

# ON NEW WINE AND WINESKINS

---

## Responding to Human Needs Through Cell Groups

---

Paul Jensen

**W**hat are students at public colleges and universities drinking these days? I am not referring to what's on tap at the campus pub. Rather, what are students doing to quench basic inner human thirsts? Chuck Miller, director of Barnabas Ministries, identifies five basic thirsts among them: love, security, recognition, freedom from guilt, and the need for new experiences. I would add intellectual integration, purpose, and power.

John 4 describes a dramatic encounter between Jesus and a young woman seeking fulfillment outside the social and religious mores of her culture. He broke through societal and racial barriers and looked beyond her behavior to the basic thirsts that had driven her from one casual relationship to the next. In so doing, he affirmed her longings as legitimate and God-given, without condoning her life-style. She needed a drink, and he knew it.

To this woman, Jesus made the astounding claim of permanently quenching the thirst of anyone, in any culture or time, who drank what he had to offer. When she expressed a longing for what he could give, he revealed his supernatural knowledge of her life with its painful brokenness. He told her that he was the Messiah for whom her culture had been waiting. "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:26, RSV).

At the point of her belief, she was radically changed. As a result, her entire town of Sychar was changed by that which had quenched her thirst.

---

### Eight Human Thirsts

---

As a student at a public college or university, what are your thirsts? How can faith in Jesus Christ quench them in a way that makes sense on your campus? Are friends at your school drawn to what they see in your life? Perhaps you will find the following questions useful in assessing how you and others on campus relate to the thirsts already mentioned.

1. **Love.** Do you have relationships where commitment is unconditional and permanent? Often, relationships involve attitudes and actions that say, "I care about you if . . .," or "I care about you because . . .," rather than, "I care about you, period."

2. **Security.** What do you have that cannot be taken away? The greater the risk, the more vul-

nerable you are. Security demands protection.

3. **Recognition.** Who recognizes you and your accomplishments, and what is the basis of their appreciation? Has recognition made you feel that you can make a significant difference in the lives of others? How do you feel about what you've done to gain recognition?

4. **Freedom from guilt.** How do you deal with the failure to do what is right? How can you come to peace with your past in a way that does not repress the wrong but frees you to live creatively in the present and future? How do you face those you have hurt?

5. **Need for new experiences.** Are you growing and expanding? In what areas are you merely existing? Routine can be destructive if it doesn't lead to satisfaction or new discovery. Do you learn and become more sensitive when you encounter pain and sorrow? Are you more aware and alive than you were five years ago?

6. **Intellectual integration.** What is your world view? Do you attempt to tie what you know into a unified field of understanding that gives meaning? Do you believe that questions and problems in your thinking will yield new understanding through further study? Have you explored various world views honestly, in order to discover which one most satisfactorily explains what you

know in both the physical and metaphysical worlds?

7. **Purpose.** What would you like to accomplish with your life? What would you be willing to die for? Someone has said that you haven't really lived until you have something worth dying for.

8. **Power.** What resources outside yourself do you have to become more than you are on your own? A power gap exists between what people would like to be and what they actually are. How would you like to influence others? What principles guide the way you use influence and power?

---

### **New Wine: A Drink at Barkley's**

---

Some time ago I led a small Bible study group for students, couples, and young career people. Our group participated in a series of discussion parties for non-Christians, led and hosted by Don Barkley, the Southern California director for Search Ministries. What happened in these parties illustrates the difference that the Christian faith makes in relating to human thirsts. For several weeks our group studied principles of relating to friends who don't know Christ, prayed for them, compiled a guest list, and prepared for the parties. Each discussion began with three promises:

1. Any question about life or God is welcome and will be discussed.

2. The discussion will be limited to one hour. (Guests were invited for refreshments before and after the discussions.)

3. The leader will stimulate discussion rather than presenting a lecture. He will offer a biblical perspective for consideration when the group deals with questions relating to the Bible.

At the first party Jesse, a young physician and agnostic who had

read widely in the field of astrophysics, stated that he could find no compelling evidence for belief in God. We spent most of the first evening dealing with various world views which deny God's existence. In the course of the discussion Jesse made an incredible admission: "I'd like to believe in God, but I just can't. If I could believe I'd walk the world for him" (thirsts 1, 6, and 7).

