"In really dying to myself.....in community, I truly find life."
(Craig Kirkby in 'Living at the Edge of Time' p.253. Review p.14)
Spring is such a happy time with all the previously dormant plants blossoming. So much new life. My garden has so many beautiful flowers in bloom that even I am not noticing the weeds (well, not much anyway!). For us as Christians, we celebrate NEW LIFE all the year round because Jesus is risen! What a joy!

I have just returned from a tour of Teams, house churches and gatherings through Gippsland Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. These trips always provide me with an opportunity to focus on the bigger picture of what is happening in the nation because of the conversations I have with many along the way and the time I have to be focused in prayerful thinking.

Here are some of my ‘thoughts’! Get back to me with any observations or responses please.

When we started OIKOS 20 years ago, we were mainly involved with groups that had come out of traditional churches due to church splits or spiritual abuse of power.

The next phase over the last several years was that of people stepping out of traditional church with a conviction that ‘church’ had to be different to that from which they were leaving.

We are now into a third phase—missional movements with a Kingdom of God focus. These are often under the umbrella of a denominational church, or at least on the edge of one. Others are emerging from the fresh yearnings of highly motivated, thinking young men and women for whom the old wineskins and the questions about them are no longer relevant. They see disciple-making and the Kingdom of God as the life-style they seek to develop.

OIKOS has moved effectively around the first two I believe, but now we need to move up a few notches and move outwards to encourage networking and resourcing for the movements that are emerging. Pray for OIKOS and the Team please, as we seek the way forward that God would have. It is all too easy to just coast along, but we must be open to change direction and methods. This has been a ministry that God has miraculously evolved over the 20 years. We must get it right now.

Listening to the Lord and being obedient is the only way forward.

The other thing that has been on my mind during the trip is to ponder the things that make movements grow or not grow. Here are some of my thoughts -

A. Things that help movements grow.
- Undergirding prayer.
- Good servant leadership that is enabling, thinking strategically and has a sense of the big picture of what God is doing.
- Having a Kingdom of God focus rather than the old church culture.
- Movements move! Encouraging growth in prayer and Scripture in the simple church groups as well as disciple making.
- Grassroots recognition and encouragement of the Ephesians 4 ministry gifts. Recognising the anointing but not doing any ‘appointing’.
- Recognition that growth equals an invasion of enemy territory and Ephesians 6 spiritual equipping is seen as necessary.
- God does what He does. It is not about slavishly following methods/formulas but seeing where/how God is at work and partnering with Him.

Things that hinder growth -
- Introspection. It is all about ‘us’. Holy huddles.
- Existentialism. It is all about ‘me’ to go deeper in my own spiritual walk.
- Dependence on ‘experts’ rather than the Lord.
- Putting the ’cart before the horse’. Starting with a church makes it hard to get disciples. Make disciples and you will get a church.
- Parochial attitude by leadership.
- Controlling, dominating leadership.
- Attempts to put new wine back into old wineskins.
- The tension that the ways of the world provide—lack of ‘forsaking all’ attitude. Busyness.
- Lack of recognition of the spiritual both in terms of the resources of heaven being available for us and the fact that we are entering a battlefield when we want to take people out of the world and into the Kingdom.

Lots more can be said in both of these, but here are some thoughts. Feel free to come back to OIKOS with any responses.

NEXT MONTH IS OUR 20TH BIRTHDAY

We will be putting out a celebratory edition of OIKOS magazine in the Summer.

God bless you... Bessie
OIKOS readers were challenged to read this passage of Scripture and determine if there are lessons for the house church that we can learn. Here is Ian Thomson's response (OIKOS Brisbane Nth).

Joshua had acknowledged the heartfelt obedience of the Reubenites and the Gadites in assisting their fellow Israelites to possess the lands west of the Jordan. But soon suspicion of apostasy and idolatry arose in the majority by the action of the minority.

They had built this imposing altar 'on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side'. Surprisingly, this place actually lay on the border between Benjamin and Judah (Joshua 18:17), not on territory given to the two and a half tribes. The story though, seems to hint that they were sincere.

Yet who can blame the others for worrying there was a serious covenant breach which might result in dire disasters for the whole nation? One section can bring the whole into disrepute in God's perspective. The disasters experienced as a result of the sins at Baal Peor and by the actions of Achan were fresh in their minds.

What can we organic church people learn from this event?

It is so patently obvious that His people must not add to or dream up their own ideas for the protocols of worship in approaching the Holy One. He had clearly revealed to God's people his ways. The Torah, the scriptures, was adequate, sufficient, in what God had spoken to provide for their survival as God's holy people walking with Him.

It is so patently obvious, so why did they do it? Did they forget? Were they careless?

We can forget, or be careless, or become busy with mere side tracks. We do not need stunts or add-ons or entertainments to ensure our survival as an organic movement of apostolic practice. If what we are doing is of God, it will prosper (Acts 5:38) and nothing will stop it—except our loss of faith and love. Let's not waste time on stuff not prescribed by the Lord. Look only to Jesus. Aim at love. Stick with the faith once delivered to the saints, the apostolic tradition. Instead of trusting Yahweh, the Eastern tribes were concerned about their security: We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours 'What do you have to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? They need not have feared because the antidote for fear is love—love of God and of his people. Here is a strong call for all God's people never to fear what others may do to us. We must fear God, not others.

