

Chris Husbands

Screen Printer in Kansas City, Kansas

Interview by Chhaya Kolavalli at Broadway Roasting Café in Kansas City, KS

June 12th, 2014

Original recorded interview length: 1:24:04

Transcribed by Chhaya Kolavalli

Note: Interview questions are written in bold, respondent's answers are in regular font.

Abstract: Chris Husbands, a 24-year old Kansas City resident, discusses his 7-years of experience living in various Christian intentional communities and group homes, both within and outside of Kansas. This interview focuses on the social justice goals, sustainable practices, and evangelizing aspects of Christian intentional community. Husbands discusses the merits of various historical kinds of Christian aid, and analyzes the kinds of social justice projects which intentional communities commonly engage in.

Can you give me some background information – your name, age, date of birth, place of birth, etc.?

I'm Christopher Husbands, I was born in [REDACTED], my birthday is [REDACTED], I'm 24.

Where'd you go to school?

I went to high school in Bradenton Florida, South Florida. After high school I did essentially various internships and apprenticeships as a part of a church organization school—that didn't go very well, so I ended up leaving that. And then I started an organic farm with a group of people in Vermont, probably around 2012, 2011. Moved back to Kansas City, built a school bus that ran off of waste vegetable oil, travelled the Northwest for 6 months. Ended up in Portland, can't get a job like everyone else in Portland, came back to Kansas City and worked on the Urban Farming Guys' nonprofit. And now I'm a screen printer.

What faith tradition were you raised in?

Protestant Christianity would probably be the easiest explanation.

Was your family very devout?

Nope. Not at all.

Then what brought you to your current faith tradition and how would you describe it?

Well I am currently newly baptized into the Eastern Orthodox Church. I came to that conclusion through appreciating Christianity and its teachings but not liking a lot of the more modern things that I saw. So I started looking at the church history, the original function, form, of the early church, and found that the most accurate depiction—to me—that I could find, that I agreed with, was the Eastern Orthodox Church. I go to St. Mary's of Egypt, that's off 31st and Troost, they have a soup kitchen. They do all that stuff. Bunch of homeless dudes sitting in on church services. Sleepin', snoring—real funny, real nice dudes.

Have you lived in a Christian Intentional Community before?

Yes. You could technically argue that I have since I was 18. In one form or another, some more intentional than others. But, since I left my parent's house in Florida and moved to Kansas City I've lived in various group homes. Always with groups of dudes, going for the same basic thing—simple living, liking agriculture, liking working with their hands, building things, making stuff. So for about 7 years now.

Could you elaborate more on what makes that a personally fulfilling arrangement?

Yeah—obviously, living with like-minded people is beneficial for sanity. So usually you try to find a few people that you're alike in some degrees. Most of us have similar ideas of Christianity, which is one of the most beneficial things about Christians living in group settings. I'm Greek Orthodox—everybody else is varying degrees of Protestants, some are attending mega-churches, Anglicans at times, Catholics. So you all get to learn from each other and grow. You get to know different points of view and the practicality of them, and actually see different view points as people, and not just thought processes. You actually see how certain thought processes propel people in their daily life which is really interesting. That's probably my favorite thing that I've learned—just getting and being able to see other people's point of view. You can't really agree with any of it some days, but at the end of the day you can see whether or not it's beneficial. It makes you grow, and it makes you think. I guess that would be the main thing. And then if you're all into agriculture, it's helpful when someone else is digging in the soil with you, and weeding the garden too. Cus' when you're doing it yourself its hard.

So what is the purpose of living intentionally?

That's tricky.

Well, what might you think it adds to the practice of being Christian?

Well I think it's absolutely—an absolute necessity. Because people can't get wrapped up in their own thought processes, their own ideas. There's no delusion. A lot of Christianity is delusions of grandeur, that people think they're going to be this wonderful thing, that they're going to be as revolutionary as some of the other big

names. But when you're in intentional community, you kind of just realize your personal shittiness, and start to work towards repairing that and fixing it. You learn how to be a good human.

The first part of Christianity that people—that I neglected—for a very long time, is that you need to be a good human first and foremost. If Christianity is true, and if we are created by a creator, he wants us to be fully human. He wants us to be in touch with our personalities, and our emotions, and conflict, and conflict resolution, and all those things. So living in intentional community forces your hand at having to deal with these things, and dealing with pain and suffering of other people, and love and loss, and the joy and the mundaneness. You can't just slip into a social media coma, like this weird passive thing—you're always there, someone is always there. You're always talking to them. You kind of just get used to living life with people so you're not isolated. Which is one of the biggest problems in most people's thought processes, because isolation just makes you mind-fucked. It's just terrible. So, doubly so with religion.

So to have a group of Christians living together in intentional community, they don't necessarily all have to be from the same denomination or have the same exact beliefs?

Yeah, I would actually advise against it, personally. I just think that's cultural inbreeding. That's what we always called it at our house. Cuz' every couple of months we'd all start hating each other and we wouldn't know why. We'd be like "Man we all love each other, but man we're tired of looking at each other!" And someone would just be like raising their hand and saying "I do believe we have a case of cultural inbreeding, where we all do the exact same things and are becoming the exact same people." And we'd all go out and do different things and come back and enjoy each other's company again. But you can't—I don't wanna live with me, like 8 me's. That's terrible. A lot of people might not see it that way, but I like conflict, I like people I disagree with. In a safe environment, people who are actually willing to work towards stuff...that's why I prefer different denominations, different groups of people. It stretches you and makes you think.

So I remember you telling me about Shane Claiborne and New Monasticism last year. And then I read his "Irresistible Revolution"...why do you think Shane Claiborne has been so influential? Because like literally, every community that I looked up online in Kansas said "we're inspired by the idea of a New Monasticism."

