

# Serendipity in action

When Tim Bulkeley, just back from a month of sabbatical-teaching in a refugee camp (see May's NZ Baptist), wanted something "more" for his 60th birthday party, he planned a Karen evening to raise funds for a village of Internally Displaced People.

He contacted Ruth Corlett from Upper Hutt Baptist, the New Zealand director of Partners, a relief agency that specialises in assisting the people being harassed by the government of Burma. Ruth is in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and so much nearer to the village. He hoped she could get the money where it was needed.

One of the Corletts' friends in Chiang Mai had come up with much the same idea, but as an educational twist to a child's

birthday party. Ruth had just posted the idea to the Partners website ([partnersworld.org.nz](http://partnersworld.org.nz)) calling it "Party with a Purpose," and organised Partners in New Zealand to prepare party packs for people who want to do something similar.

Serendipity can be a sign of the Spirit of God at work; think of Ruth "just happening" on Boaz's field (Ruth 2:3), or Esther in the Persian royal court "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

"Maybe parties with a purpose is like that," Tim says, "serendipity as a sign that the Spirit is moving. Perhaps your next party could have a higher purpose, as well as reunions and fun."

Sixty people, mainly from Carey College and Balmoral Baptist Church attended the party. (Tim's family are almost

all in the UK this year). On the menu were Karen pakora, pumpkin curry and the warm yellow bean noodle salad. Tim and Barbara showed a video and introduced the Karen.

The Karen are a largely Christian tribal people who the Burmese military government seems determined to drive out or wipe out. Tim and Barbara also spoke about a village in Thailand where children whose villages have been burned by the soldiers can find safety and an education. Gifts at the party raised \$2500 towards the cost of a roof for a new boys' dormitory.

Another donor had been supporting the project but pulled out, leaving Pastor Peacefully and his team with a missing roof. If you want to help finish the job, \$1500 is

*From Stu Corlett, of Partners in Thailand:*

The little boy in this photo is special. Last month his home was burnt to the ground by the Burma Army. He just came to the Poppra School. I sat him on my knee and had a translator. "Are you afraid?" I asked. "Yes," he said. "What of?" "Of the fire," he replied.

I then spent the next half hour explaining how Jesus could help him when he was afraid. I told him to call the name Jesus when he saw the flames in his mind. It was the first time he had ever heard of Jesus, he is from a Buddhist family. The little boy was never further than about 10 metres away from me for the next 3 days. I called him "my little shadow."



still needed.

**To find out more about:**  
 • the PhoPra roof –  
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click on "Party"

• running a party with a purpose  
 – [www.partnersworld.org.nz/events.html](http://www.partnersworld.org.nz/events.html)

# Promise Keepers 'leaves no man behind'

*By Paul Subritzky*

With his ship, the Endurance, "impaled on ramrods of ice" in the unforgiving Antarctic Sea, Sir Ernest Shackleton gave the order for his crew to abandon ship on October 27, 1915, becoming castaways in a hostile, sub-zero environment. This extraordinary expedition to the Antarctic was to become one of the greatest adventures of the last century.

With insufficient range on their wireless and no hope of rescue, the men

understood they must look to themselves to survive. Their initial attempt to walk towards open sea had to be abandoned, but eventually Shackleton and his crew used lifeboats to make it to Elephant Island. Shackleton then led a team of five on a harrowing, epic 800 mile journey to the Falkland Islands to seek help for the rest of his crew.

The ensuing story of how these men endured incredible physical hardship, as they survived

storms at sea and trekked across icy mountain terrain on South Georgia Island with broken equipment and crude, improvised clothing, is inspirational. Driven by the need to rescue their fellow crew members, they persevered under grueling conditions, refusing to give up. Eventually, four months and four attempts later, Shackleton was able to return on a Chilean rescue ship for the rest of the stranded Endurance crew. By the grace of God and through sheer determination, not one life was lost.

The example of this rescue brings into focus the importance of men courageously standing together for survival and leaving no man behind.

Alone, none of us can manage life's demands all the time. How much easier it is for the enemy to pick us off when we are isolated. As men, we all need a band of brothers to stand with us, to hold us accountable and to watch our backs. And like Shackleton, who was



**The Endurance**

"single-minded and ferociously loyal to his men," we need to demonstrate that same commitment to others. A life and legacy of significance can become a reality when we focus on our mission to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

God commands us to love one another and calls us to look out for each other. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you ..." John 13:34.

Jesus clearly demonstrated this when he spent three years with 12 men.

He walked with them, talked with them, and revealed His power and purpose to them through the everyday life experiences of their journey. It was never God's intention that we should make our journey alone. As Proverbs 18:1 says, "A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment."

Our culture today has tried to persuade us that "it's all about me." Concern for others has diminished and we have become increasingly isolated and robbed of friendships. The fruit of this can be seen in our society, where men "rage against all wise judgment" as they follow their own desires.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends," John 15:13. Shackleton's story plainly demonstrates this selfless attitude. But the ultimate example of self-sacrifice is Jesus, the One who gave himself totally for us. Although we were separated from God because of sin, Jesus

died on our behalf so that we could be reconciled to God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life," John 3:16.

