

Hope and A Home Staff: On Hope and A Home

Seekers Church: A Christian Community

In the Tradition of the Church of the Saviour

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On Hope and A Home

Grace Dickerson (Educational Advocate)

We want to look at the temptations of Jesus and Adam and Eve, not from the prospective of the temptations to those individuals, but rather as a reflection on their commonality to all human kind. We will see how temptations come to us through the body, mind and soul. We will also talk about how they relate to those of us in Hope and A Home and in social services in general. We don't believe that the stories are about one person passing the test of temptation and others failing. We think the stories are about the temptation process that is common to all of us. The different responses of Adam and Eve and Jesus to the temptation are helpful to us in making our decisions.

In the Jesus' first temptation to turn stones into bread we find a temptation to satisfy the physical needs (the Body) – not unlike Adam and Eve's observation that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was "good for food". Now that doesn't make sense for those of us in the social services, because isn't that what we are about – satisfying the physical needs of people? We give folks food, clothing, housing, services and more services. I'm not saying that this is not important. Certainly Jesus went about feeding, healing, etc. but that was not the end goal. Jesus said to Satan that we

couldn't live by bread alone and called attention to the spiritual – the living soul-bread.

I relate to that temptation as the Educational Advocate at Hope and A Home. Our vision for the educational component of Hope and A Home is use education to help people find their dreams of meaningful employment, and to have their children be in appropriate educational settings as a way of preparing them not only for graduation from high school, but to go on to post secondary education. In my work, I help people get appropriate service for their children with special needs, help people get their children in private schools or other richer educational settings, help kids and adults go to college or get into job training programs, etc. Many times my temptation is to do things for parents – hand them the bread after I've made it, rather than helping them to reach down in their soul to develop the skills necessary to be the kind of advocate they need to be for themselves.

Several months ago, I had the opportunity to help a child get into a private school. I made the great connections with the school, gave up my Sunday afternoon to take the kid to the open house, got the paperwork, etc. It was such good bread I had made. I was surprised and dismayed that the parent became less and less interested in this process, and finally decided that her child would go to the local HS, which in my mind was one of the worst in the city. I was devastated. I turned to one of my "counselors" on staff, and her advice was for me to simply leave a message on the parent's answering machine, basically telling her that whatever her decision, it was fine with me, and I was available if she would ever need me again. It was really hard for me to let go, but that is what I needed to do. You can imagine that I was surprised this week when the parent called me and asked for my help to get her son into one of the most challenging academic public high schools. I was humbled by the call and realized that this process was no longer mine anymore, but hers. I realized what her goals were

all the time—to have her son take responsibility for his life. This process had a deeper spiritual significance—deeper than my bread. God calls us all to be building something of the soul, rather than just providing the immediate need of individuals.

Mary Jo Schumacher

I am Mary Jo Schumacher, family worker along with Paulette Jeffries. I will speak to the second and third temptation that Grace related from the scriptures. The second temptation of falling down from the pinnacle of the temple was a temptation to be about hero actions, spectacular feats—a temptation of the mind. This temptation is an alluring one for me in my work with families. We are tempted to look at our work and say how successful we are. It is important to us to feel that WE have made the difference. This family has done great things because of what I did and provided for the family.

I work with a family that is about to graduate from our program. During their first 1 1/2 years in Hope and A Home there was little motivation. In our weekly visits I would struggle to keep up the hope of ever seeing progress. Then a crisis threatened their relationship and one of them left the family for a while. Out of that crisis they made the choice to live their lives differently. There was a dramatic turnaround in this couple's lives. They are now both fully employed in careers that have a future. They are about to own a home. It was a temptation to shout about this one for our own glory—look what Hope and A Home did. I reflected on this. What did I really do? It was this couple's inner transformation that was the key. It was their choices that turned their lives around. Hope and A Home can set the stage for families to succeed. We are here to nurture, encourage, and hold families accountable, but our real mission is not about doing wonderful displays of great work, but rather in doing our work in such a way that it is not about us; it is not obvious that we had much to do with

it.

The third temptation was a temptation of the soul-to-be like God. Again, it is a temptation that we face – to believe that WE have the answers. We run this show. It is easy to slip into this. I get an idea about what direction a family should go. I think that I know what a family is capable of and what would be best for them.

A mother that I work with came to our program from a shelter. She seemed to have some limitations that bound her. My temptations to have all the answers turned to actions and I began to develop ideas about what I thought would be best for her. I began to plot out what I thought that she needed. Then slowly I began to realize that she was teaching me. When I began to listen to what she had been trying to tell me all along, I saw that she was capable of doing do so much more than I ever thought she could. My vision wasn't hers. I wanted to rescue her, but she wanted much more for herself than that and she has gone about accomplishing this by getting meaningful work and advocating for herself and her children.

I believe that this transformation, of families as well as of myself, can come about in the context of relationship. It builds something of the soul. At H&H we value relationships. If we truly listen to others we can hear and better understand what a families' vision is for themselves.

Another place that this has happened is within the Mission Group experience. To highlight one situation, Mary Carol, a Mission Group member and Seekers member, and Joyce Freeman, a graduate of Hope and A Home have been connecting for many years. It is in the context of their relationship that there has been giving and receiving. Joyce's family, as many of you know, has been devastated by illness. There are many obvious needs and the temptation is to do everything for her, to think that we always know what is best for her, but Joyce reminds us that it is not all one way. There has been openness about

race; she states what she will and will not do, and genuine gifts giving on both parts. This can happen because of their relationship. There is a deeper meaning found in Hope and A Home when we get beyond the **we** have the answers to the being **with** each other.

