



Fall 2016

Brian Frable — facilitator

# COUNCIL TREE COVENANT CHURCH

*Greenhouse Experiment*

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere” 2 Corinthians 2:14. I love that Christ uses us to spread an aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere. Think about it. Those in Christ spread an aroma. Sometimes by speaking and sometimes without saying a word, but by merely serving others. Brian and I went on a camping tour of South Africa this summer. We desired to be an aroma of Christ among our fellow travelers. There were eighteen of us from seven different nations. This desire had been built through the Greenhouse Experiment at church, where we were called to focus on how we can help others to discover a life-saving relationship with Jesus through praying, caring and sharing. Sincerely, I think we went to Africa with a Christ-focused perspective. I didn’t want the trip to be all about me. I wanted it to be about meeting the needs of others. Not about protecting my time; but about giving my time away. It was kind of a *mini greenhouse experiment* for my husband, Brian, and me. If we chose to live like this on a daily basis, would we see God’s promises come true? By giving my life away, would I somehow gain my life?

How did this work out practically? Brian and I prayed together daily for the people we travelled with. We looked for opportunities to connect with others and get to know them. We tried to find ways to serve. We helped put up and take down tents. We helped cook and clean at meal times. We prayed for those hurting and in need. We shared our stories of faith with people who were interested. It was an incredible three weeks. I have not experienced that much openness to the gospel for many years. People asked us probing questions: “Why do you go to church? How often do you go to church? Why do you read the Bible? Do you meditate? How does your meditation look different from the way a Buddhist meditates? Who is this Jesus? Why should I believe in Him?” Goodness, I was sitting on the edge of my seat excited to see what God was going to do next.

The trip was a sweet way to celebrate my birthday. But the sweetest celebration was the one we gave to our guide, Loreen. It was her 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Her brother Zanela, also one of our guides, said she had never had a birthday party. He told us that he and her three other brothers had thrown water on her once to acknowledge her birthday as a little girl. I am telling you, seeing the joy on the faces of her and her brother when everyone on the tour presented her with three cakes and sang *Happy Birthday* in six languages; it was priceless.



So... I am learning bit by bit, tiny decision by tiny decision, to live my life for others for the sake of Christ. “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it” Matthew 17:23.

- Connie Trout (Kindergarten Teacher)

We ventured into an experiment March 2016 to see if we could create an environment that would grow the seeds of compassion, love and outreach. About 65 people in our congregation, plus an addition of some small groups, sought to learn together how to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to help others discover a life-saving relationship with Jesus. **The Experiment: *What will God do when we turn our attention to Him in this way over the next six months?*** There were some that met in a large group about every six weeks for training, encouragement and prayer. There were some that met in the context of small groups. There were others that met one-on-one with Brian Frable. A few participated in multiple ways. Readings were available and we challenged all participants to pray for one another as well as those we were desiring to see walk with Christ. We learned some things along the way. Some experienced life change. Some were awakened to the reality that there are spiritual forces that are absolutely opposed to this kind of love and care for others. At our last large meeting, at the end of the six months, it was determined by the participants that we need to keep on going with this and invite others into this meaningful life-changing, spiritual-impacting journey. So please, as you read this, have a conversation with the Lord. He may be calling you to a deeper walk of faith through phase two of Greenhouse. We pray that you will be encouraged by the reflections and stories. Talk to any of us if you have questions or are interested in participating.

I was very encouraged through these last six months by the desire of many who prayed fervently, opened themselves to new possibilities of sharing their faith, became people of invitation and took seriously Christ’s call to share his great news of rescue. At one of our large group meetings it was spectacular that we had a full table of high school and college students enthusiastically contributing to the discussion and sharing their passion and love for Christ. It was refreshing to experience their vitality in Christ. At another large group meeting, Carole Harvey shared about what Christ had done and was doing in her family; major answers to long enduring prayers. Personally, over the last six months, my intentionality increased. In that, I experienced open doors I probably would have ignored otherwise. Through it all, my love and passion for Christ and others grew. Prayer and encouragement from others made a difference.

