

SUMMER 2018

Vol. 27 No. 4

OIKOS

AUSTRALIA

*JESUS eats and
drinks with US!*

Errol Muller

How House Churches Should **PREPARE for DISASTER**

Rad Zdero

WITHOUT MORE MISSIONARIES WE WILL LOSE

Martin Bragg

Disciple Making | Multiplication | Kingdom | Simple Church | Missional Movements



ARE YOU EQUIPPED WITH THE BASICS? The “GO!” Tools

OIKOS Australia

Oikos exists to build the Kingdom of God by multiplying disciple-makers and simple church

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NEXT EDITION: The Autumn edition of OIKOS Magazine will appear in April. Suggestions and news are welcome. Please send them in by March 1st.

We all want to see the Work of Gods kingdom grow and advance but sometimes it seems confusing as to what we should focus on next. Prayer is the starting point and then ensuring that we are regularly involved with the core practices. One leader said we need to be "conspicuously spiritual" in our lives - just be open about our connection with Jesus and its impact in our lives!

Jesus gave us the focus for our lives in *The Great Commandment* and *the Great Commission*. The Great Commandment involves "loving God with all our hearts and mind" and maintain a close relationship with him. The second part of the Great Commandment that Jesus gave, involves loving our neighbour as our selves. This involves loving caring, and sharing with them, and if they are open to Jesus and the Gospel helping them to become his followers. We do not want to focus only on outreach but also on genuinely being loving people.

The other key focus Jesus gave is in the "Great Commission" to "make disciples of all nations" and we need to ensure that we are equipped with the basic "tools" to do this. Taking the Great Commission wording to "Go into all the world" - I call these the "Go" skills. They are not a formula or a set of magical words but rather some basic skills that can be used under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

These include:

- 1. Listening to peoples interests and needs** and asking good questions that can lead to spiritual conversations.
- 2. It also involves offering to pray for a particular need** that has surfaced and trusting God with the outcome. I have prayed with people that they will experience Gods peace in their lives and have seen this happen.
- 3. Bridging conversations to the spiritual is an important skill.** It can pick up on a need or concern or simple to ask if the person has any spiritual beliefs or convictions? It is best not to argue, but to simply listen and ask questions. In talking with people with a New Age orientation I often try to reframe the spiritual towards Jesus and the Holy Spirit or seeking God's guidance etc. I talked recently with a young lady about walking in "the light" and she embraced the language readily. I then sought to link this with jess as the light of the world
- 4. Connecting and sharing meals** with people is very important. Jesus made food a key part of his instructions as he sent out his followers in Luke 10. He told his followers to accept and eat what is put before them. Accepting hospitality is so important as eating together builds friendship and understanding.
- 5. Sharing one's testimony** is so important as people are interested in the experiences of others. I try not to use religious language like "born again", "saved", "repentance" etc., but to just use every day language as much as possible. A friend who attends our

(Continued on page 18)

paint me a mural... call it CHURCH

Let's paint a picture.

Let's paint a Puerto Rican single mom and her toddling half-Mexican daughter. Let's add a teenage black boy. And his two sisters, one twelve years old, the other seventeen. Let's paint a Nigerian doctor, and a white nurse who was raised in Hawaii. Let's paint a white college student studying fashion, and a black one studying audiology. A Brazilian soccer coach, and his newly wedded dancer wife. A Colombian railroad worker. A black rapper. A white guy who owns his own computer business. A black teen mom who has been separated from her daughter. Let's paint a half-Argentinean guy from California and his roommate from Kansas. And let's add one more white girl into that mix.

Stroke that brush and depict them sharing a meal. Someone makes some soup. Someone brings some bread and cheese. Sandwiches are made. A pretty cake appears, and someone else traipses through the door with homemade mint tea in hand.

Let's paint this small crowd sharing this meal in the living room of a two-bedroom triplex located on the border of the impoverished and crime-ridden part of the city. Let's paint a scene where the fifteen-year-old black kid leads the whole group in remembering Jesus' great sacrifice by offering them a broken piece of a pita chip dipped in glass of Coca-Cola. Stories are told from the week, stories of how the God who upholds the universe by the word of His Power invades each of their own little worlds.

Paint a book with words of life, and everyone's hands held open on their laps.

Paint understanding pouring out in the form of simplicity off the lips of the twelve-year-old. Paint tears in a few eyes. Paint light dancing in many hearts. Let's be sure to paint smiles. And great sobs. And uncontrollable laughter.

Let's paint the picture of these beautiful people praying for the sick in their midst. Show how some are healed immediately. Let's not forget to add the scene where one girl's leg is shorter than the other and grown miraculously on the spot. Paint the prophetic words that fly around the room, and the ones that fly across the city via phones and laptops.

Depict the teenagers helping

the single mom distract her little one, so she can have a twenty-minute break.

Paint that picture in such a way that we know that a few of those individuals have not yet made decisions to follow Jesus. And several just started following Him a few months ago. A handful more have known Him for just a couple of years. Only a few have really known Him long.