The term "one another" is mentioned more than 50 times in the New Testament. We also see examples of men who could not come to Christ on their own being brought to Him by others. For instance, the four men who carried their friend on a stretcher to see Jesus, and because the crowd was so vast, they dug through a roof to lower their friend into Jesus' presence.

Without the persistence, faithfulness and commitment of his friends, this man would never have had that opportunity to meet with Jesus and be healed.

So how do we find men who will stand with us?

## 1. Be intentional

Make a decision to break away from the grip of passivity and apathy that can infect our lives, and

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testing, or is it simply sitting and listening?

To “teach” is associated with the process of helping another person develop their understanding, knowledge and ability. To understand the difference between “a teaching” and “to teach” we can consider the many examples in the Gospels where Jesus taught others by allowing Himself to, as it were, “get down to their level,” and with patience and humility, lovingly start with their previous knowledge and lead their understanding to a new and higher level.

He also used questioning as a form of assessment for learning to help them build that new knowledge and understanding into a new concrete experience. He even did this with His disciples. These illustrations of Jesus are not preaching, but teaching that results in learning and change.

Nehemiah 8, Luke 24 and Acts 2 have been presented as examples of preaching, yet there are other writers who present Nehemiah 8 and Luke 24 as examples of teaching. When we accept and understand the difference between preaching and teaching, we can see that Nehemiah 8 is not necessarily an example of preaching; it is an example of teaching as in “to teach.” Ezra read the Law out loud, and in verse 8 the Levites taught, “making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” So the information was not just given, it was associated with the assistance in understanding.

When they had finished reading and teaching the Law, the people rejoiced because they understood. A good question to ask is, how did they know that they understood?

Luke 24 is another example where Jesus first enquired of the others about what they were discussing, and then took them from that level of understanding and raised their understanding to a new and higher level.

Jesus did not leave them until their new level of understanding was complete. At that moment “their eyes were opened and they recognised him.” It was not that they were previously blind, but finally their brains broke through the confusion of the death of Jesus and made the association between their knowledge of the writings of the Old Testament, the Jesus they had known and the Jesus in front of them. At last they could “see.”

Sermons present a lot of data and the problem becomes the “how” of remembering. It is not a case of being a better listener nor is it a case of taking notes as this creates a problem called “divided attention.” Neither is it a case of telling listeners they need to become faster learners.

It is simply that most people cannot remember data that is not built into a learning experience (like the cramming of data before an examination, then forgotten soon after). Preaching does not

ensure that the message starts at the level of understanding of the hearers. Neither can it ensure that the hearer’s new level of understanding is complete by the end of the message.

Acts 2, however, does contain a very good example of preaching – an example where the Holy Spirit used Peter to powerfully proclaim the truth to unbelievers to counteract their false arguments. Herein lies the strength of preaching, that of urging through a one-way communication, a particular ideology, and in the Christian church, that of the good news of Jesus Christ.

The strong and continued association of teaching with preaching in the Christian church and very rarely the association of teaching with the process of to teach knowledge and understanding, has subsequently produced a series of problems.

Preaching is seen as teaching to a new level of understanding. Preaching and also lecturing are seen as the model for new teachers in the Christian arena and it has become so entrenched that it is an established part of Christian culture.

Ask a Christian to teach a group of adults and the result is more often than not someone who lectures (or preaches) to the group, simply because that is what the church has inadvertently trained them to do. Seminars, missionary conferences, Christian courses, are so often promoted with keynote speakers, speakers who talk and talk and do not teach.

One of the offshoots of this preaching, lecturing, keynote speakers, motivational speakers, etc., is the buzz and the inspiration. Yet these are only feelings and often last only for a while. There is much truth in the saying that the only person to learn in a lecture is the lecturer; similarly with sermons, keynote speakers, etc.

The result is a lot of short-lived inspiration and very little deep understanding and change. There is also the problem of educational wounding. Once a person is wounded through bad teaching practice it can take a long time for that problem to be brought to the light and healing to occur.

Adults need food, yet the process of preaching and not teaching, expecting people to sit and listen and not be active in the learning process, could be compared to placing them in a high chair and spoon-feeding them. This problem of poor teaching is not just associated with Christian education; it is a problem in all areas of adult and tertiary education. Lecturing provides information, but so often there is no real learning.

Tertiary and adult teachers tend to teach using the methods (or lack of methods) they learnt through observation during their student years and are recruited because of their knowledge of a subject, not their expertise as a teacher. This type of recruitment is one of the major obstacles to the progress in tertiary education. Is there a similar problem in Christian education where,

## When was the last time the Church spent as much time on really teaching disciples so that they in turn know how to make more disciples, as it does on preaching?

for example, a missionary has become a lecturer and has not studied and developed the skills of teaching?