- Brian Frable (Pastor of Worship Arts)

Street corners yelling fire and brimstone, pulpit posts embracing grace and redemption, living rooms talking birth and resurrection. For most, evangelism is as mysterious as these ambiguous phrases that describe it. But does it have to be? I think one reason why so many people shy away from evangelism is the fear of being judged, rejected, or labeled. If one thinks all they have to do is tell people the story of Christ and move on, then their fears might be legitimate. The Greenhouse Experiment was a journey that opened my eyes to what evangelism truly is, a mystical power that is in fact a dance between prayer, love, and invitation, all interwoven to share the gospel of Christ from our hearts. Of these keys that we explored, prayer drove it home for me. I’ve struggled with prayer; not being able to perceive the being on the other side of my words. But the Greenhouse Experiment showed me evangelism isn’t just what you say, but what you feel and how you act. How can we share our faith if we don’t first love with the same passion Jesus had. Prayer is that avenue. Prayer isn’t just about oneself, but a way of growing oneself in Christ and leading our mind into a new way of thinking and viewing people; all to better share our faith.

- Ben Trout (college student)

# Greenhouse Experiment

Quite frankly, I had few expectations when Greenhouse started. But, God met me in such remarkable and unexpected ways; I was deeply changed by what God did in me. I see evangelism so differently now: Less an obligation and more an undeserved privilege. I don't see people as projects; rather, I have this desire that people would come to know the joy and the truth of Jesus. I have much to learn, but Brian is a gifted, willing and kind teacher. He does not see people as projects, but as opportunities to share the unconditional love, healing and mercy of Jesus. I so hope that the Greenhouse experiment continues. I believe it is a vital and truth giving opportunity to connect with Jesus and to let others know about Jesus.

- Tom French (District Court Judge)

I have been so encouraged by the Greenhouse Experiment. I've been longing for Council Tree to do something like this for many years. During the six months of the experiment I had opportunity to pray and care for many and share Jesus with a few. I was led by the Holy Spirit to the point of weeping often for a friend that didn't have a relationship with Jesus. My heart was captivated by God's compassion for her. She was going through a very difficult family struggle, blaming others, but not seeing her own sin. Through much conversation, prayer, care, and sharing about Jesus, she finally came to a point of realizing the hardness that was within her. She recognized this wasn't something she could fix on her own. The door is opening for Christ to walk through and heal. She sees her need. She is so close to receiving Christ as Lord and Savior. Please join me in prayer! Thank you.

- Chizu Deeny (Japanese Outreach)

I have wonderful people in my life that I love who do not yet believe in Jesus. Some of them are angry and some are simply indifferent, seeing "religion" as irrelevant. The Greenhouse Experiment has helped me to take some steps forward in knowing what I can do. **Part 1** Commit to pray, believing that only the Holy Spirit can open someone's heart to Jesus. I picked six people that I have been close to for a long time to regularly pray for. Two of them are the angry ones and four of them are the indifferent ones. I have also prayed for some others that were part of the Greenhouse Experiment. **Part 2** Care, showing the love of Jesus in real ways. I have had opportunities to do this with each of these six. In some cases, it was my acceptance of who they were through a letter or a conversation. In some cases, it was through being available and spending time together. One time it was simply by listening. **Part 3** Share Jesus. I read two books that the Greenhouse Experiment had recommended and one of them has changed how I approach "evangelism." Instead of pushing and proving Christianity, I simply try to bring Jesus into conversations to show how he is good. Then I go back to parts 1 and 2, asking for opportunities to care and share. The Greenhouse Experiment also suggested we think about how Jesus has been good to us so that we can share this. As I thought about it, I could see how good Jesus has been in my life and I wrote some things down that I shared with four of my six, plus a number of others. This opened up some wonderful conversations, one of which was with one of my angry six (he is actually a very nice person). I also experienced rejection and no response at all. I have yet to share with two of my six since the Greenhouse Experiment started. Even though the first round of the Greenhouse Experiment has ended, I feel that our experiment is still on. Experiments can be messy and this is no exception. I am naturally timid with my own set of doubts and difficulties and I need encouragement from our church and the Holy Spirit to both help me and to do what I am not able to do on my own. So the conclusion is still out - what will happen as we seek to follow the Holy Spirit together?

Dear Lord - I love you and believe you are working in me, your church, and in this world. Help us at Council Tree, a people that you love dearly, to be bold and united in seeking to follow your Spirit. I ask for the hearts of each of those we are praying for, in Jesus name. Amen.