Had the east tribes forgotten that there could only be ONE sanctuary where Yahweh could manifest his glory? The Israelites must gather for worship "at the place God chooses" (Deu 12:5-14). It cannot be a "do as you please" thing. It cannot be an individual" activity. This place must be sought, it is a place of glad meeting, a place of confession and atonement, a place of giving and a place of immense celebration.

Jesus likewise told the Samaritan woman (John 4) that the Father seeks to be worshipped "not on this mountain or even in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth" and He then went on to speak of Himself as the only true sacred site. There is only one place for us collectively (and individually) and that is in Jesus. In Jesus alone. We must seek out him. He cannot be substituted by anything or anybody. We are to be his body wherever we gather to "worship". And He tells us so much about how we may worship the Father "in spirit and in truth". The way we are to think and act must be his way and not ours, not men's, not tradition, but with Jesus as the Head and the Holy Spirit as the inspirer and the revealer of Jesus. In Him, in his body—the place He chooses for us—we expect to find him, to experience forgiveness, a place of giving and generosity and a scene of celebration and joy, of loving service.

The Word of God is sufficient for us, so wondrously revealed for us in Jesus and lived out by his followers in the first century as recorded in Acts and the letters of Paul and the other apostles. It does not need improving upon by us.

We are always tempted to do our own thing like those Eastern tribes: "How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now?" In this passage we see how serious it is to adopt ideas and practices that are not given by the Lord. How angry Jesus was with those who placed their tradition before the Word of God thus voiding it. Just dreadful. It is rebellion.

(Continued on page 5)
Though we were hoping for 30 to attend, 35 participants made it to the 4th Asian house church leaders’ summit in Tokyo, Japan. This time we had participants from Japan, India, Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, Australia, Nepal, Singapore, Cambodia and Central Asia, with some from China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan not making it due to visa problems. Just like in previous summits in Manila (2006), Hong Kong (2007), Bandung (2008), and New Delhi (2009, Global), we were aiming for key house church leaders in Asia to gather to fellowship, plan and work together effectively for God’s bountiful harvest in Asia.

On the first day, we were treated to the easily replicable Japan-developed "Upward, Outward, Inward" (UOI) training facilitated by a Central Asian and a missionary-to-Japan trainer; thereafter the Indian delegation promised to share this UOI training, including the translation and publication of the materials, across the countries in south Asia. Then we also learned from the reports from those networks that were effectively reaching poor communities through combining house church multiplication movements with community development approaches.

Before coming to the conference, the participants were encouraged to email in their experiences in doing house church movement and their expectations of the summit. Only nine did, but it was enough to give us a sense of the unity and diversity in our networks. As we went into strategic planning, we had a "SWOT Analysis" to determine how best we can move God’s agenda forward in Asia, given the resources available. After individual prayer and corporate discussion, as a sign of our commitment to partnership, we approved a budget of US$10,000 for a "common fund," with $5,000 designated for travel subsidies of HCM training, and the other $5,000 for development of social enterprises for those who work among the poor.

We also decided to develop a website that will serve as our internal communication system to share stories and prayer requests, as well as provide a collection of resource materials, esp. training modules, with five participants offering their help to help the webmaster. We were also reminded that in order to effect community transformation, we should aim to connect with local political, religious and community leaders, together with our “persons of peace.”

As we adjourned, the Japanese HC networks held their national summit focusing on how those who witnessed and got involved in the dramatic breakthrough after the earthquake-tsunami disaster last March 2011 (with testimonies of Jesus appearing in dreams and visions) can turn the HCM in the affected north-eastern region into a national movement!

Due to security concerns, some other details of the summit and some reports of HCM in restricted countries cannot be shared in this report. We thank our Japanese hosts for the smooth and enjoyable time that we spent in Tokyo. We reaffirmed our commitment to help one another in catalysing HCM and IM which will result in transformational communities that are led by local Christ-followers who have not been extracted from their relational and religious communities. We look forward to holding our 5th summit in February 2014, most probably in Bangkok, and the Southeast Asian region may hold one in Singapore in mid-2013.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the HCM in Asia will catalyse IM in Asia and beyond, for we believe that the harvest is indeed plentiful (Matt. 9:37-38) and our King Jesus is indeed building His church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it (16:18-19)! Maranatha!

Respectfully reported by co-convenors: David S. Lim (Phil.) & Mitsuo Fukuda (Japan).

Andrew Beel, OIKOS National Team (Missions Rep) represented OIKOS Australia at this event. Here is a report from him.

Whilst my trip to the Asia House Church Conference in Tokyo was only short it was very productive. I met a number of people from various parts of Asia including Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, India, Nepal, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan etc. I heard many stories of how God is working in numerous different ways amongst various people groups, cultures, sub-cultures, religious groups etc.

I was quite moved to hear how Ramesh from Nepal and his organisation are rescuing 10,000 girls aged 12 to 19 each year from being trafficked into the brothels of India.

It was also exciting to hear how many of the girls end up becoming house church leaders as they share God’s love wherever they go with the new skills they have gained through their training. You can look up eternal threads or the red thread movement on the internet to read more of this work.
I have ordered a thousand red thread bracelets which I hope to sell here on behalf of the girls towards their support. I have also asked Ramesh to consider coming to Perth to share with people here of this work.