In presenting these thoughts about preaching and teaching, there is the likelihood that some would disagree and say that the reason people do not learn from a sermon is that it is the person’s problem, not the problem with preaching. I am not saying there is a problem with preaching, and I am not suggesting that there is a problem with our preachers or pastors. They undertake a wonderful service for the church family and much respect and honour is due to them.

There is however a problem with a system that doesn’t place an importance on helping people learn and our pastors do not have the time for the necessary research and self-training to learn about learning themselves. The system seems to be one that devalues many people both in the world and in the Christian church. From the articles in response to the original article there is the argument that disassociates preaching from the many good and quality attributes of learning.

This unwillingness to accept theories from the social scientist and the inability to accept that there is a problem with using preaching to teach suggests that the Christian system doesn’t care about those whom God has made to learn in a way that is not in the auditory style of preaching.

The argument also suggests that there is no place in the worship service for the abilities and knowledge of those whom God has led down a lifetime career in adult education. What about those people who have spent many years studying to gain qualifications and learning how to teach adults and now feel frustrated that the system doesn’t want their gifts?

It also suggests that all pre-Christian people who have successfully learnt in the secular world through styles of learning that are not auditory have to change their learning styles when they become a Christian. It also suppresses those to whom God has given a gift of teaching and are called to be teachers.

So the problem is not with preaching; there is and remains a necessary place for those inspirational messages of the Good News of God’s salvation. The problem lies in the suppression of teaching that is the facilitation of learning towards knowledge and understanding, learning that is firmly fixed through the learning experience so that it remains and is not forgotten a few days later.

Jesus’ life on earth was a mixture of preaching, teaching and healing, preaching to bring people to faith and teaching on how to live out His principles. He kept His ministry in balance through the use of preaching and teaching.

His great commission was for us to make disciples by going, teaching and baptising, not by preaching to the converted. When was the last time the Church spent as much time on really teaching disciples so that they in turn know how to make more disciples, as it does on preaching?

Our pastors in training receive teaching in the skills of preaching. Two questions to ask when we understand the importance of teaching are: Do they receive the same amount of teaching in how to teach? Are they taught how to recognise those under their care who have the gift of teaching to learn?

After all, Paul wrote to the Ephesian church “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” In Romans we read, “Anyone who has the gift of serving should serve. Anyone who has the gift of teaching should teach.”

Paul also writes to Timothy regarding the qualities of an overseer (bishop, or elder) and gives “able to teach” as a necessary quality. Surely then, having the gift, having pursued the study of, and having proven skills in teaching is as important as the skill in preaching. Where then in our Baptist society, more so in all of Christendom, are all these leaders who can use all the knowledge that can be gained through God given education principles who are teaching and training the disciples won through the evangelism of others.

After all, give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him how to fish and you feed him for life; give a man some information and he will know something for a day, teach him how to learn and he will continue to learn for life, and be able to teach others how to learn.

Rather than dismiss the means of helping people to learn, we now have an opportunity to stand back and be prepared to see the big picture, to be prepared to accept the God given knowledge and skills of others and the different ways God has created humans to learn, then approach the debate with an open mind and apply the principles of a holistic view, viewing text in context, applying change for improvement and the synergism of working together for God’s Kingdom.

Then we can make disciple-making disciples throughout the whole world by going, teaching and baptising.

*References: Zull, James E. (2006) Key aspects of how the brain learns; New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 110, Summer. pps 3-9. Redish, E. F. (1996). Discipline-based education and education research: The case of physics.*

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make the effort to build true friends. Pray about which men God is calling you to become friends with. “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24.

### 2. Invest time

Building friends for life takes time. It must be seen as a priority, and as an investment for your future and the future of your loved ones.

### 3. Sacrifice

Jesus is our ultimate example. Life is not “all about me.” As Christian men we are called to die to ourselves daily. There is also an incredible satisfaction and sense of purpose that comes from placing the needs of others ahead of ourselves.

### 4. Choose the right friends

Choose men who you can relate to, trust, and allow to speak truth into your life, even when you do not necessarily want to hear it – men who will help you grow and who have your best interests at heart. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed,” Proverbs 13:20.

### 5. Stay on target

We need men around us who will keep us focused on our mission in life and challenge us to achieve something bigger than we can do alone. Promise Keepers surveys reveal that the number one desire of Christian men is to grow spiritually. Experience and statistics also indicate that men will grow spiritually up to seven times faster by regularly attending church plus a small group, than they will by simply attending church alone. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend,” Proverbs 27:17.

Not all of us are called to venture to the Antarctic like Ernest Shackleton. But every day we can make the choice to come out of isolation and become part of a band of brothers – together achieving all that we have been called to.

One way we men can respond to this clarion call of Christ is by attending an event such as the Promise Keepers “Leave No Man Behind” event in 2008. As we focus on God and hear the inspired messages over the weekend, we can be strengthened and equipped, and, like Shackleton, follow the example of Jesus as we seek to leave no man behind in the battle for men’s souls in this nation.