

Guests in an Ever-Changing Culture – Letter from Alan Chambers March 2013

MARCH 18, 2013 BY ALAN CHAMBERS



Leslie and I love fictional British historical series like *Downton Abbey*, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, and *North and South*. All of which revolve around the every-day life of English families at times in history when great change is taking place in the world around them. Maybe we love these docu-dramas because they parallel the changes that are taking place in the world we are presently living in. Let me explain.

It was only a few short years ago that I adopted the label “evangelical”. To be honest, it was thrust on me and on Exodus, an evangelical organization. It took very quickly and I embraced my evangelicalism and my fellow community of evangelicals. Not long after this adoption, I realized evangelical had become more of a dirty word than a trophy. But, as an evangelical, I posited that Exodus and I must wear the label proudly, fight those seeking to oppress/overtake us, and stand rigidly on the truth of the gospel.

Being graciously black and white was all I knew to do. Anything less was compromise. Why? Um, because God is black and white. Right? Failing to answer every question and take a stand on every issue was failure. Wishy washy. Sloppy Agape. Those were my beliefs about others I saw as compromisers.

I honestly cannot point to one event that led me to abandon all of the above, but rather more than a decade of learning about who I am in Christ and who He is in general. The result of my journey is like a deep satisfying breath after years of constant asthma attacks and hyperventilating. **I believe religion has taught us to be in a constant state of shock and horror rather than peace and rest and constant trust that God is God.** Evangelicalism has only served to further that shock and pitted us against neighbors who fail to live up to our religious paradigm—especially believers who ‘fall away’.

We have become all too comfy fighting the myriad of evil agendas that threaten our Christian way of life. We have also become far too callous when it comes to the staggering rate of recidivism in the church—when people entrenched in the church “go back” to old lifestyles, identities or patterns of living. I can think of recent examples where good churches full of grace have simply watched as families impacted by sin walk away from the community of Christ they were serving and living in. Blame can be found on both sides, but the lack of effort to “go after” and “fight for” has left me hopeless, at times.

Even the best churches and most grace-filled believers seem so steeped in “right and wrong” that when someone fails we find it easier to cut them off. Or maybe it is the fact that sharing our lives with other messy people and the messes that surround them are too much for us to fit into our own busy lives, and it becomes easier to simply let them walk away.

At Exodus we have been guilty of all of the above. We have done an okay job of proclaiming what we are for, but it’s been nearly impossible to do that without proclaiming what we are against. And, as far along as I have thought myself to be, I have so often over-emphasized things that I am *for* at the expense of the people who aren’t able to do what I am for. Take marriage for instance: highlighting my marriage as an answer possible for others with SSA often alienates people who either have no desire for marriage or no possibility of it. Failing to vocally support singleness and celibacy as an equally wonderful option has alienated even my closest of friends.

Times, they are a changing. Gone are the days of evangelizing through scare tactics, moral legislation, and church discipline. Gone are the good old days of taking marriage for granted or seeing it as the end all be all for every human being. **The culture in which we live has been rapidly changing for some time and if we, Christians, are going to have any impact in this new culture then we have to realize that we are no longer in charge, we’re guests at best.**

1 Peter 2:11 states that we are aliens of this world. I love the whole chapter, though; it speaks of this very season in which we are living. Verse 13 says we are to submit to every human institution whether a King or leader. Further on in the verse it encourages servants to respect their masters. The chapter ends with the reminder that **Christ is our ultimate example. He was reviled but did not revile back.**

I believe that our calling as the Church today is to serve above all else. In so doing I believe we will position ourselves as modern day Joseph’s

– a boy sold into slavery only to become a humble servant leader who saved his family. Every day I hear from scores of people who have an opinion about Exodus or me. There are those who believe I have given up proclaiming the truth of God and opted for a message of free grace.

To those folks I have to say, **grace is free and that is the most amazing part of God's new covenant with us.** We cannot procure his grace, and once we have received it, we cannot secure it. As beneficiaries of His grace we can never be disinherited.

More than the criticisms I get, however, are the grateful praises from people who never knew they mattered or could be a part of God's Kingdom. Thinking they were too far-gone or too bad they came to realize that there is no such story on planet earth. **Anyone can become a believer if they simply believe.**

At Exodus International we are here to serve a wide variety of people. We will only ever point to one truth, though. We are here because of Christ and His power to transform the heart. We are a biblical, Christian ministry. When it comes to sex and sexuality, we believe there are boundaries worth living in. One of the groups we serve is those who want to live through the filter of their faith and not through the filter of their sexuality. Choosing to go against your sexual desires or living celibately isn't something that will be celebrated in today's world. Yet, it is possible and it is beneficial. Choosing to honor your marriage vows in the midst of great struggle and temptation isn't easy, but it will produce life.

The world in which we live has changed and we must adapt. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That should bring us great peace and comfort.