In the middle of the painting, show the high school students breaking up fights at their strife-ridden schools. Show the Nigerian doctor sharing the good news of Jesus to a pregnant girl in his clinic. Paint the nurse praying fearlessly over each of her ill patients, at the risk of losing her job. Paint a few of the crowd driving their dear friend to the emergency room and taking her tiny kids home for the weekend. By the way, their friend is a stripper & addict with sickness ravaging her body. Let's paint a scene where the computer business owner takes flowers to the eighteen-year-old while she recovers in the hospital after being shot in a drive-by shooting.

Paint these beautiful people crowded around a fountain nearby, as someone who just experienced the forgiveness of Jesus gets baptized by someone who has never baptized anyone before.

I wanted to paint a picture. I suppose we painted a mural. I suppose if we painted all this it would take up the whole side of one of these dilapidated buildings I can see out the back window that faces Troost Avenue. If we paint with broad strokes it might cover a few.

What shall we name this lovely mural?

Let's call it church.

(Note: This is not a far-off dream. This is not a bunch of nice ideas. This is my present reality.

I have personally experienced all of these things happening within the last month, both here with my local spiritual family and as I have spent time with spiritual families on the other side of the nation. I am in awe of what can happen when people begin to encounter the love of God for them. I've tasted the miracle that Jesus called "church." And all I want is MORE. This, times a million, doused with even greater hope, greater faith, greater compassion.)



Lindsay Ellyson



JESUS eats and drinks with US!

I'm convinced Jesus personally eats and drinks *with us*, each time we as his followers 'break bread together' *and* amid all our celebrations of God's goodness and kindness in this world! It was said of the saintly Dr. Andrew Murray (renowned South African preacher, author, revival witness and missions mobiliser) that a meal at the Murray's was like a Communion Service.

Turning to Lk. 22, Jesus' *grace* is surely magnificent! Ch. 22 opens with Judas' sell-out of Jesus to the temple officials, who had been plotting his death all along – hence his secret preparations for the Passover meal with his nearest and dearest (v. 7-13). At the beginning of the meal Jesus declares his 'eager desire' (double emphasis in the Greek) to share it with his companions, before his Calvary. 'You've *no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover meal with you before my time of suffering!*' (MSG) He's aware of Peter's imminent threefold denial (22:31ff) as well as his friends' squabble as to who would be the greatest in the kingdom (v. 24ff). **Nevertheless**, Jesus enthuses over this last opportunity of table fellowship. So is his grace toward us also, undeserving and broken as we are.

I was also intrigued by Jesus' linking of the Lord's Supper with his kingdom. "*For I tell you that I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God... I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes*" (v. 16 & 18). Note also Jesus' earlier response to the Pharisees' question as to *when* the kingdom would come: "*The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within (or, 'among') you*" (17:20-21).

In grappling with 'the kingdom' today we have to bear in mind over a century's 'brainwashing' of the Western Church by the unfortunate 'dispensationalism' and 'futurism' of J.N. Darby (1800-1882), C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) and their successors. Thank God that presently, across the globe, countless thousands of serious Jesus-followers have, after wrestling with the text, come to a more biblical understanding of 'the gospel of the kingdom' (Mk. 1:14-20, etc). Here's a brief synopsis of that more biblical understanding...

Erroll Muller

G.E. Ladd (1911-1982) of Fuller Seminary was one of the first American theologians to seriously challenge the dispensational status quo in that country ('not much to quo about?'). He did so through his lectures and books which are still in print today. I was introduced to his writings in my seminary days, and I owe him much. Here are some basic definitions by Ladd: *"The kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God... and derivatively, the sphere in which this rule is experienced."* *"The end times were inaugurated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and thus there are both **already** and **not yet** aspects to the kingdom of God."* (my bold emphasis)

South African theologian Dr. Derek Morpheu, built on this – he sees the kingdom as encompassing 'signs and wonders and social justice.' The 'last days' began with Jesus and Pentecost (cf. Acts 2) and will culminate in his personal return at the end of the age.

- Influential American pastor Brian Zahnd has also put it simply, *"The kingdom of God doesn't look like... Rome in the 4th century, Byzantium in the 6th century, Spain in the 15th century, France in the 17th century, England in the 19th century, America in the 21st century. The kingdom of God looks like Jesus! Jesus healing the sick, feeding the poor, forgiving the sinner, raising the dead."*
- While in no way detracting from Christ's climactic second coming, the fact is, if we are honest with Scripture, Jesus has 'come' to his own in a number of ways since his resurrection. He shared two post-resurrection meals with his disciples (Jn. 21:12ff, a fish-barbecue on the beach); Lk. 24:30ff, a simple supper with Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas in Emmaus Village). This was followed by his 'coming' through the Holy Spirit's person at Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus' Olivet discourse on 'Signs of the End of the Age' (Mt. 24) is complex, but it assumes an over-lapping of such 'signs' and their fulfillment, some signs 'already' fulfilled and others 'not yet' fulfilled. I've often used the childhood game of skidding a flattish pebble across a smooth surface of water – the pebble bounces several times before finally sinking away. Prophecy may be fulfilled a number of times, to a lesser or greater

degree. In Mt. 24 many verses were fulfilled with the terrible Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD (v. 1ff, v. 15ff). See my online footnote for more details** Other sections have been fulfilled down through Church history, others are yet to be fulfilled.