It's a tricky word. I think the thing about Shane Claiborne—I guess with American Christianity...he has like one quote, that he puts in one of his documentaries called "Ordinary Radicals," really good documentary—it's about his book tour, and it's just him talking with a bunch of people, bunch of groups. But I think the big deal with him—one of the best quotes from that movie, and I don't know if it was actually him, but the guy goes "We're a generation of people who were raised in the church,

getting yelled at by everybody in the church to just shut up and read our bibles. And the problem is we did, and realized there was a huge disconnect between what was biblically written and what wasn't, like what was being done—the form and the function and the politics and all that was counterproductive comparative to the actual writings that we got a hold of.” And so that kind of encapsulates the—I think the big thing is, we grew up in churches always asking for money, always asking for tithe, and seeing people do these things and then pat themselves on the back, when they do a soup drive once a day, but they're building crazy atriums for like hundreds and thousands of dollars that help literally nobody, it has no structural reason. I mean, there's arguments for that, but yeah—I think the big deal was that we were all sick of the Christianity that we were shown before, but we weren't willing to give up on it.

So finally—we were like, we need to rethink these things. Those are archaic thought processes that we need to modernize without watering things down. We can actually see things. And you put it in a perspective by sharing large amounts of stories and being able to say, from within the church, this is wrong, this isn't right, we've gotten far off the point, but there's still hope, and it's us. He as a person isn't that extraordinary, but with his writings and the things that he's done, he's become a face where he can straight up say the thing everybody's been thinking. He puts it very kindly, very graciously, very specifically. And he pushes the envelope without being an ass. Like, I could never do that because I'm a dick. And so like if you gave me a microphone I would have ranted for long periods of time, years ago. But reading things from him lets you be a little more gracious in saying different things. And he worked with Mother Theresa, that's a pretty good resume. So. You have the experiences, he's done it, he walks it, and he comes from a place where he can say something and it's worth listening to, because he actually does it. And so that's the big thing too.

We have a lot of people always telling us to do all these things that weren't living this life—so he advocates living simple, and living poor on purpose. Not like destitute, but living simply so that he could be extravagant toward other people. And so that was the big thing, which I've always loved that. I've always wanted to live simple. Like, growing up and seeing my family struggle for money to raise up in social classes that ends with a Dad who's fifty and can't breathe. A mom who's frustrated because it didn't work out for her in the workforce for like twenty-five years, and then they produced me who's not going along with the plan, and so it's like this big ole' cluster of a situation. I had a lot of case studies in looking at those things. It's the concept that we don't need a lot. That people are important, that Christianity has completely missed that for a long period of time. That's a broad statement, obviously, there's factions and there's always been individuals. But we all should be doing much better. That was what he was good at.

I can definitely understand how he's so mobilizing. He's a great speaker, and you're right, he doesn't condemn you for any consumerism you may have engaged in in the past.

He doesn't take pop shots, there's no political agenda. He doesn't answer to anyone above him, which has screwed him over—given him good and bad feedback. But he's willing to take that position. That's kind of the thing—he doesn't have a horse in the race kind of deal, he's not trying to finagle people into either direction, he's dead set in the middle. And he's able to bridge the two groups of people and have an actual conversation, which is extremely difficult.

I was confused about – it seems like much of New Monasticism is so apolitical, yet at the same time it's very engaged. So that was confusing to me, but I read this one Shane Claiborne quote – “We wanna create a world where socialism isn't necessary and capitalism isn't possible.” So like, creating a world where people want to give to others. So is it like a conscious pulling out of political systems in the hopes that like people can provide for each other on their own?

I think that's the major trick of it. Because to pull yourself completely out of the politics is to no longer choose a platform. And you're missing large portions of people who need to hear it just as much as anybody else. I dunno, it's kind of tricky. I have a problem with politics. I hate it. I don't like how things go. Everybody screws up, everybody does good. There's good and there's bad in everything. But his crew of people would consider themselves Christian anarchists, which instead of “No gods, no country,” it's “One god, one country.” I've been to a couple ones. In Denver there's a Catholic Worker Mission House. And it's an illegal halfway house, and she's an anarchist nun—the old lady who runs it. She's funny. It's super brutal but she does so much work. Her whole life she's been giving back. But she's anti-politics too. The thing is—there's always the balance between working outside the system, and working within the system, and trying to figure out how it works. I personally work outside of the system. But I'm just me, I don't do anything crazy. I like homeless people, so I hang out with them, I feed them. I'm not like outside of the system technically, I don't do protests. I just don't. I don't really get it. I mean it looks like a lot of fun.

I don't either. Never seems like there's any tangible result.

Every so often you need to have a huge protest where people show up. But I don't know, that's the thing—if you're completely outside of the system, and the politics change to try to fuck you, you're screwed, because nobody will listen. You're just some dude on the street. Like right now, Kansas City is trying to pass an act to make it illegal to feed people—like homeless people. I haven't really read into it, it's just like all over the articles now. That's the thing, where you need some dudes into politics—the mayor does a lot of stuff with the revitalization of Troost. He's kind of my neighbor, the mayor. So bunch of shady stuff happens but he's actually working towards it and giving lots of money into our area, not to gentrify it but to save houses, so the people who live there can remain, which is totally ideal. He does a lot of good work. St. Mary's of Egypt, the church I go to, they're located above a soup kitchen. They started out as a protestant church soup kitchen, they converted the

