

# REWILDING

## Rediscovering the Wild Adventure of Following Jesus

These days, I feel more comfortable sitting around a dinner table with young people who are critical of religion, conflicted about faith, and confused by Christians than sitting in a worship service on Sunday morning.

I'm not being critical. Just honest.

I spent the first 25 years of my adult life in worship ministry. Sunday after Sunday, I stood before congregations, leading people in music. I have wonderful memories of those years.

Well, mostly wonderful.

But for the last 15 years, my life has unfolded largely beyond the systems and structures that revolve around weekend worship services.

I've shared dinners, enjoyed coffee, and simply sat with thousands of young people from around the world, each on their own journey. Almost all of them knew little or nothing about Jesus. And they weren't afraid to say so.

They were honest. Not cruel. Not unkind. Just honest.

They asked questions, challenged assumptions, and shared their doubts, frustrations, disappointments, and hopes. And somewhere along the way, many of them became dear friends. They still are. I love that.

These last 15 years have changed me in ways I never anticipated. My understanding of Jesus, His Kingdom, and His Church has been challenged, stretched, and enriched through the intertwining of my life with theirs.

Every day brings another conversation, another adventure, another opportunity to encounter Jesus in ways and places I never would have imagined during those first 25 years.

And somewhere along the way, I discovered an entirely different landscape in which to live out my faith. One that took me beyond the familiar rhythms of church life and into the everyday lives of people Jesus loves.

Recently, I came across a word that encapsulates the essence of these last 15 years:

***Rewilding.***



## RETURNING TO THE WILD

*Rewilding* is a fascinating concept in ecology. It involves restoring landscapes that have been altered, cultivated, or controlled by human activity, allowing natural processes to flourish again.

For generations, we've reshaped landscapes to make them more predictable, manageable, and productive. We've cleared forests, redirected rivers, fenced fields, and carefully determined what should grow where.

And we've accomplished some remarkable things in the process. But we've also discovered that our efforts to manage nature can unintentionally diminish its diversity, resilience, and vitality.

Rewilding begins with a different question. What might happen if we stopped trying to control every aspect of the landscape and allowed some of its natural processes to return?

The results can be extraordinary. Native plants return. Wildlife finds new habitats. Relationships within the ecosystem begin to recover. Dormant seeds may find the conditions they need to emerge.

Life begins showing up in places we didn't expect. And much of it happens without our having to design, organize, or manage every detail.

## REWILDING OUR FAITH

The same principle has profound implications for how we follow Jesus.

Over the centuries, we've developed extraordinary systems and structures for expressing, organizing, and sustaining Christianity. We've built buildings, established institutions, developed programs, and created traditions that have shaped generations of believers.

But our efforts to cultivate Christianity can also unintentionally constrain our imagination of what following Jesus can look like.

We can become so accustomed to familiar expressions of Christianity that we begin to mistake those expressions for the boundaries of Christian life itself.

Sunday mornings. Worship services. Bible studies. Ministry programs. Church activities.

All familiar. All capable of being deeply meaningful. But none of them represents the full landscape of life under Jesus' Kingship.

When I read the Gospels, I'm struck by how much of Jesus' life and ministry unfolded in ordinary, unpredictable places. Around dinner tables, along dusty roads, in fishing boats, at wells, in marketplaces, and in people's homes.

He taught in synagogues, participated in religious gatherings, and spent time in the Temple. But His Kingdom wasn't confined to those places.

He encountered people in the middle of their everyday lives. People with questions, doubts, complicated histories, and very little understanding of who He really was.

And He invited them to follow Him.

Not back to the synagogue. Not back to the Temple. Not simply into another religious routine. But into an entirely different way of seeing and experiencing life.

A life that was often surprising, uncomfortable, unpredictable, and wonderfully adventurous.

## BEYOND THE FAMILIAR

Looking back, I can see how deeply those first 25 years shaped my understanding of following Jesus. I knew the rhythms, the expectations, the vocabulary, and the routines. I knew how to function within that landscape.

But when my life became intertwined with young people who had little or no understanding of Christianity, I discovered that many of those familiar assumptions didn't travel very well.

The conversations were different. The questions were different. The starting places were different.

I couldn't assume we shared the same understanding of God, Scripture, faith, or even the meaning of the word *Christian*.

I had to become curious again. I had to listen more closely, ask better questions, and learn to recognize what Jesus might already be doing in their lives.

And something unexpected happened. My faith didn't become smaller. It became more expansive.

I began seeing His Kingdom in places I had rarely considered before. I discovered opportunities to express His love that didn't require a program, a platform, or an invitation to an event.

A dinner could become a sacred moment. A conversation over coffee could open an entirely new understanding of Jesus. A friendship could become a place where faith was explored naturally, honestly, and without pressure.

I wasn't discovering a different Jesus. I was discovering how much more there was to following the Jesus I already knew.

## WHAT IF?

***What if rewilding our faith isn't about abandoning the familiar, but rediscovering the extraordinary possibilities we've overlooked?***

***What if some of the most meaningful expressions of life under Jesus' Kingship are waiting to be discovered beyond the environments where we've grown most comfortable?***

***What if the Spirit is already stirring in conversations, relationships, communities, and cultures we've never considered part of our ministry landscape?***

***And what if we don't need to create something new to participate, but to simply become curious enough to see what's already happening?***

Jesus described the Kingdom of God as a seed that grows, even while the farmer sleeps, without the farmer understanding exactly how it happens (Mark 4:26–29).

I love that picture. The farmer participates. He scatters the seed. But he doesn't control the mystery of life unfolding beneath the soil.

That's part of what rewilding our faith invites us to rediscover. We aren't the source of Kingdom life. Jesus is. And His Kingdom has never depended on our ability to organize, manage, or contain it.

After 40 years of ministry, I'm still discovering how much I have to learn about following Jesus. These last 15 years have convinced me that the landscape is far more expansive, surprising, and alive than I once imagined.

I'm not interested in returning to some romanticized version of the early Church. I'm interested in following Jesus wherever He leads today.

That means holding some of my familiar assumptions more loosely, letting go of my need to anticipate every outcome, and recognizing that Jesus is already at work in places I haven't imagined and in the lives of people I might otherwise overlook.

It means learning to participate without needing to control, and being willing to venture beyond the familiar.

Because the Kingdom is nearer, the harvest is more plentiful, and the adventure of following Jesus is far wilder than we imagine.