Back to my opening sentence. 'Jesus eats and drinks with us each time his followers break bread together, each time they celebrate some or other aspect of God's goodness and kindness in this world!'

Why? Because he is the King of the kingdom, a kingdom that has come, a kingdom that is coming right now through prayer and obedience, a kingdom that is still to come in full glory at the end of time. Despite the whole world being under the control of the evil one at this time (1 Jn. 5:19), the Lord reigns! My sage old College principal used to say, 'The devil may have his finger in the pie, but remember God has his hand on the devil's finger!'

By way of application, Dorothy Day (1897-1980), renowned Catholic social activist among the poor, helps us in the right direction: *"We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship."*

There are some imperatives here...

- Loving God and our neighbour as ourselves (Mt. 22:34ff).
- Regularly gathering for 'breaking of bread,' preferably in a group small enough to really get to know one another and with maximum participation of those present (1 Pet.

2:9-10) (the greater the cultural and social mix, the better).

- The development of true companionship within the body and beyond.
- Celebration of God's many goodnesses around a table, e.g. a birthday, wedding anniversary, etc.
- Celebration of Communion in public space. I'll never forget breaking bread with a terminal cancer sufferer, who had just come to faith, in a tea garden. It deeply impacted the four of us plus the young waitress. What about couples celebrating Communion in a park or on the beach front? I have been privileged to celebrate Communion with fellow-believers at the gates of a very poor township school in my city and as far afield as at a Buddhist monastery door in Central China – I believe both occasions were a witness to the curious onlookers and the unseen spiritual powers of Eph. 3:8-11 and 6:10-12.

So c'mon, let's celebrate in the assurance that the King of love eats and drinks with us at each banqueting table, both in this world and the one to come!

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Can I Get a WITNESS?

The Mythical Commission

“Can I get a witness?” I have heard that in jest and I have heard that in reality. People have looked to others requesting their witness of an experience. This request has become a personal venture. But in reality and in truth, the witness has been made manifest.

There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through Him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:6-9 NASB)

The man called John the Baptist was sent from God as a witness to tell folks about Christ. John the Voice, if you will. He prepped people to the reality of the Fulfillment of the Law Who was on His way.

This is one of the first signs that a Legend is being formed in the minds of people. You see, people heard this witness. They hear the testimony of Christ. Yet, they did not see Him. “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.” (John 1:10 NASB) But because of the witness, the world was forever changed.

John the Baptist was so ready to testify, he was kicking in his mother’s (Elizabeth) womb when Mary came close to Elizabeth. There we see he began his life as a sent-from-God witness. And when Jesus’ ministry was established, John the Baptist was there to testify to who Christ is.

Witness

The Legend of Witnessing is the first waters we cross. The Four Spiritual Laws, the Roman Road to Salvation, tell all your friends about Christ. These are some things that well up when the word witness comes up.

Witness is a noun. Witnessing is a verb. Testimony is a noun. Testifying is a verb. This is where things get testy with some of us. We see the noun and verb and grab the verb. I can grab the verb and do the verb action. We choose to witness.

What if, we chose no verb?

What if, we chose no action, but to be?

Mark L Champion

We would then connect with the Divine Nature inside of us and access Divine Rationale and live and move based off of the leading of the Holy Spirit according to God's will.

We would no longer be doing.
We would be being.

And when we be, we are ... a witness, a testimony ... of the power of the Holy Spirit given to us through the Life of Jesus Christ and the Will of God.

Commission

Going further past the oceans of Legend, we look past witness and to commission. Some have called it great. But could it be a myth? Could what we know as the Great Commission be the Mythical Commission?

The seas that takes us to the Mythical Commission are very expectant. Through the centuries after Christ, we have put in our scriptures into different sections, each of which are called a "pericope." In Matthew we have focused on this pericope called, "The Great Commission."

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20 NASB)

This is how Matthew ends his writing. This is how many Christians begin their journey of doing. And unintentionally escape being. We have been told that this passage is a command for all Christians and disciples of Christ. And once new believers hear the command to "Go," the pressures of doing affix themselves to the soul of these new believers.

Discouragement sets in. Guilt. Shame. For by our own power, we are incapable of fulfilling this so called commandment, which is actually just a pericope.

The Journey to the Source

Luke has a record, in the Gospel of Luke, of Christ as He leaves the earth and

ascends. Then in The Acts of the Apostles, Luke writes about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Church.