whole church over to Orthodoxy, lost half the members. A couple of ladies became nuns. So that's kind of where we got nuns—most churches don't got nuns, but we got nuns. They're really freaking funny—their whole thing is bridging the gap between all races. They started a free internet café in the soup kitchen area, so that people that don't have computers and don't have access can use the computers to stay in touch with family and friends, to use email so they can actually get jobs. So they're giving themselves internet situations so they can actually get out of that process. So St. Mary's does that—it's the village mentality, that's what they call it, so that's how they get around the politics. They work with the politicians, but it's kind of like a give and take, too. But because they work with the politicians they receive a large sum of money, because they provide services. Basically to be helped by St. Mary's, everybody else has to turn you down. When everyone else says no, they go to St. Mary's. Like if you show up and you're homeless and it's your first time in town you go to St. Mary's and they'll send you everywhere else. So when everyone else says no, you come back to St. Mary's. It's called reconciliation services, and the Priest—his wife actually passed away, a little over a year ago—so now he's in Greece becoming a monk, like a priest monk. Which is pretty cool. But he's doing that right now, but when he comes back he's gonna start a monastery and work way more full-force to get things done, like actually building a church that isn't decrepit or falling apart, and revitalizing the whole situation. Just being present, just being there – he would always preach village mentality, that was this big analogy kind of thing, which is if you go to church they want you to live there, they want you to live within walking distance. They want everybody to be there, to be a part of community from the inside, and not just outsiders trying to work in. So now when you talk about problems that are going on around the church—they're my problems. When you talk about shootings, well that shooting was on my street. Some crazy shit is happening, and it's my neighbors. So that's his whole deal—the village mentality in which everyone helps each other and takes care of each other and stuff.

Also community gardens—I'm working on getting one set up at the Priests house, our Priests house, and he's setting up a garden on a lot next to his house. So we're working on getting some chickens and rabbits up in there too. So the hope is for him to be able to do those things, and then get help from the neighbors. Which I feel like's the biggest issue, is jumping from sustaining yourself to actually helping others. A lot of people grow food in urban settings and then they think that that was like them being urban gardeners, they think that's helping, but it needs to go much further than that. You need to have other people working on things. Not a bunch of shit-head dudes that look like me—I have a job, I don't need to do that. If I was growing a garden I'd like to eat from it, but I'd prefer the food to go to someone who cares. That's a whole 'nother situation—encouraging nutrition and teaching people how to use those things. Because our society doesn't know how to use food. Like we get packaged things and use microwaves, and add this and boil that...but. But even when we do these things it doesn't get you to a really good place. Like, soup kitchens make the most sense with that kind of structure, cus' you're actually cooking the product that you're growing to give to people. So, the situation is just way more complex.

Like if a mom is working two jobs and has kids, she doesn't necessarily have time to go pick her own okra. Community gardening is a great model, but...

It's got potential but there needs to be more handholding. Cus' I've been growing things and doing agriculture related things since I was a freshman in high school—still don't know how to grow things. Like, people still ask me for advice and I'm like "I don't know man, just put it in the ground." "What's it look like now?" "It's a little yellow," "Okay, you need to add some things to it. This is a trial and error kind of thing!" I mean the biggest problem with the urban lots—they don't have water. You can do this thing where you buy this pump, and you hook it up to a fire hydrant but it's a 1,500 dollar deposit. 1,500 dollars. That is more money than any car I've ever personally bought. And it's a deposit, and people know how valuable they are, and it's just chillin' on a fire hydrant. I don't know about that!

So that's a major structural problem, if you can't even get water into urban areas, how are you supposed to encourage people to garden...?

And then you build a catchment system and you piss off the city. I mean, I get a new citation from the freakin' city every couple of days, because there's a pallet up against the house...once there was a tree limb in my backyard, and they saw it, and I got a citation. I get so many citations I can't even have anything in my house. I'm down to rabbits, it's all I can do because neighbors won't complain, they won't see it even though it's happening. I went to go buy chickens, I got a coop built and everything ready to go, and then we got a series of like three more citations. I was like, "Well, you know, I kinda don't feel like fighting. I don't like eggs that much. I'll just stick with whatever I'm doing!"

So that's the other issue too. And a lot of times what communities think they're doing is this great thing, moving out in the middle of nowhere and then not doing anything. They talk about all these great things they're doing—most of 'em use the bullshit "power of prayer" excuse. "Well we're praying,"—well I think that's ludicrous. I think prayer has a lot more to do with us, personally, than it does with other people. Obviously the spiritual aspect I totally believe, I've seen some weird shit happen when you pray for things, like I think that's awesome. But one without the other is useless. I mean, like the book of James. Super offensive book, says all the things we do wrong. It's only a couple of pages, makes everyone angry. Every time someone rewrites the bible they try to delete it. Freakin' Martin Luther tried to throw it away.

You made me think about another question that's not on here, but in reading about modern intentional communities online, for a lot of them racial reconciliation is one of their objectives. So have you, in your experiences being with intentional communities—has this been a goal?

Granted, I am a white suburban-raised male who was privileged so anything I say can be taken as bullshit. I feel like that is an issue, but talking about it all the time perpetuates the issue. Because you talk about us versus them, and how it shouldn't be that, you're just reinforcing the us versus them mentality. But on my block, I'm the only white guy. There's my entire block, all the way around it, and even the other side—there's a little old black lady that lives across the street, she's been there since the 60s, she owns the house next to me, she's wonderful, her boys come and mow the lawn and we hang out, we drink beer, sit and talk. There's like a Mexican family across the street that's really freakin' great, there's all these kids riding around on bicycles all day chasing dogs. Their dad comes over and steals cigarettes when the kids aren't looking. There's another dude in the abandoned house next to me—but I never remember sitting there and being like, "Man we're reconciling races!" I don't get it. People are people, and I mean, coming from my point of view that's easier for me to say and I totally understand that. And to be fairly honest our neighbors did not like us for 9 or 10 months until they saw that, even though it's a rental, we work on the house constantly to make it look good—because that's affecting their house value. And we hate our landlord, our house is falling apart—when it snows, it snows on the inside through our windows, we didn't have heat for most of the winter but we take care of things. We wanted our neighbors to like us. Now that wasn't a racial reconciliation thing—that was a people thing. I don't want to be a shitty neighbor because there's a bunch of punk houses in our neighborhood—they buy 'em for two grand and keep 'em intentionally shitty. They have an outhouse kind of thing, that's what they do, I guess to each his own. But you're destroying the value of the neighborhood. You've gotta hold your own, you've gotta be there and you've gotta be nice and you've gotta do things for your neighbors and you've gotta take care of them.

