

## **Post-Its from the Edge: A View into Emerging Culture**

*By Shannon Hopkins, a Texan in London living missionally*

Alan Jamison says there are five categories of people who have left the church. His PhD thesis became a book, *A Churchless Faith*, and now five years later his second book *A Churchless Faith Five Years On* continues to chronicle the exodus and the progressions within each of his categories:

1. Displaced Followers – Bold and expressive, they left hurt and angry, having received faith but not the tools for examination. They still entered in to church-based activities such as attending conferences, reading books by pastors, etc. Of those in the initial survey, 94% had held positions of leadership. This category represents the only category that five years out had some returning to the mainstream church.
2. Transition to alternative faith – The smallest percentage of those surveyed, these are disillusioned and rejected Christianity with a tendency to be drawn toward Eastern practices such as Buddhism.

**Five years later, Jamison observed that the above categories represented the truly disconnected and the following three categories developed into stages of a faith journey.**

3. Exiles – Angry and isolated, the exiles were deconstructing their faith through reflection and questions. They are not interested in anything Christian – outward or inward and want no labels as to who and where they are. After five years, hardly any of the original exiles were still in this category.
4. Transitionals – Emotional owners of whatever they are a part, when they left it was to reconstruct their faith. Unlike the displaced followers who haven't examined their faith, they are pulling from ancient practices and the things they know to reconstruct a deeper faith.
5. Integrated Wayfinders – These Wayfinders are quietly strong with an integrated and autonomous faith and as they exited the church they were looking for ways to connect with theological training and pastoral care . . . outside the church.

Jamison draws a picture of the differences between the Displaced Followers and Integrated Wayfinders with a karate metaphor. A karate blue belt knows the task and wants to hurt you, but a black belt, while skilled and knowledgeable and able to cause pain, is focused on bringing their opponents along, in a manner, they are teachers. If they knock you down, they will help you up.

The faith journey marked by the progression of Exiles to Transitionals to Integrated Wayfinders included individuals with common concerns – integrity, vulnerability, and a willingness to express weakness. They found that church was irrelevant to faith and life and maintained a consistent reservation about the church. Five years on, these were still seeking ways to process how to be community outside of church usually via small groups. Notably, moving from one category to the next usually

included having found small groups of others with whom to travel on the faith journey.

Jamison underscores that the church's tendency is to disseminate faith in a packaged approach which does not encourage critical thinking and provides few to no tools for the inward journey. If we teach people in the church to actually be critical, he sees hope for the mainstream church to avoid the exodus.

Jamison's words provide me with a language to describe my work, my passion. His findings illustrate what I consider to be a flaw within the church -- we celebrate the start of the race . . . "Yea Rah! You've walked the aisle." The finish line becomes joining the church. People then get disillusioned because most often we leave them to run the marathon alone with little to no coaching or encouragement along the journey's way.

Since moving to London, I've encountered representatives of all of Jamison's categories. Caroline is one such example. An actress and dancer now, she was once active in her church and even helped plant a congregation when she was on staff with Youth With a Mission. However, as she processed the activities of the church as a whole, she progressively became disillusioned with programs and practices until ultimately she pulled away completely. The accompanying questions and criticisms she received from church leadership served only to foster her anger. She was a bonafide Exile.

After a time, Caroline began to read the desert fathers like St. John of the Cross and investigated Native American spirituality where she found parallels to the Christian story. A group of artists in the city had by this time created Artisan, an initiative to encourage faith in the entertainment sector. Caroline joined this growing community after encountering one or two others with similar interests. This exploration through reading and experience marked her Transition period.

Now, as an Integrated Wayfinder, she participates in an ongoing prayer time, bringing new companions into the experience on a regular basis and has even, on occasion, returned to the church facility to participate in worship there.

God is at work in London. I'm convinced of that. But my travels by bus and the Underground (my personal preference) to seek out what that looks like particularly among those involved in the arts, hasn't taken me to many of the beautiful cathedrals and monumental attempts to architecturally capture God's glory. I find my way instead to meeting rooms and pubs where dialogue is happening.

One such meeting room is at the Christian Missionary Society, an arm of the Anglican church that has accepted the challenge of confronting the church's seeming inability to address a changing culture. One such attempt is Blah, an irregularly scheduled dialogue among established church leaders who either want to know more about the churchless faith -- spiritual seekers outside the church who could be interested in some tie to community -- and church leaders who currently are planting some type of work among the Wayfinders.

At a Blah gathering, I found myself discussing culture with Jamision himself. Unknowingly, I had taken a seat at a table with the speaker of the evening. As we chatted, I shared some of my experiences to date and Jamision agreed with much of my findings. Over the next several months, my intention is to unpack some of my discoveries related to those who have disconnected and reconnected to faith, albeit in some rather unorthodox ways, as well as attempts to engage with and speak into the lives of those who have yet to identify Christ as their guide along their faith journey.

Here's what we'll be exploring in the days ahead -- our own Blah in print if you will -  
- complete with anecdotal pictures/ postcards from the edge:

1. Art in Culture
2. Pilgrimage
3. The home and meal
4. Festivals & Arts/ Worship Events
5. Justice Movements
6. New Monastic Models
7. Storytelling events
8. Spiritual Tourism & Adventure Missions
9. Gatherings for discussion
10. Ancient practices rediscovered
11. Places for partnership among the established church and those on the edge