But before these two out-of-this-world events, Luke writes down something that give us insight into the Myth and Legend of today's post.

*Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **You are witnesses of these things.** And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24: 44-49 NASB)*

Jesus Christ Himself revealed to these disciples the Scriptures in a way they understood them. Not from a human perspective, but from a Life-giving, Divine perspective. Then He stated that these disciples were witnesses ... nouns. Then there was a promise being sent, but they were to stay still until that happened. So, what was the promise?

*The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "**you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**"*

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by

*His own authority; but **you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.**" (Acts 1:1-8 NASB)*

The Legend of Witnessing, a verb, has been enough for some people they have committed their lives to doing this task for an eternal reward. The Myth of the Great Commission, a pericope, is a tactic that can be used as a tool of oppression that can lead to guilt and shame when we are unable to meet certain standards made by man.

However, the very words of Christ are our source. The promise of God is that we will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And at that moment, we will receive His power! As a result of His power we are then witnesses ... nouns. And not just any witnesses, but His witnesses.

We are not a witness to a gospel that man has created. We are not a witness to the programs of the institutions we have given our lives to. We are not a witness to the beautiful structures we have built with our hands.

We are Holy Spirit baptized, God sent, Christ testimonies to the world. He has brought us to a certain space on and in His creation for the sole purpose of His Eternal Purpose. He wills to have a witness in the remotest part of the earth. But you don't have to go. You don't have to do. Your only response to a Divine Revelation of Christ is to just be.

He will send you out to fulfil His will.

So relax. Breathe in Christ. Allow Him to fill you up with His Life. Be with people that desire the same. Rest and abide in Him together. Enjoy the assembly of those who are hungry for Christ alone.

He will prepare and equip you to be you in Him. As you are lead into opportunities to bring a testimony of Christ ...

Be a noun ... a witness to the greatest story ever told.



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Following are two blogs from a couple of our Kiwi friends who are involved in Simplechurch works in New Zealand. Andrew Stirling and his wife Irene head up a group out of Tokoroa, and Jack and Averil Guerin are seasoned advocates of New Testament church. Follow their blogs and pray for them.

THE FUNDAMENTAL FLAW WITH HOME CHURCH

Andrew Stirling

I have been involved with home church for nearly four years now. Here is a brief summary of how it all started for me. After becoming a follower of Jesus at the age of 24 and then attending a traditional church, I was getting frustrated because I noticed very few new believers coming along and I wasn't growing in my faith. I was reading my Bible daily and saw a big difference between the church of today and the church I read about in the book of Acts. I tried to speak to the pastor about this, but he wasn't interested in changing anything. Eventually I got so frustrated with the traditional church that I made the tough decision to stop attending.

After I made this step, I was missing fellowship with other believers, so I met up with them in my home or their home. I enjoyed this so much that I sought this out at any opportunity.

Going from attending a religious weekly service to meeting in homes was an important step that I needed to take to strengthen my faith. My story is similar to a lot of other people I've spoken to who now do home church. A lot of them relate how the step from traditional church to home church isn't as simple as going from A to B because of the various traditions we believe which aren't Biblical in any way.

Traditions aren't always easy to see or to break off.

Here are some examples of traditions that took me a while to break.

- We can only do church on Sunday mornings.
- We have to start our meetings with worship music.
- One person does the majority of the speaking.

To become the Biblical church that Jesus intended required some drastic changes in my understanding of what church is. I now understand that church occurs whenever followers of Jesus meet together. The venue and program don't matter, and all believers are given freedom to share what is on their heart because they are all brothers.

Another thing I have noticed, after talking to many others who are involved in home church, is that they talk about a blockage somewhere that they can't quite put their finger on. They have great fellowship and learn amazing things about God together in their groups, but there is little to no multiplication. Instead it seems to be a long slow grind to see any growth. I believe that is caused by a tradition which is creating a fundamental flaw in most home churches.

The tradition is that we need to invite people to our venue to teach them about God.

Let's say a new believer (let's call him Frank) comes to your group and enjoys it. After a few weeks Frank talks to a friend of his at work (let's call him Bob) about what the group does and how much his faith is growing. Bob sounds interested in this so Frank invites him along to the next time they meet up. Sounds promising, right? But there is a problem. What is wrong with this scenario?

Jesus gave his disciples practical instructions on how to make more disciples. In Luke 10:6-7 he told them to **Go** and find a person of peace and stay with them in their house. He also said in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples of all nations and **teach** them how to follow his commandments.

This means we should be meeting regularly in the house of a person of peace and teaching them there, rather than in our own house. If we keep expecting people to come to our house, it

is no different to a traditional model of putting all your energy into getting bums on seats.