I think the race thing is important, it is there, but it's there more of a broad-spectrum thing, whereas me, personally, I've always had friends of all different races. I've never had a problem with that, I have a propensity to date Hispanic women. I was raised in Florida so that probably has something to do with it, but I just don't think about those things—at least not consciously. Subconsciously I'm sure I'll catch myself now and then being weird. I mean, I feel safer in my neighborhood than I would in the suburbs. I get hassled more in Florida in a gated community when I walk around at night—barefoot and in shorts—like, obviously not being sketchy but because I'm bearded and in Florida, I get profiled a shit ton. But in my neighborhood we can share cigarettes and talk and joke around and make fun of each other and that's awesome. When we catch each other's dogs we stop and talk, and there's no problem with that.

And so, I think intentional reconciliation, racial communities, you can tell pretty quick if they're true and if they're real by how they treat their neighbors. If they're holding them at two arm's length away, it's like okay, how are you reconciling with your neighbors? The bible talks a lot about neighbors, and yes it's kind of a broad spectrum term but it's also pretty fucking literal. If you can't love the dude who literally your neighbor, then you have problems. That was one thing that we always

do as a church—those are our neighbors, not those poor dudes in Africa. ‘Cus it’s really easy to like the dude that you never see except for really cute photos that you get sent, and you pay 10 dollars a month. “It’s only a dollar a day, it’s like a cup of coffee.” Okay guys, I get that, but, your neighbor is like this little ol’ lady and there’s a hole in her driveway and she wants you to fix it. Like, that’s better. And there’s benefits—anytime something shady happens to our house, she warns me. If anyone tried to break into our house—that lady’s like a hawk. She just sits out there staring through her window, you can see her! She’s like “There’s some weird folks, some man out there walking around in cut off overalls, I figured he was one of yours” I was like, “Naw,” and she was like “Really?” and I was like, “Yeah, but it does sound like one of ours!”

I wanna turn to the topic of charity and social justice in intentional communities. I get the idea that there’s a move towards empowering people - like “teach a man to fish” rather than soup kitchen-type work in Christian intentional communities, am I right about that?

Mmhm.

So what do you think necessitated or caused that switch in thinking about how best to provide for the poor?

I dunno, that’s another broad spectrum, hard-to-answer question, but a lot of that is...with Christianity, from the way that I understand it, is that one of the biggest things—I’ve gone to social justice/homeless ministries since I was like young—I used to help them put on concert festivals that would raise a lot of money, we used to give out backpacks full of cool shit. And buy camping supplies and just hang out and eat in weird places in forests behind strip clubs in Florida—that’s what I did when I was 16. ‘Cus it was fun, those people are hilarious, but they don’t have jobs. The problem with American Christianity is that they’re always like “Well, they don’t wanna help themselves, they don’t wanna do this, they don’t wanna do that, we shouldn’t give them this...” But at the same time, like—now I don’t really know where—but Jesus pretty much talks about giving freely, not with intention. He says if someone asks you for something, you give to them. Or John the Baptist—he’s my Patron Saint. When you get baptized in the Orthodox Church you get to pick a guy—and I’d loved this dude since I was little. And so, he preached—and John the Baptist is great, we kinda need another one of him, ‘cus he called the church—which were the Jews at the time—to be Jews. He like, was sitting there yelling, in the middle of nowhere, that it’s time for you to actually—like, when you were being baptized as a Jew—the whole concept was that Jews baptized people who weren’t Jewish. And so he was making Jews baptize themselves to start over. He’s like you need a reboot—you haven’t done it. Just because of your genealogy, you had a mom that was Jewish—that doesn’t matter. This is the kingdom of heaven, this is what you do. The bible says if you have two coats, give one away. That was nonnegotiable. It wasn’t like, you should give some clothes or something. “You sort of grew out of this brand, so why don’t you give it away?” Its like no, if you own two of something, one

of those things belongs to not you. You shouldn't own more than those things if you see someone in need. This is probably what that socialism quote earlier referred to—making it unnecessary.

Do you think there's a benefit to gardening programs over soup kitchens?

I think there needs to be both. You need to give people the option but then you also—you need to encourage people and give people hope, which is where benevolent ministries fit in. You need to do things, you need to give out blankets, you need to help repair homes, you need to do those things. Things that take technique, that take structure, that take resources that people don't have – you still need to give those and you need to give those freely without any intention or agenda. If someone asks, you give it to them. If someone asks you for money you give it to them with the expectation that you'll never get it back. But at the same time, while you're giving, if you're giving with the right heart—which takes time to develop—'cus you're also a fucked up person, a developing person.

That's the other thing too, the us versus them thing, this superhero yuppie family moves into a an area and is like “We're gonna do all this stuff for these people!” and that's not it. When you move to a place, when you're in those situations—when I hang out with homeless people its for completely selfish reasons. I really love novelty in my life. I will set myself up in the dumbest situations just for the story. And those people obviously are a great choice—like, you have some dude spouting off some really fucking hilarious story—I don't even care if they're true anymore, I just wanna listen to what he has to say and I wanna tell other people later. I get bragging rights and it's a good time. The whole situation is treating people like friends—'cus there is divinity in all people.

