share with the greater Body of Messiah to see that God is still at work among the Jewish people and that He is returning soon to Jerusalem. He will bring His kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. It is nearer every day and the peace and joy we have in this

crazy world will serve as an anchor for our souls and a safe harbor for others.

There are fewer and fewer churches and Christians familiar with prophecy. We may have our differences regarding eschatology but our commitment to Israel and the Jewish people is a much-needed voice in the Body of Messiah. May God bless each of us as we serve Him and His chosen people with the Good News that the King and the Kingdom has come and is coming in all God's glory.