Think back to when you were a child. If you wanted to spend more time with a good friend, you would usually a) go to their house, b) invite them back to your house or c) meet somewhere neutral. It would be very rare that you would d) both go to the house of a third party. In the above illustration, Frank and Bob have a relationship. It would make sense for them to meet at either Frank's house, Bob's house or a neutral venue if neither house is suitable. Ideally, what Frank should have done is gone to Bob's house to facilitate a new home church there. He would then be following Jesus' command in Luke 10 to stay in the house of a person of peace and teach that person how to follow him. Frank would also be modelling what Bob needs to do if he wants to make disciples in the future.

Instead of focusing on adding to existing churches, we should be focusing on multiplying churches.

Every member of your home church should be encouraged to go and start another home church.

This tradition is something I've only recently broken off. Since then I have started to travel and teach people from house to house as Paul did in Acts 20:20. I am starting to see people mature now more than I ever have before and more labourers being raised up for the harvest. I don't try to build a church in one place now. I focus on visiting people in their homes and making disciples like Jesus told me to and trust him to build his church like he said he would.

ANDREW & IRENE STIRLING
www.homechurch.nz



FIVE GREAT GUIDING PRINCIPLES Jack Guerin

Embracing the blessing of not owning a church building.

Of course, if you have a building there may not be much you can do about that - though I did hear of a church in the UK who sold their building in order to give the money to a mission station! But if you don't own one, my advice is; don't get on the all-controlling mortgage merry-go-round of the Building Fund. Here's a number of reasons why not owning a church building is better than owning one.

- The Early church evangelised the then-known world without owning any real estate.
- The release of *so much* money. It is estimated that the world-wide church owns real estate with trillions of dollars. Imagine the good that money would achieve for health, education and evangelism.
- They give the impression that the Most High dwells in temples made by human hands.
- They anchor the church, hindering it from being the 'mobile force' it is meant to be.
- One sole-charge church leader said, "Owning a building shifted my emphasis from 'filling people' to 'filling a building'".

The New Testament example of financial freedom and generosity.

The opposite of the legal, restricting Old Testament tithe is the freedom of New Testament generosity. A quick read of 2 Cor. chaps 8 & 9 will validate this. In fact, if you use the O.T. Scriptures to practice tithing, you should practice keeping the Sabbath! Selah. My wife Averil and I sincerely tithed for 50 years. More recently we have changed to giving *money, possessions and time* as we've felt guided by God. And in no way do we want to go back to the mindless, non-responsible, Old Covenant tithe.

See www.simplechurchletters.com, "What Should Christians do With Their Money?" and, "Should a Christian Tithe.?"

Making the poor a priority.

I've already spoken about the 2,000 + Bible passages commanding us to be

generous to the poor. One of the great blessings of Simple Church is you've got plenty of money! With no property to pay for and maintain and no staff to pay and with people who are generous givers, you can easily help local and overseas situations where there's genuine need. And I'll leave you to count the 2,000 Scriptures, but here's one you may just have missed. It identifies Sodom's major sins and explains why God judged her - and it doesn't even mention the word "gay"! Ezekiel. 16:49.

Demystifying the role of the pastor.

After being involved in a life time of pastoral ministry I have learned some important truths. These include:

- Pastor (shepherd) is a gift, never a title -- except when applied to Jesus, Heb. 13:20, 21. Note Jesus' strict command regarding the use of titles, Matt. 23:6-12.
- The majority of Christians who have the gift of shepherding, rescuing, compassionate caring will never have a title, and never want one!
- The sole-leader in most churches today is more of a gifted CEO than a shepherd.
- There is no mention of the term "senior pastor" in the N.T.
- When Paul and Barnabas established churches, they appointed elders (plural) to lead the new flocks, Acts 14:23.
- This last point speaks to me of *team* leadership. I've experienced that during the last nine years and it beats the one-man-band hands down.
- James Rutz in his mind-boggling book, "Megashift" lists a sorry set of statistics revealing the percentage of (mostly sole-charge) pastors suffering 'burnout', 'discouragement', 'their job affecting their family negatively', 'struggling with Internet porn', and '70% of U.S. pastors who say they have no friends'!!! (page 120). I believe 'team' leadership would cut those stats to shreds as well as turn the idle pew-potatoes into functioning members of Christ's body.

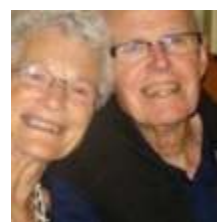
Major on making disciples and let God do the converting miracle, Acts 2:47b.

It's common knowledge that Jesus didn't tell us to make converts but to make disciples, Mt. 28:18-20. cf 2 Tim. 2:2.



Actually, Jesus didn't even tell us to plant churches, and nowhere did he tell us to invest? ginormous amounts of time, effort and expense on Sunday mornings in order to attract people to attend our amazing spectacle in the hope that the members wouldn't jump churches and hopefully, some people will pray the sinners prayer. (I hope the folk doing this know that, it takes an average of *four years* between conviction and conversion, according to a recent U.K. poll). Just imagine if all this Sunday morning energy was put into mature Christians, getting alongside younger-in-the-faith believers and walking them through the foundations of the Faith and letting them observe the older members' ministry and life-style. Wow! -- (stands for Walking on Water according to Robt Schuller).