These 3 temptations found in the scriptures, the body, mind, and soul, are not just the temptations of Jesus. They are common to us all in our human experience. We have a lot of good ideas of how to address this or that need that we see, but Jesus modeled for us how to focus on the deeper questions-the deeper issues that brings us back to the words of our creation-and "man/woman became a living soul.

Mike Young

Good morning. My name is Mike Young, and I am the Program Director of Hope and A Home.

When we are told that "We can not live by bread alone", I take this to mean, among other things, that we are to look for our nourishment in all of God's creation. We are to be open to all that feeds us, and discover our connectedness to one another and the world around us.

In Seekers language, we are to journey inward and outward.

Now, the words "inward journey" and "outward journey" resonate deeply in me. They resonate, in part, because I enjoy traveling. And because I like to travel, I'd like to tell you a travel story. About 20 years ago, I was driving up the coast of California with several friends, and as we looked out the window, we saw a wall built out of poles about 12 feet tall and spaced about 10 yards apart, and stretched between the poles was a shining white parachute-like fabric.

This thing went on and on for miles, running along the highway, dipping into gullies, across farms, through a town, eventually crossing the road and running into the ocean. It

was wonderful. It was fascinating. We didn't know what it was.

Years later I learned that this "Running Fence" had been created by an artist named Christo, and I had a chance to hear him discuss his work. He spoke about how he developed the idea for his fence, his work being in the tradition of landscape artists, and so forth. But what was really evident was his love of the effort that it took to build fence; town meetings to get construction permits, cooperation from ranchers who wanted to be certain their livestock could get to their feed, approval from the highway department, and organizing hundreds of volunteers to build the fence and tear it down a few days later.

The effort, Christo said, was art.

Years later, I joined the Hope and A Home Mission Group. 15 years later I'm still a member of the Mission Group, and I would suggest that our work at Hope and A Home is art work. It is the art and work of creating something new, of organizing volunteers to renovate affordable apartments, of holding town meetings (we call them family workshops), of bringing together the families in our housing, our Mission Group volunteers and our staff – haves and have nots, blacks, Latinos, and whites – to struggle together, to deal with the temptations Mary Jo and Grace have described and to build relationships and a community based on respect, trust, and mutuality. This work is about creating a wholeness and an abundance, in each of us and in each other. It's art work. And there is lots of work to do.

Today, there are around 900 families who are homeless in Washington. Last night, like all nights when the temperature drops below freezing, several government office buildings were opened to let in those on the street. Thousands of others are living in bad housing. And there is welfare reform, cuts in benefits, and the elimination of local rent subsidies.

There is work to do. But our experience at Hope and A Home

teaches us that it is possible for families to overcome great odds and succeed. Despite failures – our own failures and the failures of the families in our program – 36 of the 41 families who left Hope and A Home in the past 5 years have moved to permanent housing. And despite a drop-out rate of over 40% in the D.C. Public schools, our Hope and A Home children are staying in school and succeeding.

Last year, 200 families used the resources and programs in this city to move from homelessness to permanent housing.

So we keep at our work, inspired by the achievements of the parents and children in our program, and by the times when we feel most connected to one another.

When I first started working at Hope and A Home, Kathrene Lawson was living with her children in one of our apartments. She was a member of our Mission Group, and she had the chance to buy a home. I had the chance to work with her to renovate her house. Previously, I'd worked in a cabinet shop, building reproductions of 18th century furniture, working to tolerances of 1/64th of an inch. So when I started on Kathrene's place, the woodwork and trim were perfect. Closet doors were hung precisely. Molding cut just right.

One day Kathrene started painting and began slopping her paintbrush around, getting paint all over the floor. I tried to be polite. I said, Kathrene, why don't you paint a little more carefully, or use masking tape. But she said it didn't matter, when the paint dried, she'd scrape it off the floor. I was not happy about this. All my good work was now a mess. But then I remember thinking as I watched her paint, this is not a reproduction of old furniture, and it's not mine; it is Kathrene's home, and she is painting it. And that's what was important.

And for years, when I visited her, I'd see the paint on her floor and be reminded of the lesson I'd learned from her.

I feel connected to Kathrene's life and her journey, and her journey is a part of mine.

In a similar way, we at Hope and A Home feel our connection to you, Seekers. We are an expression of this church and each of you: the generous financial commitment you make, and the incredible commitment of those of you who are Hope and A Home volunteers. And I want to thank all of you for enriching our lives and the lives of the Hope and A Home families.

Our lives are wonderfully connected, and this connectedness offers such rich and creative possibilities. Thankfully, God offers us this connectedness, and it is much more than bread alone.

When we feel the connection between us, we are nourished, and we can face the temptations of mind, body, and soul, and we can choose the journey that is right for each of us, and for all of us. In this spirit, I'd like to ask you to turn to the Hope and A Home Creed in your bulletin and read along together with the Hope and Home Mission Group. We recite this Creed at each of our family workshops:

The Hope and A Home Creed

We come together to celebrate ourselves, our families, our community, and our relationship to the God of our understanding.

We commit ourselves to:

*good homes for our families,
good health and education for our children, and
good management of our money toward a secure future.*

We will build on our strengths, ask for help when we need it, and offer aid to others when we can.

We know that life can be difficult as well as joyous. We are

here to learn from each other, to encourage each other, and to create a brighter future for us all.

To these ideals we commit ourselves.

*– Written and adopted in 1992 by the Hope and A Home families
and Mission Group*