As a result of some of the contacts I made I have received invitations to teach for a week at a time in church planting schools in North East India. I have been invited to Nepal to visit the work there and I am being asked to prepare a paper on homosexuality, which if accepted, I would give at a theological conference for evangelical and Pentecostal church leaders in the Philippines.

One of the other things that most touched me was the response I received from some of the house church leaders and church planters from other countries as they heard of my work amongst people in the gay community. There was no hint of the judgmentalism often associated with the church, but rather a desire to join with me in learning how best to reach out compassionately to gay people in their own communities and countries. I left Tokyo rejoicing at the friendships beginning to form and the potential of relationships forming across the world for the sake of the Gospel.

Whilst my trip left me quite exhausted, I came back to see God's continuing work here. Whilst it is not progressing with the rapidity of some of the church planting movements in India and other parts of Asia, nonetheless, God is at work.

Andrew Beel

(Continued from page 3)
Can we not learn from the subverted versions of Christianity that we see around us—the results of men who thought they could improve on God? Dare we try to improve on God's perfect ways revealed to us? Are we going to continue to adopt the traditions handed down to us by well-meaning religious people with all the worldly substitutions that have been incorporated throughout the history of Christianity? Sadly, meeting informally in a house, is no guarantee of neglecting the teaching of Jesus and the traditions of the apostles. We can be just as worldly minded, lording it over members, failing to seek God's leadings, adopting our own agendas and strategies, and more than anything else, failing to deliberately and firmly choose to acknowledge Jesus as the Head of our ekklesia in practice.

Do we not serve the same Lord as the Israelites? Are we also going to perpetuate the disobedience and arrogant thinking that has become so often and so deeply embedded in institutional Christianity?

Much has been entrusted to us to whom has come the revelation of the apostolic tradition, of the beauty of God's wonderful design for his people to meet together as a body with many members, each with an important function, necessary for the health and vitality of the body which is intended by Jesus to express his otherwise inexpressible love and service and splendour to a lost world all around us.

Is Jesus Lord, Head, Leader, Apostle, Shepherd, Mentor, Lifegiver of our little group? Does he walk among us and show us the way (His way), the truth (His truth), the life (His life)? Together? The Kingdom of God cannot be experienced alone. It is experienced together with one another.

Surely we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us! Surely his ways are perfect! We need not fear if we hear his voice. So .... "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ..." like they did in the past.

Ian Thomson

Boating Camping Fishing

A blokes weekend held on South Stradbroke Island on the last weekend in August has become a popular annual event organised by Graham Wheat (OIKOS Gold Coast) and others. This gathering provides an opportunity for Christian and not-yet-Christian guys to share opportunities for deep and meaningful conversations around the barbie, as well as stiff competition for the award for the largest fish caught.

Judy and the other girls are trying to work out what they can do for the weekend. Why not come to a show and dinner in Melbourne?
David Currie, served as Senior Adviser in Mission for the Church of Scotland, leading a Team which encouraged churches in every part of the country to engage with their local communities – serving and witnessing in Christ's name. During this time he co-authored a book on faith-sharing entitled "You're an Angel – Being Yourself and Sharing the Faith". In the last few years David worked as Emerging Church Development Officer – encouraging local congregations to look beyond themselves and see where the opportunities might be to plant new models or fresh expressions of church in people groups and networks not presently being reached by traditional church. Late in 2011 he came to the Scots' Church, Melbourne, to take up the post of Assistant Minister with a particular focus on mission, outreach and new models of church.

"Signs of Hope" Vision Day was held at Scots Church on 15th September to introduce Fresh Expressions to those in mainline churches who recognise the need to change to reach beyond the four walls of buildings. David Currie had met with John Emmett (UCA), Craig Ogden (Anglican), Martin Boutros (CoC), David Chatalier (Baptist) and the Salvation Army to plan the day. Some 50 people from Presbyterian, Anglican, Uniting and Churches of Christ and a couple of Baptists were given the opportunity to engage with the concept of missional communities. More information on the UK scene is on the website http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/.

Having been hearing references to Fresh Expressions from the UK and listening to interviews on Nomad Podcast to people involved, we (Mal and Di) decided to join in the Vision Day, primarily to network (or 'netweave' as we're becoming accustomed to say) with those involved and to see if we can inject a Simple Church perspective.

**Fresh Expressions definition:**
A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.

It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.

It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.

Stories are being written in Australia but the video clips were of UK examples. We were shown Tube station http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RICAExJXIpo, and others. http://www.youtube.com/user/freshexpressions is the link for a whole bunch of examples from the UK.

Seated around tables, we interacted across the denominational boundaries and heard an exciting initiative for discipleship as a precursor for mission in an established Uniting church, and about the new Anglican church plant at Mernda. After speaking of the statistics of church membership, showing how many people are not connecting with Jesus, there were exercises encouraging thinking how love and service might look for reaching different people and what discipleship might look like.

In the Missional Focus seminar group Mal found a number of fairly senior mainstream church leaders, some who thought the principle purpose of such a venture was to try to arrest the declining attendances at their churches. Others, generally younger, were more interested in fulfilling the Great Commission in ways relevant to today. We had quite a long discussion on whether the church and the Kingdom are synonymous, and whether or not the Gospels really focused on the Kingdom. Some agreed with me that in all four gospels we see more teaching about the Kingdom than anything else, despite the language of each being sometimes cryptic to avoid unnecessary persecution to the early church from the Roman authorities; others did not seem to want it to be so. He was able to share some insights from Craig Kirkby's new book Living at the Edge of Time. For example, John speaks often of 'living in the light', a probable euphemism for the Kingdom of God. Matthew uses 'Kingdom of Heaven' for Jews who may not say Jahweh's name, and so on. Paul also used the expression 'in Christ' in a similar way.