One of the reasons I chose to jump into Orthodoxy is because they don't believe in original sin, which is something that was developed by Augustine, one of the church fathers. It's funny, the Orthodox consider him a saint but they also consider literally half of what he said bullshit. They're like “We still like what he said, we still think he did good, but he did a little bad too!” and original sin was just one of the things I just couldn't get behind—the idea that all people are doomed to hell, they're born evil. And you're like—no!. Hold a baby, watch him develop. All children are sociopaths, they just are because they don't know how not to be. There's new scientific studies that came out that prove it—like, teenage boys especially are like really—13 to 19—you're like, yes that's accurate! I mean, I was! So, the whole concept is that people are born evil, that people are born with an illness that is inherited—it's like you're born with a small virus and everything you do, everything you are, you either feed that virus and perpetuate the death in your life, or you feed the cure, which perpetuates life. The main things in those are actions, like prayers, almsgiving—which is giving to the poor above and beyond everything, and above and beyond yourself. That concept I feel like is super important within intentional communities. I feel like that's the difference between people who do really well and people who don't. Anyone who believes that everyone is originally born evil will inherently

treat everyone that way. If that's truly what you believe, you believe that's really in there, you will treat everybody like they're evil. And you'll justify it. And most of the times, it's hard to realize the detriment of that thought process. Especially in my own mind—the only reason it died is because I hung out with people who weren't Christians and found out I liked them a lot more, that they were much more honest, much more vocal. I learned a lot more spiritually from those people than I would from people who were pastors and preachers. That would probably be the main thing that I can see that really messes people up. But if you come from the point of view that all people are literally icons of Christ—that they were created in his image, and have inherent goodness—those are the people who do good.

We do shit that we don't wanna do and we do really beautiful things, and we can surprise ourselves on both ends of the spectrum. And so if you come in from that point of view of being much more humble you seem to do a lot more work, like just from a straight study point of view—from sitting back and watching the communities, not trying to save people. Which is a ludicrous thought process that was developed fairly recently within the Western church—it's a fairly recent development where you say this prayer and then you get it. Whereas within the Orthodox church we're like, "We're all kind of hoping we get it!" The whole deal is like—every single prayer is like, "I'm sorry! Have mercy! I'm hoping this works out!" But it's not like a confident thing. You're not sitting there thinking I'm saved and you're damned! That's the biggest wall ever and we just create it and keep it there and it keeps everybody at arms length. So then if you teach a person to fish it still doesn't help because you're still there and you're not giving people hope because you're not loving freely and fully and that's a huge obstacle—a big obstacle from stopping people from being able to do that well.

So there needs to be both but it needs to come from the actual point of view of people wanting to help people because they love them, and because they want to love them. Because loving people is hard. Especially people that suck, including yourself—its really hard to love yourself, and love others, and love god. If you don't love others but you feel an obligation or a quote unquote calling—which is my least favorite term which I grew up being abused with, like literally abused with—you're useless. If you're doing something because you're called, you're making yourself a martyr to a God that isn't the one who you're serving. It's more just an ego boost. Because at the end of the day you're like "Well I'm called to do this so I'm gonna do this, even if I hate it because these damn people need it" but if you're there because you wanna be and you're actually doing what you're created to do—which is be a good human—I mean, that's what god...Jesus pretty much shows up on earth as god incarnate, and goes "Alright guys, you can imitate me because its been a long time since you guys have been created. This is what a human looks like vaguely." He had a three-year run to show people—which isn't long—and then we killed him for it. But he was showing people how he would run things. And at the end of the day it's more important that you be a good human being. You need to learn to be a good dude before you can even remotely learn Christian values. You work on yourself and you actually become in touch with yourself and know your own sins. So when

you look at your neighbor or look at the dude who needs help, you actually prefer them above yourself because when you're in touch with yourself you know your capabilities more and more and more, but you also know that other people are going through the same things and you can even admire other people in different circumstances and situations. You can say "Shit, I was given a really good run and I'm still this! That dude was given a really shitty run, but you know what, he's not hittin' his kids! He's really working—he's bad at it!—he's still an alcoholic, but he's less of an alcoholic now than he was before."

The entire situation—teach a man to fish thing, it's really complex. But it all comes down to what you really think of other people. And I think with Christian communities it comes down to your thought processes on what you think god did or did not say about men. I've met homeless dudes—like my favorite dude I probably ever met was in Vermont. He's dead now, but he was so badass. Me and him would yell at cops as they drove by. I'd give him food and coffee every day, and I'd get my lunch and we'd split it and we'd just hang out and talk and he'd tell me the most outrageous stories. And I'd tell him some, and then we'd argue and we'd laugh. We'd talk about how pretty all the refugee people were in the area—there were all these Ethiopians with gorgeous handmade dresses and we were like "Damn! Those dresses though!" He was just this 70-year-old Vietnam vet. He taught me a ton of things, but he became homeless when his wife died suddenly—the complete love of his life—and he just let it all fade away. He just lost everything because he was so wracked with grief. But then this cop—we'd call him officer shiny boots because this dude had thigh-highs, like boots up to his thighs and they were shiny—and he was such an ass. That guy was such an ass. But he would treat him like he was complete trash, and I was like this guy does not realize - humanity-wise—him as a cop is a much worse individual and human than this guy, who is homeless and drunk out of his mind. He doesn't know his backstory—so of course this cop would bully him, he's in an authority position.

But my friend was actually awesome, I saw him beat the crap out of some dude because he said something bad about his girlfriend—like the dude said something rude about his own girlfriend, and Paul just kicked his ass. Just took him to town. That's something the cop should've done, but he didn't! For him, teaching him a trade won't do anything. He needed to be in hospice, he had stage four-colon cancer after a couple rounds with cancer. So what's the benefit of empowering him? He didn't need empowered, he needed rent. He needed someone to hang out with. It's individuals. When you develop "a plan of action" for a large group of people, it doesn't work. Once you start seeing groups of people as groups of people, then it doesn't work. You've gotta see individuals as individuals. I've got a problem with ministries in particular—they have these broad spectrum plans about bringing salvation to Africa. Really? We really think we're better at being Christians than everyone? People in Africa are a lot better off than us in some ways—especially in the ways that you're coming to try to change. Specifically, community. They take care of everybody in their immediate surroundings. A stranger rolls in and they actually take care of him, I've seen it!