After each discussion, conversation continued in small groups as Christians and non-Christians shared refreshments and discussed issues. At the last party Mike, an Iranian who grew up in the Islamic faith, asked why some of us were Christians. Several Christians gave their reasons. Marty eloquently shared that he was a Christian because of miracles. He told how he was driven over a 200-foot cliff while drunk and not only lived to tell about it, but walked out of the hospital the next morning and met with the police at the site of the accident! Marty, who is 6 foot 7 inches tall, told us how the adulation he received after basketball games never filled the emptiness he felt. He told us how in the past year he had come to an abiding faith in Jesus Christ, a certainty of God's forgiveness, and the assurance of salvation, which filled the vacuum as nothing before did (thirsts 1-4, 6-8). There was a long pause when he finished.

Mike broke the silence. "Marty," he said, "until tonight, I didn't know why I was supposed to be at these discussions, but now I know.

Hearing what you just said has brought me close to making a decision for Jesus Christ. You are the reason why I was supposed to come." Mike still has not become a Christian. He continues to search. His biggest question is the deity of Christ (thirsts 6-8).

Marty's boss, Roger, is a successful computer programmer and analyst. He came to the parties because Marty and his wife Laurie had developed an authentic caring relationship with him. Their new faith almost never came up in conversations, but their relationship grew in warmth and openness. Roger had gone through a painful breakup with his girlfriend. At the parties, Roger discovered convincing evidences for the Christian faith and came to understand the claims of Jesus Christ and the gospel. A couple of months later he committed his life to Christ and began attending a small Bible study group with Marty and Laurie. The following Christmas, Roger joined 160 others at the annual Christmas party that our ministry organizes for the kids in the Orange County Juvenile Hall. He was on one of eight teams that spent several hours making Christmas a little more fun for 160 troubled teens. He was so moved by what he saw that he signed up to be a parole volunteer to work with these young people several hours each week (thirsts 1, 2, 6, and 7).

---

### **New Wineskins**

---

Jesus claimed that he could quench the deepest thirst of anyone who drank what he offered. Marty, Laurie, and countless other students have discovered that these claims are both historically and experientially true. Jesus used the metaphors of water and wine to illustrate what he gives: the Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer with power and new

life, and his death to forgive and cleanse those who come to him confessing their need.

But he spoke of a tension between the new wine and the old wineskins. The new wine represents the new life that he gives to believers. The old wineskins represent the old patterns, both in the believer's private life and in his relationship to his secular and spiritual communities. "No one puts new wine into old wineskins, for the new wine bursts the old skins, ruining the skins and spilling the wine. New wine must be put into new wineskins" (Luke 5:37, 38, LB).

George Webber, the author of *The Congregation in Mission*, wrote, "No relationship of love can develop unless there are structures in which it can grow." The pattern for humans, both in society and in the church, is to build structures that decay, reflecting the selfishness of our fallen natures. But the new wine that Christ gives is servant love, and we must continually measure the effectiveness of our Christian social structures by our love for one another (see John 15:12).

A significant question for the Christian student is, What kind of wineskins are most compatible with the gospel in your campus setting? Many structures are appropriate, but the most helpful for us has been the small group. This has been true in many renewal movements throughout history. The Moravians and Wesleyans in the 18th century are two outstanding examples. In his excellent book, *The Problem of Wineskins*, Howard Snyder cites a number of advantages of the small group structure. It is flexible, mobile, inclusive, and personal. It can grow by division, making it an effective means of evangelism. It requires a minimum of professional leadership, and it is adaptable to the institutional church.

## **Evangelistic Cell Groups**

Our Friday night Bible study was called an evangelistic cell group. Here are the goals we formulated originally:

To grow up into spiritual maturity, which involves:

1. Appreciating Christ's death and resurrection as the basis for (a) our unconditional acceptance by God, (b) our worship offered to God, and (c) our personal growth in him.

2. Cultivating a growing love for Christ by spending time alone with him and loving and obeying him in all areas of our lives.

To grow together in fellowship, which involves:

1. Starting with our families and others where we live.

2. Making our relationships with other cell members a priority in our schedules by taking time for each other outside the meetings.

To serve through relationships with the unbelieving world, which involves:

1. Praying for our unbelieving friends, asking God to give us open doors, love, boldness, clarity, and sensitivity (see Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:2-6).

2. Building relationships with non-Christians by making time in our schedules for our unbelieving friends and inviting these friends to events such as home discussion parties and a juvenile hall Christmas party where they can be exposed to Christianity in a non-threatening way.

While there are other types of groups in our ministry, with different objectives, these were the goals that our cell group adopted. The needs of those in a group should determine the goals and

agenda for the group. Group structure should be an aid, not a hindrance to the Spirit of God in dealing with people's thirsts and needs.

## **Starting a Group of Your Own**

The following suggestions will help you to start a cell group of your own.