There was another seminar about Community in the Pub. Di went to the third one led by someone from Solace, an emerging Christian church - "a network that helps people enjoy authentic, Jesus-centred, spirituality in their everyday lives". http://www.solacechurch.org.au/. We brainstormed the questions:

"In the complete absence of church building, church budget and clergy hierarchy:
"What do you personally do to follow the way of Jesus?"
"What do you do to mature and grow in compassion?"
"How do you act to transform things around you?"
This brought out some of the core values and disciplines as followers of Jesus and how we are to live in community.

http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/freshexpressions-fourdimensions-1.01.pdf

Other Fresh Expression days are planned in Melbourne to encourage existing churches to exercise "Holy Imagination" to see where Jesus building his kingdom and join him.

Mal and Di Dow (OIKOS Melbourne West)

Greetings from the church that meets at Sven and Marilyn Östring's house!

Our group has had a good winter, with much to be thankful for. We continue to walk in God's grace, strengthening and encouraging one another in the midst of life's blessings and challenges.

Earlier in the season we shifted away from more structured meetings, toward a more 'open', Spirit-led time together. Following the pattern in 1 Corinthians 14:26, each one shared a verse, an encouragement, a testimony, or whatever God laid on their heart for our time together. This gave us a great opportunity to respond to any questions and concerns that arose, enabling us to minister to one another as we had need. It's always exciting to see how God's message takes shape throughout the evening as we follow Him.

Most recently, we hosted a six week missions training event for a few local groups. There have been other missions training events happening in Perth, and it seems there is a general hunger in our region to reach others with the good news of Jesus. Our particular group demonstrated an emphasis on prayer, Scripture reading, and the sharing of our testimonies. One of the women at the training shared that she prays each day that God will give her opportunities to tell people about Jesus, and every evening she thanks Him for doing just that. Ask, and you shall receive (Matthew 7:7-8)! A follow-up session on discipleship is planned for later this spring.

We are also keen to develop outreach opportunities as a group. One of our women works in a retirement home and we are hoping to host a music ministry there soon. Other possibilities we're exploring include planning meals for a local family in need, youth mentoring and outreach, as well as hosting fun, low-key events to de-velop friendships with others who don't know Jesus.

Rebekah Prince (OIKOS Perth Sth) writing on behalf of the group.

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Rebekah Prince (OIKOS Perth Sth) writing on behalf of the group.
It was 1999, at the age of 28, I was the senior pastor of a church in South Africa. Everything was going well: we ran two well attended services each Sunday, had a number of cell groups functioning midweek, ran ‘a year of your life’ training program for young adults and a Bible school on Tuesday nights, owned two properties and rented a third, employed seven on staff (some part-time) and had effective ministries to youth, children and the poor running like clockwork. Plus we had a mature, healthy group of elders who governed the church (of which I was the youngest), and who were genuine friends and loved God (not always true when it comes to church boards).

As an eldership and wider leadership (of twenty-seven people), we felt led through a number of prophetic dealings in God to embark on a transition process from a congregational based church into a Kingdom, missional people. We realised that we were entrenched in a “Gospel of the church” paradigm, serving an institutional construct that was suffocating the very values we held dear. As they say, the “house always wins.”

This exciting two-year process unfolded by the grace of God and now, well over a decade later, we continue to enjoy this amazing Kingdom adventure, releasing church planters, missionaries and leaders into a number of nations and cities, multiplying the life we’ve all been so privileged to experience.

I turned 41 recently and have been married to Lorna for sixteen years this December and am Dad to two beautiful girls (Hannah turns 11 in December, and Jenna turns 8 in November). Thinking about our adventures in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Japan, New Zealand and Australia—seeing the Gospel of the Kingdom flourish in such diverse cultures and countries—I’m more convinced than ever that we’re in the middle of a great move of the Holy Spirit as God’s Kingdom advances on planet earth.

But what do you mean by a “Kingdom, missional people?”

Good question. For us, we weren’t merely looking for a new methodology, or a novel way of doing cell groups better or some hip, innovative way to shuffle

the proverbial church furniture. And certainly just moving our location from a church building to a lounge room wasn’t the whole picture. Rather, we felt a brand new mindset was required, or at least that’s how we interpreted God’s prophetic word to us from Luke 5:37, 38. We felt Him say that a new wineskin was required.

By a Kingdom, missional people—or the phrase, “simple church”—we refer to a values-based approach to being a Kingdom-shaped church; viewing church essentially as relational, organic, missional and fluid rather than hierarchical, institutional, attractional and rigid; a Kingdom family rather than a business enterprise or religious organisation.

For us, the main thing is the Great Commission

(Matthew 28:18-20), being about our Father’s Kingdom business, in a no-nonsense commitment to the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39). Fuelled and informed by the love of God, our hearts’ desire is to make disciple-makers; followers of Christ who in turn make disciples, multiplying the life of God.

