



below the surface

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Alongside

Restoring Christian Leaders • Impacting the World

From Heavy Hearts to Hope

As I begin this newsletter, I hear much hearty laughter coming from the conference room just outside my office door. It is our newest group of missionaries and pastors, here barely a week, but already finding a significant level of community and healing. I ask myself the question, "Given the tight smiles and cautious utterances trying to cover up heavy hearts just under a week ago, what has taken place over the last week to bring such a contrasting sense of freedom and hope that is so evident today?"

My first response would be, "Community!" God created us in His image—a relational God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in deep relationship within the Godhead before human beings were ever spoken into existence. And being created deeply relational beings in God's image, we function best in community. We grow best in the context of deep relationship.

Community is so much more than doughnuts and chatter. It has to do with genuineness and authenticity. It has to do with sharing the heart, not just the head. When people share their struggles and pain, community is born.

That's a big part of what happens at Alongside. Each day we talk together about life experiences common to all people—subjects like grief, anger, fear, burnout, depression, stress, traumatic events, conflict, hurt, and many forms of dysfunctionality. We spend time sharing deeply from our hearts the ways in which these painful

experiences have impacted our lives and ministry. We begin to feel understood and cared for. We no longer feel alone. Each one receives comfort and strength from the small, but deep, sense of community that has come into being.

We do not stop with sharing our pain with one another. We go on to talk about God's provision for us. We go on to care for one another and strengthen one another. We "build one another up in love."



Another element that brings hope is counseling. Each day of Alongside's 3-week Renewal and Growth Sabbatical includes not only teaching and fellowship, but also personal counseling time for each program participant. Ministry-experienced professional counselors offer loving concern and helpful tools to help understand and deal with the various situations being faced by each missionary and pastor.

So how does a heavy heart become hopeful in such a short time? A deep sense of community. Connecting with God and His people in a deep way. Feeling understood and cared for and not alone. Finding tools to deal with difficulties. ***It's a simple formula, but a powerful experience!*** This is how Alongside accomplishes its mission: to restore hope, purpose, passion and relationships among Christian leaders.

Jeanne L. Jensma, Ph.D.
Director of Counseling





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One Missionary's Experience at Alongside

"I came to Alongside desiring healing.

"I was tired. The energy, the passion I once had for ministry was at an all-time low. I suspected that I needed help when I had trouble thinking of what I do enjoy doing. To speak honestly, my last term on the field brought unwanted tears and pain.

"I am so grateful that my mission presented Alongside as an option. They let me make the decision to come and then gave the emotional support to follow through. I was excited because they had heard my heart's cry for help. Acquaintances who had come to Alongside offered encouragement and answered questions.

"As I began to fill out the background information for the counselors at Alongside, the pain was excruciating. I realized that any kind of 'quick fix' would not do. My heart's prayer became—"Lord, I am ready for major surgery. Yours is the surgeon's hand. I welcome the pain as a necessary part of the healing."

"It is hard to believe that the three weeks are over. They have been full. They have been balanced. They have been intense and yet there has been time to process, to read, to pray, to meditate, to go for walks, to delight in our Father's extravagance expressed through His creation. God used the combination of instruction, community and individual counsel to minister to me and to begin the healing process that I longed for.

"So often God would point out an issue I needed to deal with during the time of instruction. Then I had opportunity to take ownership of my feelings and thoughts during our time together as a group. It was a chance to be honest with myself and with others about shortcomings, weaknesses, harmful choices that had been made. As one shares, the group learns to listen and to care. Then during the times of personal counseling more work can be done on what God has revealed.

"It is hard work to be an active member of community. My understanding of the importance of the Body of Christ—the community of believers—is deeper and broader as a result of my time with Alongside. We were created for relationship and it is in relationship to and fellowship with other believers that I/we can grow to be more like the Lord Jesus. I thank God for the practice I got. I am looking to Him now for the courage and the people needed to build meaningful community wherever I am.

"I came desiring healing and I have been empowered/enabled to deal with some deep issues. I have come a long way with the help and encouragement and love my God showered on me through His people here. I go home with the assurance that 'God, who began a good work in me, will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.' (Phil.1:6)"

**Renewal and Growth
Sabbatical Dates**

July 10 - 21

August 21 -
September 1

September 11 - 29

October 23 -
November 10

December 4 - 20

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