- \* **Begin with prayer.** If you sense God leading you to start or to be part of a small group, ask him to lead you to others who are open to the idea. Pray regularly, opening yourself to the Spirit's leading in your life. Don't be surprised by opposition. Keep praying.

- \* **Don't be in a hurry.** It takes time to build a group from scratch. Let it take two or three months if necessary.

- \* **Don't worry about numbers.** One of the most significant groups I have participated in had three members. If you have just one other Christian, you have enough for fellowship.

- \* **Invite other Christians to consider participating in a group.** Give them time to think and pray about the idea. Let them know that you will accept their decision, whatever it is.

- \* **When there are enough interested people, get together and consider these questions:**

What are the goals and purposes of the group? What would the members like to see happen?

What should be the composition of the group? Should it be allowed to grow and expand?

When, where, and how long should the meetings be?

What will be the duration of the commitment? You should set a definite cut-off date when evaluation can take place and a decision can be made whether to continue with another commitment.

What should be the level of sharing?

What will be the disciplines of the group (confidentiality, starting and ending on time, calling if you can't make it, etc.)?

Who will lead the group? Will leadership be shared?

\* **Write an agreement.** For the sake of clarity and evaluation at the end of the commitment, it can be useful for the group to write out what is agreed upon.

\* **The schedule of the meeting should include certain basics.**

Sharing the Word of God with emphasis on what it says, what it means, and how to apply it to each person's life.

Sharing each other's histories, present circumstances, and future dreams.

Sharing in prayer that is natural, not forced, where members can rejoice with the Scriptures, and pray for one another's needs and relationships.

\* **Accept people where they are.** You can't change people. Only they, with God's help, can choose to change. Your role is to teach, encourage, and accept them where they are.

\* **Nurture relationships between meetings.** Christianity in some Western cultures tends to be event-centered. Make sure that expressions of love and caring are not confined to the meeting only.

\* **Plan a balance between givers and takers.** Some people have such great emotional needs that they have little to contribute to others. A group with all takers and no givers will not work.

\* **Don't be afraid to dissolve a group at the end of the covenant.** If the group agreed to meet for a given time only, nobody needs to feel badly about the group's demise. Some may wish to reorganize for another time period, which is their prerogative.

\* **If you are the leader, beware of burnout.** We've found that with

most students' schedules, a team approach to leadership is essential in order to avoid putting too heavy a load on any one person.

\* **Beware of becoming ingrown.** Ultimately, if a group is to remain healthy, it must spill over to others outside its boundaries. It is easy to become what Becky Pippert describes as a "holy huddle."

\* **Read about small groups.** These principles have worked in North America, and most of them should work in other cultures as well. They may enable you to discover afresh what Christians have learned on campuses around the world and throughout history—that Jesus Christ is present to empower his people to live out his love among those who are thirsty for the water and wine that he died to give. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, RSV).

---

*Paul Jensen provides leadership training, research, and consulting for campus pastors and chaplains under the auspices of College and Career Ministries (P.O. Box 2471, Orange, California 92669, U.S.A.)*

## The Other Great ...

Continued from page 21

sins. Another reason is our incorrect notion that recognizing God's forgiveness of others implies our approval of sin.

Let us accept our Christian role as conduits through which God's forgiveness can freely flow to the world. And let us accept his forgiveness for those many occasions when we have failed, because of our legalism and intolerance, to convey his forgiveness to the world.

### NOTES

1 All quotations from the gospels are translated directly from the Greek text.

2 A literal translation of John 3:17 would read, "On the contrary, (he sent him) so that the world might be saved by him."

3 See Letter 16, April 21, 1887.

---

*James Cox (Ph.D., Harvard University) was born in New Zealand and served as president of Avondale College, in Australia. He is currently vice-president of the Washington Institute of Contemporary Issues in Washington, D.C.*

---

## Useful Resources

---

### Campus Ministry

The National Council of Churches published in 1986 a 205-page collection of papers and a study guide entitled *Invitation to Dialogue: The Theology of College Chaplaincy and Campus Ministry*. Copies can be obtained for US\$ 4.00 each by writing to: Education in the Society, NCC; 475 Riverside Drive, Room 710; New York, NY 10115; U.S.A.

### Response to Secularism

The General Conference Committee on Secularism has published through Andrews University Press a selection of the papers and its final report on the subject. The 206-page book, which also contains an annotated bibliography, is entitled *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives* (edited by Humberto M. Rasi and Fritz Guy), 2nd edition, 1987. A limited number of copies can be obtained for US\$ 5.00 each by writing to: Education Department - Room 342; 6840 Eastern Ave. NW; Washington D.C. 20012; U.S.A.