And we’re convinced that God’s chosen means through which His life multiplies is a reproducible missional community; a spiritual family that finds its covenant and communal life in and around their homes and places of influence. And as we demonstrate the Gospel of the Kingdom; alive, in love and on mission, our “safe” communal life becomes the “launch pad” for Kingdom exploits—whether this is into a specific neighbourhood, niche of society or another nation of the world. We became utterly convinced that a congregational construct of church restricted these treasured values.

So, what prophetic dealings caused you to shift course so drastically?

I still get goose bumps every time I share this even though it was over ten years ago. At one eldership meeting—in my home where we met most Thursday nights—as we sought the Lord, we felt God bring 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3 to our attention. I still remember trembling as I read Paul’s words to the church at Corinth: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest
somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Then I heard these words come out of my own mouth, without my permission I might add: "Your hands are on my Bride", says the Lord."

In one of those course-changing holy moments, we all found ourselves on the floor immediately responding to a prophetic word we all knew was from God.

Up to this point, we would have characterised ourselves as a healthy, growing church with a bright future. The structures and systems were in place, and things were in every way going well. We were sure we were doing God's will to the best of our ability as a church leadership.

From this heart-stopping prophetic word, God began to reveal His desire to do a "new thing" in our midst; something that would "spring forth" like a "river in the desert" (Isaiah 43:18, 19). To be honest, this promise from Isaiah was a wonderful relief after the sober word from 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3. To this God also revealed His desire to pour out "new wine" and the necessity for new wineskins to handle His "new wine" (Luke 5:36-39).

So … what happened next?
Well, sobered yet excited by these words we shared what had happened with the congregation at the following Sunday celebrations. We asked the church to consider committing to a week of prayer and fasting starting the very next Monday, encouraging them to fast in any way that they felt led to and to join us for early morning prayer Monday through Friday that week if they could.

Looking back I remember been run over with conflicting feelings as I headed off for prayer that Monday morning. I was overwhelmed with expectation, but I also had this feeling that I was making a huge leadership error. Never did I feel so out of control as I did in that moment. These mixed feelings, though at the time extremely difficult, were the perfect storm for God to act.

Nearly 90% of the congregation turned out for prayer that morning and every morning that week. In fact, this week of prayer turned into an amazing ten weeks of prayer and fasting in which two things happened.

First, a spirit or repentance sprung from our hearts as we recognised our dependencies upon an institutional construct of church, a reliance on things (not necessarily all bad) other than the Lordship of Christ in our midst. I still remember that moment when, bowed on my knees, with tears streaming down my face as I repented of my own misplaced affections and loyalties, I heard someone's heartfelt confession of their dependence on my teaching! I was well and truly run through. (Just where Father God wanted me). The second thing that happened was an Acts 1:8 block-buster. In our own way, we experienced God pour out His heart for the nations upon us. Up until that moment, my every thought was, "How do we get more people involved in our church ministry?"

Yes, I was sincere in my efforts and desired to see people from our city come to know Jesus and find family in our congregation. Yes, I prayed for the other churches in our city—and prayed with the pastors of the other churches in the city—but honestly, I never really concerned myself with anyone except the success of our immediate spiritual community. This all changed in those ten weeks. Suddenly, nations on the other side of the world burdened my heart to breaking point.

Without overplaying this, I feel we've lived out the last decade in large part from the well dug in those ten weeks. Of course, we've been blessed immeasurably by the unfolding of this adventure for more than a decade now … the grace celebrated in every success, the mercy experienced in every failure; the wisdom learned in both, and the many, many memories etched in my mind.

But let me take a moment to spotlight that original prophetic word from 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3—the one I blame everything on!

After reminding the Corinthians they belonged to God, literally betrothed to Christ (v. 2), Paul then expressed his concern that they had been "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (v. 3). The NIV reads: "from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." The word "simplicity" does not mean we must be simplistic or narrow, dull and one-dimensional; not at all! It refers to a single-minded allegiance to God where He is the Centre around which we find our orbit; the essential Source that fans us into full flame, the Sustainer that brings every colour of Divine Life into our beings. And the pointed implication is that this requires no artificial prop or external life-support systems. "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

For me, this word is the genesis of our understanding of simple church and urges us to focus on what is essential, vital and primary; careful to avoid allowing anything else to usurp the Pre-
eminence of Christ in our personal and communal lives. There are many other secondary aspects of traditional church experience that are in themselves not bad. Remember, there is great freedom in Christ. As Paul explained, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Simplicity does not mean we become suspicious or phobic about everything; in my opinion, this is a ditch many in 'house church' circles tend to slip into. It simply means we learn to be content in Him in our midst, vigilant to avoid becoming dependent on anything else—whether this be a style of worship, a person or leader, a specific gifting such as teaching or prophecy, a course or programme, blah blah.

The question we regularly ask of ourselves as Christ-followers is this:

"Am I essentially connected to Father through Christ by the Spirit? Am I living out of a firsthand, vital relationship with the Godhead?" (Ephesians 2:18)

And the question we ask frequently as Kingdom communities is this:

"Is our communal life wrapped around His Presence in our midst? Are we alive in the Spirit, in love with one another and about our Father's Kingdom mission in our world?" (Matthew 18:20; 22:37-39; 28:18-20)

But what happened after the ten weeks of prayer?

