

We the People...

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It's no mistake that what Jesus left behind was not a book, a seminar, a curriculum, nor a program. Instead, he left a visible community of followers—the Church. Though initially a small, seemingly powerless group, the community left by Jesus continues to grow at a rate of about 178,000 more people surrendering to Christ daily. When we connect our students and ourselves to the Church, historically and globally, we become part of a worldwide revolution that cannot be stopped!

And what do our students see? Many of them see the church in the rear view mirror of life, leaving church behind as they feel alienated and disconnected. What new and trendy thing will keep them connected? Maybe that which is old, enduring, and has stood the test of time. Maybe we need to get back to the Story of God and reclaim perspective on who the Church is and why it's central for students in a postmodern world.

Stop and consider the role of the church in the lives of students and their connection with the Story of God. Consider that one of the pictures the Scriptures' paint is that of the Church being the People of God. This picture becomes clearer when we consider the whole of God's Story, from Genesis to Revelation.

All throughout God's Story, we read about God's People. Early into the First Testament, God creates his special people by forming the nation of Israel through Abraham. He calls his people to serve as his mediator of blessing and judgment to the other nations- a priestly role.

He further establishes Israel as his special people after the great Exodus event. After rescuing Israel from the palm of Pharaoh's hand, he says to them, *"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"* (Exodus 19:4-6)

Many have called this passage the most important summary of God's redemptive plan as God calls his people to join him in playing a priestly role with the rest of humanity. In spite of humanity's failures, God continues to pursue us through his people. Israel for the nations; Aaron and sons for Israel; and ultimately Jesus for all- the perfect priest and king. Jesus appoints the 12, clearly identifying with the 12 tribes of Israel. He commissions his Apostles, the new leaders of the people of God, to carry on the redemptive role given to the People of God, to all the nations. When you read Acts and the Epistles in light of everything that's been developing throughout God's Story, it becomes clear that the New Testament Church, established by the Apostles, is a renewed, ongoing expression of God's People.

So what does all of this mean for my group that meets this Wednesday night? It means that we're connected, by the grace of God, by the story of God, with the People of God around the world, past, present and future.

The stories of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac, and Joseph, and Moses and David, and Deborah and Matthew and Mary and Peter and Paul begin to take on whole new relevance for us. They are part of our heritage. The Exodus Story is in part, our story. When God came in to rescue the underdog--Israel, from the most powerful empire in the world, Egypt, he was rescuing our people.

The heroes of Hebrews 11 are part of our heritage. They are cheering us on. The believers in Iraq and Afghanistan are part of the same revolution we're part of. And so our identity does not come most from self-actualization, from pride in our country, nor even from our families first and foremost. Our identity is rooted in being connected with our people- the people of God.

Instead of investing in Christian boy band videos, get your students copies of *Jesus Freaks* volumes and read how our people lived and died for God and his message. Regularly visit websites like www.persecution.com and enter into the current stories of God's People around the globe. These are our stories.

Our Christian Scriptures record the great story of God that cannot be viewed as a DVD on the couch with popcorn. It's a drama that sweeps believers in, calling us to relate, participate, and own God's great story that continues to unfold. This is the essence of youth group and the church. Today the drama continues for we the people... are the people of God.