So, on a basic level you cant have this action plan if you don't understand the needs of people and how to be a good human to other humans?

Yeah, that's the thing, I don't really like the concept of intentional community, because it's almost redundant—it's what everybody should already be doing. So that's kind of my problem that I have with them—why I will never join one again, and why I will never start one. Because what matters is interpersonal relationships—with individuals and individuals. God is a god made up of individuals—he works with everybody differently.

The gospel story is full of Jesus saying different things to different people in the same situations. You're like "wait, what? You told that dude he was really bad, but that dude did the same exact thing and you told him he's doing all right? That rich man showed up and you told him he needed to sell everything, but then you hung out with a bunch of other rich dudes and you were like 'Dude, just keep giving!' You didn't tell them to give it ALL away?" Because it's on an individual basis. You cannot tell a person what they can do. You can give a person hope, you can give a person food, you can give a person comfort. But this whole intentional community thing is kind of pretentious and almost like a fallacy before it even begins. "We're just going to come together and become this cohesive force, and we're going to move as a cohesive force and get things done"—no, like you need to stop being shitty. I need to stop being shitty. And then we can be friends with other people, and then from there we can help them out if we can, but at the end of the day I still need to work. I still want things, I still need things.

So it's kind of an artificial experiment when you should really be like being a community in whatever community you actually are in?

Yeah, yeah—that's what I would say. I mean, they're all hype words that people think are great. Especially intentional community, I feel like it's so dumb. Because the entire history of humanity has been intentional communities. It's only recently that these suburbs spring up. And then recently some guys were like, we need to have intentional community! You mean like everybody else has lived, for forever? (Laughs). Globalization kind of ruined that I guess, but we're all so isolated. We read our books, we get on our phones, whatever social media we follow to connect with people in the same room. We 'like' their statuses while we're sitting next to them. (laughs) that's a cluster fuck. That just doesn't make sense. So intentional communities are rehabs for people. They're more for people in the communities than for other things—like they don't do all these different things. I mean, they can be seen as small cogs in the machine that are working towards a bigger purpose. But I've never been in an intentional community that didn't totally just focus on themselves.

Is evangelizing a part of many intentional communities?

Evangelizing is indicative of a focus problem, in my opinion, too. 'Cus the focus is like—we need to save these people—as if we had the ability to do that, which is not right in any church sense, its not right biblically, its not right historically, its not right in any understanding of the church that somebody can give somebody else salvation. Which is this weird thing that the western church decided to pick up. I think it goes back to the 'being a human thing,' too. When I was in Vermont they tried to get us to do intentional evangelism, where we all meet up and they try to psych you up into doing it. The ministry school I went to used to make us do that all the time. They would actually send you to different places. Once, we all got on a bus—which I did because it was 100 bucks to go to Boston for a week, and I was like 'Yup'! So every time they told us to go evangelize, a bunch of classmates would be like "I just really feel I heard this from the lord, I've gotta go and tell people these things." And then they would pat themselves on the back afterwards, and say "Look what I did!" I was like "Well, I bought cigarettes for people at a gas station and told them Jesus loves them," and it worked because they were confused. They were like, "Wait what?"

The other time we were in Boston I bought bouquets of roses and was handing 'em out to people. One lady, we gave it to her and I was like "I'm just handing out flowers and telling people Jesus loves 'em," she just looked at me, and I was like "I know, right? It's a cliché, but it's still accurate!" This girl—we went in teams—and this girl just rants off this whole salvation narrative, and the lady is just rolling her eyes. I was like "Okay, listen, you've heard all of this shit before. What'd you grow up?" And she was like, Catholic, and I was like "You had a bad experience," and she was like "Yeah, how'd you know?" And I was like "Because you're catholic." "She was like, Yeah, my mom got a divorce and the church left us, and I'm about to go through a divorce right now too." And so I gave her the entire bouquet. She was like "You should give those to other people," and I was like "Nah, its okay, my time is almost up. If I were quote unquote spiritually called to this situation, I'd feel like you would be the person I'd be here for. You'll be okay, god isn't your experience, he actually is much bigger and much broader and much nicer than we know or understand, and you've experienced. So you just need a bouquet of flowers because you're a lady going through a shitty time." And that like meant something to her. And at the end of the day my classmates were like "Wow that's really crazy, you must really have been hearing some things from the lord" and I was like "No, reading people is pretty intrinsic in humans. If you actually open your eyes and shut your mouth, you can actually tell when someone needs to hear something." And I didn't make it an evangelism thing, I made it a "Life sucks, but it'll be okay—here's a random, funny-lookin' dude from Kansas City giving you flowers, enjoy your chipotle, I'm sorry you're walking back to work from lunch with flowers, you'll probably have to explain that. I'm a Christian, I'm going to do something nice for you, and apologize for the rest of us." I felt like that was more proper evangelism, but they were like "Did you get her to pray??" I was like "Naw!"