Following on those first ten weeks, we embarked on a challenging transition from a congregational church into a fellowship of simple church communities around our city. From a centralised, hierarchical-based construct we completely decentralised initiative and responsibility trusting for each simple church to be self-governing as spiritual parents facilitated a communal life through their homes. These simple church communities continued to enjoy a collective sense of life together in terms of mission, and in the unfolding apostolic vision that began to emerge. Significantly, the primacy of our relationships allowed a healthy yet fluid structure to emerge. Since then we have seen Kingdom pioneers sown into several nations as we've kept the missional fires of the Spirit in full flame and assisted people—as part of who we are as a Kingdom family, rather than a separate department or strategy—in responding to His prompting to "go".

Just as parents raise their children to release them to be parents in themselves, we've tried to become spiritual fathers who put our sons on our shoulders so that they fulfill their Kingdom destiny; rather than keeping them in our shadows to fulfill our church vision.

So what were the key factors then in making the shift?

It goes without saying that unless the Lord builds the house, we labour in vain (Psalm 127:1). Without the faithful, gracious leadership of God, we would not even have begun, let alone fully embraced His Kingdom perspective (despite making our fair share of mistakes). Having said that, I realise that saying this might do two things. Firstly, it might seem to suggest that we ought to derive some credit for heroically following the leading of the Lord. This is not true. Honestly, like children on Christmas morning, we just opened the next gift that appeared in front of us—we simply took the next step in front of us that He seemed to be revealing.

Secondly, it can minimise some of the valid factors that were in place, helping us through a tremendously challenging transition. And in this regard, two important ingredients stand out.

On the one hand, we as a church leadership and community were in one heart and one mind. It certainly helped that everyone felt God speak prophetically to us, rather than the senior pastor speaking on behalf of God in some scripted vision-casting address. God promised a commanded blessing where His people "dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1-3); note, "dwell" not merely meet once or twice a week. Through the prophetic words we received, we as a leadership of twenty-seven people and a community of nearly three hundred people came into agreement. And powerful things happen God's people agree around the Kingdom purpose of God.
On the other hand, we had spiritual mums and dads who cheered us on. This was a huge factor too, and kept us from making a heap of mistakes. My wife and I have walked with Tony & Marilyn Fitzgerald, who provide apostolic leadership to a family of relating churches in over fifty-two nations around the world, since 1995.

Incidentally, this context of relationships is called Church of the Nations; it’s not a denomination nor does it have headquarters somewhere in the world. Originally from Australia (now based in the USA but whose permanent address remains a seat on some aeroplane crossing some ocean somewhere on the earth), Tony & Marilyn's servant-heart is simply to equip and release others into their Kingdom destiny, and have done so for over four decades now. The fruit of this is captured in part in the phrase Church of the Nations; friends who share a collective vision to fulfil the Great Commission while holding to common Kingdom values—people who just don’t want to fly solo.

Inviting Tony & Marilyn's perspective into our wrestles with God's prophetic word and the transitional process we embarked on saved us from reacting to the criticism we received from other churches in our city and the pastor's fraternal I had been a part of. They also helped us avoid writing off traditional churches thinking we're somehow central in God's economy; rather learning to appreciate and respect the journey that we're all on. Their presence—in person on several occasions and through continual email and telephonic correspondence—provided a base of wise counsel that helped us navigate through the megashift from a congregational, pastoral construct to a Kingdom, missional context.

Has it cost you something?
Everything!
From selling all the properties we owned as a church over a decade ago (which at the time seemed so difficult to do but in light of what was to come was a cake-walk);

to closing down all our "successful programmes" we ran (killing more than a few sacred cows in the process; mine were the first to go);

to effectively firing myself as a salaried "pastor" (and explaining this to "pastor" friends some of whom responded, should I say, in less than helpful ways);

to (and this was even harder) helping those on staff look for alternative income sources as we redirected our finances to apostolic mission; to dying a thousand deaths to my ego (and still counting);

to moving numerous times as a family to model this missional lifestyle (my oldest daughter had moved nine times before her eighth birthday);

to leaving parents (and the children’s grandparents) and siblings behind knowing that seeing them again may only be for a few weeks in a few years time (and yes, we are a very close knit family who would prefer to see each other much more often);

to sending true "sons" in the faith into uncharted waters, believing in them and the God they trusted – but lying awake at night wondering if I've sent them to their doom;

to being on the other side of the ocean when "sons" and churches struggled in the inevitable warfare against darkness, feeling helpless to help, many times incorrectly wearing the guilt of any set back or failure;

to … (I'm sure there is more to come) …
(and this is just my part in the story; the rest of team I serve with could possibly make this list three times the length)

Has it been worth it?
Absolutely! He is so worth it!
Not only do I live in the context of an organic missional team experiencing a sense of rest and fulfilment in Him I could never have dreamed of despite how busy we are and the cost paid to date, my true joy lies in seeing those equipped for the work of ministry.

Ordinary believers, like myself, doing extraordinary exploits because we're no longer serving a "system;" we're serving an extraordinary God who is the King of His Kingdom, the Lord of His harvest, the Head of His church and the Shepherd of His sheep. The "government rests on His shoulder"—not ours—and "of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6, 7). Amen! While we're certainly a work in process, as we often say, we're ruined and we're glad!