- Jack Ellis (Engineer)

The Greenhouse Experiment made me more aware of ways God could use me to share about him. It taught me about the intentionality of prayer for my friends and neighbors: to pray for wisdom and opportunity. Greenhouse encouraged me through the stories of the group, and gave me tools to be a witness for Christ (discussions and the J John videos were very impactful). I look forward to more times of sharing, praying and encouraging.

- Lenore Fable (Elite Teacher Supply)



# Greenhouse Experiment

I loved attending one of the Greenhouse Experiment meetings before I left for a Navigator's summer evangelism training program in Florida. I expressed my encouragement to the group how excited I was to see Council Tree people interested in helping others discover a life-saving relationship with Jesus. In Florida, I worked Monday through Friday in a factory, packaging and de-packaging thousands of purses. In this factory I was stationed at a table with three other people. One of the three people was a single mother who picked a fight with anyone who so much as glanced at her. Listening to her harrowing stories of drunken brawls and tales of a shady high school career were by far the most interesting parts of the day. Occasionally, our conversations reverted to some of the verbal abuse she suffered. I wish I could say I explained perfectly the grace and love of God and that she accepted Christ as her savior, but that was not the case. As the summer progressed, she arrived to work later and later, until she never came at all. I beat myself up regularly for "wasting time" listening to her, as though it was on my shoulders that she did not accept Christ. I often look back and wonder, "What could I have done differently? Did I not pray hard enough?"

Then I thought about one of the supervisors at my work. We talked to him off and on about why we were in Florida. I asked him what kind of church he grew up in and he explained that he considered himself a non-practicing catholic. I asked him where he thought he might go when he dies. We discussed life after death and how it is impossible to earn it. The thought of this disturbed him. A couple of my friends shared with him about their relationship with God and he genuinely seemed interested. We then shared Christ's plan with a couple other people at work. One day, those people shared with my supervisor. He was appreciative. Over time, after many questions and conversations, he accepted Christ as his savior. Throughout the whole process there was much prayer for him and for the others we were sharing with. The lesson: Pray and be faithful. Plant the seed and hope for fertile receptive soil, recognizing that not everyone will be open at any given moment to the love of Christ. But some are!

- Kyla Bruxvoort (College Student)

The Greenhouse experiment helped me be more aware of opportunities for evangelism. As a group we watched a video series featuring J. John from England. His simple plan for evangelism is to Pray, Care, Share and Invite. He made the point that not everyone would be at a place now where they would benefit from an invitation to accept Jesus, but most people would benefit from our praying, caring and sharing.

We traveled for 20 days in South Africa with a group of 18 people and we had the opportunity to practice all four parts of the plan. We prayed daily for all people and were able to show God's love by caring for them in different ways. We also had several opportunities to share our story with some. Connie gave a copy of the New Testament to one young woman who seemed to be very open. At the end of the trip she told Connie she was filled with joy each time she read it.

- Brian Trout (Management Analyst and CSU Professor)

Along with many at Council Tree, I signed up for the Greenhouse journey several months ago. Brian Fable's passion and commitment to sharing the gospel is contagious, so it was easy to start with much enthusiasm and even a new found commitment to be intentional about praying, caring and sharing for those around me. I attended a few of the larger gatherings and was so inspired by other's experiences of sharing Christ.

As I began to pray specifically for nearby neighbors, opportunities began to present themselves! I had some excellent conversations with two neighbors in the weeks to follow and we are now friends. This is no small matter for these women. Christ gave me the grace to live out one of Bert's sermons by loving them as God would love them, not treating them simply as "projects." Even thinking of these friends in this moment further encourages me to carve out space to be in meaningful relationship with them, moving beyond the casual "maybe I'll see you on a walk sometime."

Just this week, Tom and I had the privilege to pray with a man who came to our house to fix our washing machine. He and his wife just lost their only son, age 22, last month. Through tears and prayers we were blessed to share in his burden and grief. I believe his vulnerability and the power of Jesus at work in all three of us brought a little heaven to earth. I also invited him to our church as he and his wife aren't committed anywhere currently. Thank you, Tom, for initiating caring thoughtful prayer right then and there!

And thank you, Brian Fable, for your perseverance, leadership and contagious enthusiasm! I don't think I'm the only one who is encouraged and emboldened by you to trust God to "move mountains." God has certainly moved the mountain of my heart, and I really do believe he wants to do the same for all his children everywhere!

- Lori Austin (Encourager, Neighbor and Friend)