That kind of mentalism—in the sense of just being nice to people and then letting them know you're a Christian, surprise them. Other than that, I don't really get

evangelism. I always disagreed with it. It comes with the fallacy that people can be saved or need to be saved. I mean, Christians do believe that but I don't believe I'm the arbitrator of that. I don't think I can make that happen, so a lot of the dirty things that you see—a lot of reasons that people hate the church today is because that was preached so much in the 70s, and they've all grown up with terrible experiences of that. I don't know how many times people have tried to save my soul a year, and I'm like, "I've fuckin' done this! I've been a Christian since I was little, I chose it myself, it wasn't a crazy thing! I know more than you, we can have a discussion, but quit assuming things." Its awkward as hell—random people walking up to you, super uncomfortably, and you just have to pat them on the back and say "That is a very brave but very foolish act, because you hurt more feelings than you help, and at the end of the day, that expose you just gave on Christianity does not make me wanna join it!" Sorry people! So a lot of 'em do do that, and I think its one of their main detrimental problems and it's the quickest way to destroy your ability to help a community. People want genuiness anyway. It's a bigger testimony and a bigger evangelistic tool to be a real person with your struggles, with your problems—be present—and then still be a Christian, and then tell people that you are, and emphasize that there's not a bifurcation. I mean, I smoke and I drink—I drink too much—and I'm pretty crude, and I get angry, but at the end of the day that doesn't change what I believe. That doesn't change what I perceive as the lords love for me. It shouldn't affect anybody else. We do try to grow and do those things, but the evangelism thing, I've never seen it do well.

Outright proselytizing is seen as a turn off for many non-believers, I think you're right.

Well yeah, nobody likes it, I don't even think people like doing it. I mean, they'll pretend they like it. I've never met anyone who digs it. I've never met a sane evangelist—someone who considers themselves an evangelist is usually the most terrifying person because if I have a conversation with them long enough they'll try to save me because I don't agree with them. You're trying to get people to agree with what you think and what you know—but you're going through changes. You develop, you grow, you throw away old things that you were super devout with that you realized were super unhealthy and didn't work. It's progressive, and so communities do do that a lot. I think every Christian community I was ever in was doing that, but they were terrible. It's much nicer if you're just nice to your neighbors – that actually goes further. I've had more experience with people coming to churches and wanting to know more about Christianity by just being myself, so, and not being shitty and trying to do nice things and being quick to apologize. Those are the things that actually influence and help people.

I don't want to invite people into my walk of life, I don't want them to do what I'm doing. I would hope that if they found Christianity to be beneficial and true, that they would take it and use it and go further with it than me. But everybody is on this path, everyone is on a journey. Everyone is trying to work things out. My godfather in the Orthodox church—he was Rastafarian—and when you talk to him

about it he's like "No, it kinda just set me up for Christianity, its all just a continuation, a straight line of working towards things." The biggest thing is that people need to be working—if you're working towards a goal spiritually, emotionally, intellectually—that's good. Some people aren't ready to work, some people aren't ready to do these things, some people aren't ready to make a decision. And I just couldn't care less. I never get excited when people say that they converted somebody. I just don't get it. I've seen it a ton in communities—don't like it, don't participate in it, I'm really bad at it. Every time they try to make you do it I always hide. They're like "Alright, everybody go out and we'll meet back here in three hours," and I'm like "Three hours? Alright I can find something to do for three hours." I'd go to a coffee shop and drink coffee and sit down next to a random dude and just talk, or go to a bar and buy a couple rounds for people. That works better.

Why do you think that so many intentional communities are interested in sustainability and gardening and simple living?

I think it's like a throwback to that—that's just how society should work, and has worked. Unfortunately that's a necessity for Americans to be like "We have to be sustainable!" Whereas the rest of the world and the rest of Christianity is like "There's an option not to be? Solar power and kinetic energy? That's just how we do things anyway. We've got a water pump, and an outhouse that we move every couple of months, you've gotta make sure you put it in the right spot on the hill otherwise we'll get dysentery." It's kind of like a sham of a thing. Maybe I'm jaded, but I feel like I've put enough energy into it to be justifiably be so. I think Christians are called to simple living. They always should have been. They always should live simple for the purpose of focusing more on other things like spiritual development as people. The reason you live simply is so you're more in tune with nature, and you're more in tune with creation, which, personally I feel is super important. If the creation story is true—there's this God that created the earth and created every single thing in the earth, and so if he created something just like I created something—me is in that thing that I create somewhere, you can find it there—and so god created things and all things are sacred, all things are important, and all things hold his image and pieces of his beauty. I freakin' love bugs. I have interactions where like I'll look in depth at plants and insects and I'm blown away by the beauty of them. That, I feel, is being in touch with god, that's being in the moment with him.

If you live simply it's a protest that works, instead of like putting red tape over your mouth and standing in front of an abortion clinic? The simple life, for me, like, why I choose to live simply, is because I care more about people. The more simple I live, the more I get to be with people. Because I live simple I can lose my job right now and still live another four months on the tiny bit of money I have, because I can do that—I can also quit my job and go do things. I always live super cheap and have no debt. I think I have a credit score now because I'm renting a house. I never had credit before and never intended to. That's why I didn't go to college, because I didn't want debt. I didn't see it being a viable option for me. And because I don't

have debt I can quit my job and go to Kenya or go off—all this really cool shit. I have a friend who worked in India against female infanticide and for women's rights, and like, she's just a group of three girls that do it—it's a friend of a friend, they just need a dude to help build houses. One of these days I'm gonna take a month off work and go out and do that. I can afford to do that because I live simply. I live simple because it's freeing. I think money is this weird illusion that I don't wanna buy into. It's necessary but as soon as it becomes less of a means to an end, and more of an end in and of itself, that's wrong. So simple living is a protest against that. So one of the easiest ways for us to facilitate that as subculture Christians is by living simple and living together. My house sucks, but I pay 200 bucks a month in rent, and we all get our own bedroom and we have a massive yard and a dog and cool neighbors, and we all get to say that. All of us work jobs that we want to work, and none of them pay that well. I've been screen printing since I was 16—it was like a dream job. I work at a company that makes the shirts I wore in high school. I'm able to do that because I'm willing to live simply. But I have friends that make, combined, six grand a month and they started buying things and it was just the entrapment of money and continually needing things, and then needing to make the money. That whole cycle is just miserable and you get sucked into it, and then you're five years down the line and you don't know what happened. And that's what happened to my family. When I live simply I'm free to do what I want. I can go to church as many times as I can, as I want to, I can help friends, I can be more in tune to life, but I just think it's a better way to live for me personally.