Averil and I have, with others, prayer-walked the streets of a small town near where we live. We have now found (without looking) in this town a "man of peace", (see Luke 10), only in this case she is Gill. When praying about planting a church in Gill's town, we all felt that that should NOT be our goal. All that was needed was, first, *relationship, time-consuming* evangelism. This to be followed by instructing or discipling the people the Holy Spirit convicts, to do the same evangelism and the same disciple making. No doubt some sort of fellowship will grow out of this process, but that can wait for the important foundation to be laid.



JACK GEURIN and his wife Averil settled in Waikanae, NZ, after many years in full-time ministry in New Zealand and

Indonesia. It was there that their understanding of church changed. Read their story at simplechurchletters.com

Michael Butler

The Beauty of the Discovery Bible Study

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

Mark 11 (please read the rest of the story)

Photo:ben-white-126974-unsplash

There's something about a person reading the Bible for themselves. That is, as opposed to having someone else reading it to them. There is a difference.

This last week, we were invited to run church at the Northcott Housing Commission on Saturday evening, before cooking a bbq. We have been a few times. The expectation was established from the beginning; we were there to teach, and we had an audience. Imagine then, the surprise when we announced, "tonight we would like to do something a little different..."

Tonight, there would be no preacher or teacher, other than Christ through his Spirit, ever present. Tonight, everyone would read, everyone discuss and everyone have an opportunity to layout what the passage means to them. From a few simple questions – 'what does this passage tell us about Jesus' or 'what example does this give us to follow?' people began to share what the passage spoke to them.

Want to know what was the best thing about it all? The change in people's demeanour.

From the outset, doubt was replaced by a lighting up of people's face as they realised they could contribute. For years, all we have been taught to do – ever, is listen to somebody else, a priest perhaps. They read the Bible, and then tell us what it says and what we should think about it. Have you ever watched

someone who isn't used to reading the Bible, a believer or non-believer, actually read it out loud? Their physical features change, as their Spirit radiates.

By the end of the evening, people weren't asleep, they were wide awake, discussing, sharing thinking. At the end, all of us were challenged by this one question, "who will we share this with this week?" We went around the table, and each of us had to nominate somebody we would share the Fig Tree story with this week. Next week, when we come back again, we will all be held accountable for sharing the Gospel. Have we been obedient? A Gospel not just of knowledge, but of obedience.

This is the third Discovery Group I've been part of this week. All the groups have been small, ad hoc, in a local setting. All we need is a Bible, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. At least half the people have not been believers. Picture that, agnostics, Muslims, uncertainties – all of them discovering Christ by reading the Bible.

There is a paradigm shift happening around the World. Discovery Bible studies everywhere are transforming the way people discover Christ. Are they everything? No. Are we to worship them, or make a doctrine out of them? No, of course not. Years ago, when I grew up, it went something like this; we invite someone to church, they get saved by saying a prayer, and then they go through a disciple making programme to

become a disciple. They learn mostly information, doctrine, what we believe.

Today, as shown up largely in developing countries it goes more like this; believers, that is ordinary people like you and me, are walking into a community and beginning to show others how to discover Jesus through a Discovery Bible Study. As they begin to discover Jesus, so along the journey they become a disciple and perhaps eventually get saved.

Learning obedience from the outset, they then go out and begin to reproduce the model, looking for others in their community or another community, who will become, and then make disciples. We never take people out of their community, but rather take Christ into it. So Jesus is taken into a community, where he can be discovered by all, without the need of anyone – a priest, one that is ordained, a theologian, anybody except someone willing to obey the simple command of Christ, Go and make disciples.

How beautiful, how unpretentious Christ is. We should follow him.



MICHAEL AND SALLY BUTLER
lead a gathering in Sydney, Manly Disciple Makers. You can read of some of the

adventures on nobrokenreed.org or get in touch at justbutlers@gmail.com



3 reasons your small group is NOT a Home Church

Matthew Jacobson

This coming Sunday, millions of Christians will meet at various places of worship from Cathedrals to former football stadiums, to small church buildings. And, many others will meet in smaller groups inside their homes. However, the size, variety, and creativity of these church gatherings are not vast because of the Bible's instructive latitude. It's vast because we've mistaken spiritual activity with biblical community.

Just because Christians get together with other Christians on Sunday doesn't mean they are involved in a biblical Church meeting. To a growing number of believers, especially those fatigued by their experience with the institutional church, the best of intentions and a desire to meet are the only parameters for gathering as a local Church. But having our heart in the right place doesn't indicate doctrinal accuracy.

