

Lee Grady: How I Found Real, Book of Acts Community in Puerto Rico

In 2013, I preached for several days at Casa del Padre—The Father’s House—a small but growing church in Trujillo Alto, Puerto Rico. The congregation was meeting in a simple rented facility with tile floors and folding chairs.

They don’t have a worship leader yet, so a CD player provided accompaniment for the singing. The pastor, a gentle guy named Luis Roig, worked a second job as a fireman to pay his family’s bills. At that time, the church’s office was in his garage.

Despite the simplicity of Casa del Padre, an amazing level of love overshadowed the church’s lack of sophistication. When I ministered on Sunday morning, the meeting began at 10:30 a.m., yet I didn’t leave the building until 5:00 p.m.—not because I preached too long but because nobody wanted to go home. After the meeting, we enjoyed a lunch that lasted three hours.

You might be tempted to say: “That’s just the way Puerto Ricans are. They’re very relational.” It’s certainly true that Puerto Ricans love to party. And their food—especially the rice, beans, pork and *mofongo* (mashed plantains)—keep people coming back for more. But the authentic fellowship I experienced in Trujillo Alto can’t be trivialized as an expression of Latino culture. No, this Puerto Rican church understands a biblical secret many of us have forgotten.

The book of Acts tells us that after the first disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were “continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

Christianity is the only religion on earth that invisibly connects its followers through supernatural affection. It makes us feel like a family—and our love for each other, if it is truly from the Spirit, transcends all boundaries of race, gender, age and class. It motivates us to pray for one another, bear one another's burdens and lay our lives down for one another.

With all of our modern sophistication, we've forgotten about the essential need for genuine fellowship. We've tried to build the church without it. We developed a sterile church model that is event-driven and celebrity focused rather than warmly relational.

We build theater-style buildings where crowds listen to one guy talk. The crowds are quickly whisked out of the sanctuary to make room for the next group. Many of these people never process with anyone else what they learned, never join a small group, and never receive any form of one-on-one discipleship. And then many Christians complain that they feel lonely, even in a crowd at their own church.

Because we lack relationships today, we have tried to fill the void with technology. We think if we can create a wow factor with cool video clips, 3D sermons, edgy worship bands, and smoke machines, the crowds will scream for more. I don't think so. Trendy can quickly become shallow.

We have a relationship crisis today. Pastors and Christian leaders often tell me that they don't have any friends. Close friendships are becoming rare. This is often because we were betrayed in a previous relationship, so we close our hearts and crawl into our protective shells. Many Christians have given up on church altogether—not because of doctrinal issues but because they were wounded by someone at church.

We will have to scrap artificial, event-driven programs if we want to return to the relational Christianity of the book of

Acts. {eoa}

The preceding is an excerpt from chapter 3 of Lee Grady's book, Follow Me (Charisma House 2022). For more information, or to order the book, please visit .

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