I've been to the other side, I've lived in a gated community with a gym and I just found it to be boring, and useless. My neighborhood is not boring. There's always some weird dog on your porch and you're trying to see whether or not it's nice. And that's way more entertaining than a security guard riding around and you still get robbed. Here we won't get robbed because our neighbors look out for us, we take care of each other. My end game would be to live on a farm. Living simply is very practical—even monetarily. You have way more money if you chose not to use it on things you don't need. So just think about it, and don't waste money. I don't waste money—well, I do waste money, but I'm better at it than I was before.

So, its like breaking down all those socially constructed needs that as Americans, we have a whole lot of.

I think its like self-medication. When you chose to live simply you're slowly breaking off your self-medication. You medicate yourself with technology, with media, with these different things. But when you live simply and you're legitimately living hand to mouth, those things aren't there and you're unfortunately left with yourself and it drives you nuts. When 'you' see 'you,' you freak the fuck out every time. It's me, spiritually, trying to break through all of my self-medications and actually try to see myself for who I am and break through all of the fantasy and grow as a person, and knowing my intention and knowing how I'm connecting to people and how I see myself. It's a highly self-revelatory process. And I feel like that's why I keep doing it. It sucks when it's hard—killing rabbits for food is weird. They're

adorable and it's awkward, it's a sad time. But I'm choosing to be in touch with my meat source—that's where I get meat, you know? Because I wanna be in touch with what I'm doing. I actually want to feel the process and know what I'm doing so I'm not just consuming blindly and being so disconnected. It puts you back into the global community to a bigger degree.

I'm choosing to disconnect from parts of society—I hate the agriculture industry, which is why I'm really glad I didn't go to college for it—I was gonna go for alternative agriculture at UF, which is a huge GMO school. By growing my own food I'm protesting, personally as an individual—it's not like an elaborate thing—I'm saying no to the companies and what they're doing to people, I'm saying no to Monsanto and what they're doing in south America—the farmers that they're killing just for a bottom line. I'm trying to infiltrate their bottom line, by not being the consumer that they were guaranteed to have from birth, and from disconnecting by some degree. I'm actually becoming accountable for my own actions. I feel like if there is a god, we will be accountable for the things we have done and the things that we say, and I think the West is going to be super accountable—our affluence is super accountable. And even if there isn't an afterlife, you're accountable for it now!

Us choosing convenience—that's me actively fucking someone else over by choosing to eat Del Monte bananas. Those people are evil, they fuck people up. And I'm basically saying, "That's alright, thanks for the bananas!" That's like watching a dude shoot another dude, and the dude that shot turns around and sells you the stuff he just stole, and you're like "Yeah man, that's great!" It's the exact same thing, we just don't see it that way. These violent interactions brought me a product, and I'm saying thank you? (laughs) I'm giving you my life—time and energy—that I like spent and made paper, and I'm giving you that paper and I'm telling you that that's really okay that you just did really fucked up things, and it's all because I don't want to get up off my ass and pick my own fruit? (laughs) Social justice works with individuals, you really need to figure out what you're buying into. Christians, with our thought process, this should be a no brainer. but we just love comfort, and preaching about money.

Last question—what books or media influenced you and helped shape your ideas about Christian Intentional Living?

There's a book that I like called the "Moneyless Man"—have you ever heard of it? This guy somewhere in the UK decided to live a year without money. I think he's at the end of his fifth year now. At the end of the year he loved it, everything is barter based, he rides his bike, he does these crazy things—he has a cell phone but he runs it off of solar energy. He wrote a really good book on money's ridiculousness. Money is not the main evil but it is a personification, it is a physical entity of things that we stand for. So he was able to do it—he lost his girlfriend and a bunch of friends, but at the end of the day he was like—"That's alright!" But he even talks about the community, because he trades a couple hours of work a week to be able to camp on someone's land in his Winnebago. At one point in time he ate a piece of

bread that had black mold on it, but he just thought it was dust, so he washed it off and ate it and got this crazy stomach virus that should have ruined all of his plans, but as soon as the people who run the campground found out he was sick, they did all this work for him. They kept him up to his schedule. We don't need people right now because we have all these safety nets—but here I'm actually truly living in community and needing people for the first time. So he's got really good insight and I like that book.

Thomas Dubay—he's a Catholic, well, was a Catholic—he wrote a book called "Happy are you Poor?" Which is amazing. And it's talking about poor Christians and the beatitudes and breaks it down, saying what does it mean? Does it mean that we're destitute? Does it mean we chose to do this or that? No it's not destitution, but its asking questions to make sure we're working progressively. He was the first person that I read that was like "This is going to suck, and this is progressive." He asks stuff like do you need to shower everyday? Can you take off your shirt and just hang it up again, or is it dirty? Those small thought processes make a difference. He talks about helping the poor, and what being spiritually poor actually means. Which brings us back to intentional community—it's me saying, "I don't like money, I don't like how it works, I don't like the system, I'd rather not be a part of it as much as I can," and me training to be poor in spirit, and me living simply and intentionally. But I'm not destitute, I'm well-fed, I'm well taken care of, I can do all the things I need. I can still own a car. His book breaks that down—think of what you need, don't consume more than what you need. This is a huge thing for Christians. If all of us just used what we needed we'd find that we have way too many things. And we don't need to make money off of them, we just need to redistribute to other people.

Alright, perfect. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that I should've?

Nope, we're good.