For those of us who value our good intentions too highly, the Bible has some hard lessons to teach. Remember the return of the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel 6:7? The physical journey of a Holy artefact that must not be carried by anyone except those of the Levite tribe (see 1 Chronicles 15:2). In that account, Uzzah (who was not a Levite) tries to prevent the Ark from falling off the cart by steadying it with his hand and is instantly struck dead by God. Uzzah's intentions were pure as the wind-driven snow. But, God wasn't interested in his

good intentions. He wanted obedience to His command.

Where God has spoken, he expects compliance—not from some rigid sense of duty but from a heart that desires to please him. If the way we are gathering as the local Church is contrary to the direct teaching found in the Bible, it's time to change. The example of the Church at Corinth should encourage us by demonstrating that a local assembly can be tremendously wrong and yet still be a part of God's Church . . . as long as we don't forget that change is required when we're walking contrary to God's ways. The only way to know if we are being obedient in the matters of the Church is if we are ordering our gathering according to the Bible.

Many Christians tired of institutional Christianity act like Anarchists—no order, no accountability, no government, and no consistent commitment to regularly attend a gathering with other believers. They're "over it" and done with "all that" and "Thank God, Almighty, we're free at last!"

Is the local Church you are a part of organized according to the direct teachings of the Bible or is it a combination of entrenched traditions, innovative ideas, and creativity designed to entertain? Or maybe you believe that because Jesus is your Sabbath, you aren't required to meet at all. What does the Bible say about the meeting of believers and how that meeting should be led?

First off, not attending the Church gathering is not an option. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Biblical Christians gather regularly with other believers. It's not a matter left up to personal desire, schedule, or creativity. We see from Acts 20:7 and the unmistakable inference of 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 that the disciples met weekly. This is the norm, practice, and instruction for the Church gathering from the very beginning.

Not gathering, gathering infrequently, or gathering in a manner out of step with biblical teaching indicates either ignorance or rebellion and is not an option for the Christian who desires to be obedient to the Word of God.

If you've already bought into the idea that we, as Christians, should gather regularly, great. But, how we gather matters, as well. The Bible is not silent on the purpose, structure, and content of the gathering of the Saints this side of Heaven, which is why three couples meeting for a little Sunday evening Bible reading and prayer is not a Church gathering. But wait, didn't Jesus say, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

Welcome to one of the most abused verses in the Bible. This passage has, literally, nothing to do with the general Church gathering of any size. If you read just a few verses prior, you'll quickly realize Jesus's statement is about the divine support you will receive when two or three that are meeting in his name come to deal with a sinful and unrepentant brother. It's not about Jesus being present and validating your small group because you and a friend met and prayed in His name.

If simply getting together with your Bibles isn't enough, then what constitutes a biblical Church meeting? For the vast majority of Christians today, it doesn't seem to matter—not because they are willfully opposed to what the Bible teaches but, more typically, they don't know what—or even if—the Bible has anything to say about the regular gathering of Christians.

There are two types of information regarding the Church meeting that can be found in the Bible: description and prescription. When we encounter a description of what the early Church did, we shouldn't automatically take that account as a doctrinal requirement. A report of what was done isn't the same as teaching what must be done. For instance, we see in the early Church that everyone held everything in common—the first Christian Commune—but this is descriptive of what they choose to do, not prescriptive from what the Bible teaches all local Churches to do.

Prescriptive instruction in the Bible is the universal teachings for the local application of the Church Body, wherever it may be.

1. Who Should be at the Church Meeting?

To someone raised in the typical protestant, evangelical church, it's often surprising to be told that the Church meeting is not for the unbeliever. Many Church meetings are geared, specifically, to entice unbelievers to come into the meeting. It's a nice idea based on good intentions—let's bring people in and expose them to the Gospel—it's just not something you'll find in the Bible.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the idea of inviting unbelievers into the

weekly gathering of the Body of Christ, making it, essentially, an evangelistic/missionary effort. The Great Commission says, *Go and make disciples*. It doesn't say go and invite as many non-believers into your meeting so a professional pastor can tell them about Jesus for you. The “seeker friendly” church is a modern innovation devoid of biblical example, instruction, or support.

Here's why that matters... When a crystal-clear mountain stream and a muddy stream run together, only a few yards downstream, dirty water is the result, every time. This example from nature is found on a spiritual level in the local Church. The Bible is clear on this topic relative to believers and the unsaved. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*

Which begs the question, ‘If there is no communion (true fellowship) to be had between the saved and unsaved, why have myriad churches done their dead-level best to get as many unsaved people as possible into the building on Sunday morning?’

The answer is simple: They don't understand what the meeting is for, according to the Word of God. This isn't a matter of the value or merit of individuals. It's a matter of God's purpose in the meeting of His people.

2. The Biblical Purpose of the Weekly Meeting of the Local Church

The first insight into the purpose of the Church meeting encountered in the New Testament is seen in the record of what took place at the weekly gathering of Christians. In Acts 2:42, it states, *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* There is no mention of evangelism in the meeting. Clearly, this was a gathering for believers, not for the unsaved.