So what are you doing in Australia?
As part of serving with a missional team involved in four countries at the time, we sensed God was sending us as a family to Melbourne Australia to cooperate with what God was doing in this city.
We felt that Melbourne was an apostolic sending city and that from this city, God’s missional people would be thrust around the world to spark Kingdom exploits. We also believe that God wants to bring a renewed revelation of the Father-heart of God to this nation, one that unlocks an intergenerational sense of purpose and community, “turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6).

Having arrived in February 2009, with two young children and four suitcases, not knowing a single person in Melbourne, we were amazed to walk into a number of God-ordained relationships and various God-initiated open doors.

Our passion is to help followers of Jesus rediscover the simplicity and power of missional community life centred on Jesus Christ while grasping a Gospel of the Kingdom mindset. For us, this translates into both simple church communities that are alive, in love and on mission together, and a full appreciation of the glorious Body of Christ no longer divided and fractured.

Towards the former goal, thriving simple church communities, I host a website that contributes a number of articles and free resources for those exploring simple church values. You can have a look-see here: http://www.yourkingdomcomeyes.com/

And with respect to the latter, a healthy and vibrant Body of Christ, I’m privileged to offer leadership into a context called Converge—which consists of various simple church practitioners and communities building relationships across the city, working synergistically for Kingdom advance. You can find out more about Converge here: http://www.connectionpoint.au.com. Finally, we would like to say thank you to Bessie and the many others who have made us feel at home in this beautiful “South land of the Holy Spirit”.

Craig R Kirby

What could potentially sabotage your group?

- Inward rather than outward focus?
- Dominating leadership?
- Fuzzy leadership issues?
- Unresolved conflict?
- Focusing on doctrine rather than Jesus?
- Over or under structuring?
- Not having a balance of the serious and fun?
- Not coming to grips about ministry to/with children and/or teens?
- Someone’s needs dominating the meetings?
- Expectations not met?

Which one would you put as #1 and why? I would like to publish some responses in the next issue. (Ed)

Candytuft

A reflection of the Christian journey

I imagined the roots of this dainty cluster of flowers,
Having its beginnings in the dirty soil,
Hidden from the light and unclothed in beauty.
Over time the roots dug deeper and more strongly
Into the earth and finally matured, pushing up
Into the light and revealing the Creator’s touch
Of beauty, for all to see and delight in.

Yvonne Morey, Qld
(In response to Joan White’s photo )
When I saw the email about the get together I had a ‘dare not hope’ hit me in my heart. Well God made a way for 3 Aussie girls to travel the Pacific to attend this Luke 10 conference in Denver, Colorado led by John White.

Three women were asked to speak about ‘Women in leadership’... one from the USA, Maree Watson from Australia and little muggins me. The lady from the States deferred. I felt guided to set the tone, and for Maree to knock them over! Neither of us felt as though we were really qualified, but John White would not take ‘no’ for an answer.

I shared about my background as a draftsperson in a strongly male field, as well as insights I had been given by my faith peers and scripture. In this we shared points such as ‘not to lord it over’ ‘not be a top down style of leadership’... ‘is your thinking a world system or is it Kingdom style’ ... ‘servant - bottom up type thinking?’ 'Does your mindset need changing and how do we change it?' The Holy Spirit is needed...

Maree was led to share from her journey in learning to hear the voice of God. The Lord asked her to ask the group 3 questions...
1. What has the Lord brought you out of?
2. What has the Lord brought you into?
3. Lord who do you say I am?

Everyone had an opportunity to write down their answers & share with the group. Then we had an opportunity to all pray for one at a time. What was exciting was hearing what the Lord said to each one and how it impacted them... Helping them step into their God-given function with the confidence that God gave that day.

There was a broad range of people in regards to house church from seekers and those in it for a while... from different parts of the USA. For this reason there were ‘tracks’ to attend... skills to explore and learn.

Other things that happened...

Table churches - we were assigned groups of about 5 people. Here you 'checked in', then had a time of listening to the Lord and a prayer time together after sharing. This helped people connect at a heart level... New people were amazed at the rapidity of this and the deep connections that were made.

The 'World Café' provided an interesting process to get the group focussed on a number of questions then to seek the Lord for His input. Through the gifts of those present people gained a picture of His heart for direction. The atmosphere became charged with excitement and I'm sure most, if not all, were very encouraged.

Annette Land (OIKOS Brisbane Sth)

What would I do differently?

By Neil Cole
Recently I was asked to describe what I would do differently if I were to start again, knowing what I know now. Here was my response.

First, I would begin in the harvest and start small. Don’t start with a team of already-saved Christians. We think that having a bigger and better team will accelerate the work, but it doesn’t. In fact, it has the opposite effect. It is better to have a team of two, since the right two makes the work even better: an apostle and prophet together will lay the foundation of a movement. The churches birthed out of transformed lives are healthier, reproductive, and growing faster. It is about this: a life changed. Never forget that.

Second, I would allow God to build around others. Don’t start in your own home; find a person of peace and start in that home. Read Matthew 10 and Luke 10, and do it.

Third, I would empower others from the start. Don’t lead too much. Let the new believers do the work of the ministry without your imposed control. Let the excitement of a new life carry the movement rather than your intelligence and persuasiveness.

Continued on page 15
Living at the Edge of Time—An ancient retelling of the popular end-times tale and its critical Kingdom implications today. by Craig R. Kirkby
Craig is a practitioner of disciple-making and simple church multiplication in Melbourne. His story starts on p.8.

This is not a book you can read with distractions around you. Craig gives us much to think about in each chapter. Although it is a very demanding read in some ways, he intersperses profound challenging fun bits, usually about himself, or quirky sayings that help to keep us grounded and engaged.

In the opening chapters he counters the paranoia and craziness that surrounded 'end-times' teaching back in the 80s and 90s. He points particularly to the unreasonable impact that the 'Left Behind' series had amongst many Christians. By the way, in dealing with the parable in Matthew 25 about the Virgins and their lamps, he ponders why it assumed that the '5 taken' go to heaven and that those 'left behind' miss out. It is reasonable to assume that Jesus meant that the '5 taken' are to be set aside while those left behind are the blessed ones who get to stay and reign with Him!

His main thesis is that a true and biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God and it's fulfilment in the Second Coming of Jesus is foundational to living out the Kingdom mandate and the Great Commission now. He stresses that 'the multiplying of church communities (or Kingdom families) is, importantly, not the goal; it is the strategy or means to achieve the Kingdom mandate,' (p.143) Also, on p.131—'Jesus said He would build His church as we advance His Kingdom rule by His Spirit. One of the amazing tragic adventures in missing the point that has characterised the modern church is that we have adopted God’s role and expected Him to do ours. We have attempted to build His church, hoping that He would advance His Kingdom. The result: we build our own little empires and take our eyes off the Kingdom mandate.'

Jesus builds His church as we advance His Kingdom!

The book is divided into four sections.

Part 1 The Coming of Christ—without a victorious, hope-injecting eschatological passion, we'll neglect our Kingdom mandate or misrepresent it.

Part 2 What's the Big Deal about Heaven? - without a biblical view of heaven, we'll relegate the message of the Kingdom to the hereafter or have no hope at all.

Part 3 The King and His Kingdom. Unless we have a clear grasp on the dynamic reality of the Kingdom, we'll settle for false finish lines.

Part 4 Mission Impossible? Unless we have a clear and compelling Kingdom vision, we'll never carry out the Kingdom exploits assigned to us.

He shares with thorough biblical insight and quotes profusely from Scripture. He encourages us to see that we are not merely 'saved for heaven' but 'saved to reign with Jesus' and in this reign we will be sharing with Him in the promised making of all things new—the ultimate restoration of God's purposes in the universe and in His creation. He then encourages us to see that Christians who are, at the best, cruising along in life until they get to heaven, or at the worst, gritting their teeth to cope in this wicked world until they get 'raptured' out of it or die and go to heaven, are missing something so glorious and vital in the here and now. Craig shows that the Bible tells of a future far more exciting and in the meantime we are called to demonstrate and build the reality of the Kingdom that is 'now' in readiness for its fulfilment when Jesus returns.

Some sub-titles to whet your appetite -
*What is the overarching backdrop of the Kingdom message?*
*Training for Reigning.*
*Jesus, the Politician. Does the Kingdom of God inspire us to improve our world?*
*Signs that Make you Wonder? What place do signs and wonders have in the Kingdom of God?*
*What are the essentials for unity in the Body of Christ?*
*Why is community so important.*

I encourage OIKOS readers to get hold of this book. I would also encourage a serious approach allowing for prayerful consideration of the material. Take notes, underline, or use a highlighter. Whatever method will assist a serious study of the contents. At the end, I am sure you will be determined to be found with your hands on the plough when the Lord returns.

"Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20)

Bessie
Continued from p. 13

Fourth, I would let Scripture, not my assumptions, lead. Question all your ministry assumptions in light of Scripture, with courage and faith.

There is nothing sacred but God’s Word and Spirit in us; let them lead rather than your own experience, teachings, and tradition.

Fifth, I would rethink leadership. The Christian life is a process. There is not a ceiling of maturity that people need to break through to lead. Set them loose immediately, and walk with them through the process for a while. Leadership recruitment is an end. We are all recruiting from the same pond, and it is getting shallower and shallower. Leadership farming is what is needed.

Any leadership development system that doesn’t start with the lost is starting in the wrong place. Start at the beginning, and begin with the end in mind. Mentor life on life and walk with them through their growth in being, doing, and knowing. The end is not accumulated knowledge but a life of obedience that will be willing to die for Jesus. The process isn’t over until there is a flat line on the screen next to the bed.

Sixth, I would create immediate obedience in baptism. Baptise quickly and publicly and let the one doing the evangelising do the baptising. The Bible doesn’t command us to be baptised, but to be baptisers. It is absolutely foolish the way we hold the Great Commission over our people and then exclude them from obeying it at the same time. We need to let the new convert imprint on the Lord for protection, provision, training, and leading, rather than on other humans.

Seventh and last, I would settle my ownership issues. Stop being concerned about whether ‘your’ church plant will succeed or not. It isn’t yours in the first place. Your reputation is not the one on the line; Jesus’ is. He will do a good job if we let him. If we have our own identity and reputation at stake in the work, we will tend to take command. Big mistake. Let Jesus get the glory and put his reputation on the line; He can take care of Him-self without your help.

It is time for faith that fears inaction, not failure. It is time to stand up high, boldly announce, ’To infinity and beyond!’ … and then take the leap. You will either fly or fall with style – and both are worth it.
“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46-47