The purpose of the Church meeting, according to the Bible (not according to our good evangelistic intentions) is to build up—to train and to edify—Christians to do the work of the ministry. Ephesians 4:11–13 outlines the ministries distributed throughout the Church and

what those ministries are for. *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*

These ministries are to take place in the meeting with the express purpose of “perfecting”, which is to say, to make complete or to bring to maturity, the Christians in the local Church for the work of the ministry, for edifying the body of Christ. When the central focus of the Sunday meeting becomes an attempt to evangelize and teach unbelievers who have been encouraged to attend, the true purpose and biblical goals of the gathering are lost in the effort—and a biblically illiterate, immature body is the result. Ultimately, the effort at making Jesus popular with unbelievers results in making the church indistinguishable from the world.

The Biblical Structure of the Local Church

Where the Bible is silent, and the possible choices are not sinful, the Church is free to choose a path forward. The structure of the local Church, however, is not a free-for-all restricted only by our imagination. The Bible, despite what many pastors seem to believe, speaks directly to the matter of Church structure. What the Bible teaches on the organization of the Church is remarkably simple, bearing no resemblance to the giant church constructs of today's global denominations.

3. The Bible Sanctions Only Two Offices in the Local Church

Your church gathering may have a Lead Pastor, an Executive Pastor, Youth Pastor, or use titles such as Reverend, Father, or any number of others but, all of these are inventions of denominations, thoroughly extra-biblical and, in most cases, thoroughly unbiblical.

In 1 Timothy 3:14,15, Paul says, *“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of*

God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Preceding these verses are the requirements for Elders and Deacons—the only two Church offices spoken of in the New Testament. "Elder" is the overseer and "Deacon" is the logistical/ministry support role.

There are five words used in the Bible describing the office of "Elder" which are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament: Elder, Presbyter, Overseer, Bishop, Shepherd, and Pastor. The biblical Church is elder-led, not under compulsion but through a voluntary submission to the leadership God has established. Hebrews 13:17 says, *"Obey those who rule over you, and*

be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

The Bible is the only source for instruction on how Churches are to be organized and operated. In the Bible, we find autonomous, self-governing local Churches. There are no structural or organization ties between local churches and no organization larger than local churches. There are churches which are led by a plurality of elders, appointed through the local church according to the parameters of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.



The road back to biblical Church doesn't lead through church tradition, innovative ideas for growth, what I may want it to be or feel good about, or even the strong manifestation of spiritual gifts. The road back to biblical church leads away from giant organizations and also the small gatherings of believers inventing church based on their personal opinions. The road to biblical Church leads through obedience to the teaching found in the Word of God. For many, this will require a journey away from familiar surroundings. Is that a journey God is calling you to take?

MATTHEW JACOBSON is a Theological Advisor at Relearn Church. He is also a seasoned house church planter, elder, and published author. He and his wife have eight children and live on a farm in Central Oregon

THE GO! TOOLS

(Continued from page 2)

home church has found this to be so effective. He talks of how God miraculously healed his wife who had a degenerative disease and was virtually bedridden and how they prayed and God healed her. I often share how God works to save our oldest son when he broke his neck and the change seen in the early X-rays to those taken a little later.

6. Inviting a person to accept Jesus into their lives is so important. Sometimes I just ask "would you like to know Jesus better in your life? or What are you sensing God is putting on your heart? Would you like to be at peace with God?" etc. When one asks a question, be silent and await their response - do not keep on talking as it can distract the person from the conviction of the Holy Spirit on their heart.

I have had people say yes and so I've helped them pray out that conviction to Jesus. Others have said no - and I just simple say - If you feel differently some time latter or would like to talk further just get in touch....



7. Helping people learn how to do

Discovery Bible Reading is important. It is as simple as inviting a person to read a passage of Scripture and then asking them or someone else to read it again the second time and then to tell it in ones owns words. This internalises it. We then use some simple questions such as SOS

S - *What is it saying about God/Jesus? About people or a principle to follow in our lives?*

O - *what can we apply or obey from this in our lives this week?*

S - *what are we going to share with someone this week? - Who will we share it with? Who are we praying for daily?*

8. How to make a simple Oikos list - a list of our family and friends and who amongst them to pray for and seek to talk to.

9. The simple principle of leading a simple church/missional community.

This involves learning to facilitate and focus discussions but not be controlling, or do all the talking, including everyone, fostering relationships etc.

10. Supporting people who develop

Moments. Once we find people who are seriously reaching out we need to encourage and support them. I call it "fanning the flames". This involves regular contact and support. Steve Addison in his book *Pioneering Movements Leadership that Multiplies Disciples and Churches* (2015:31)

suggests meeting once or twice a month and asking questions such as:

What have you done since we last met?

How have you seen God at work?

Where are you stuck?

What do you need to do next?

How can we pray for you?

To build momentum for developing movements he suggests getting practitioners together for 2-3 days to share around these questions to identify obstacles, pray together and move forward.

As we pray and are led by the Spirit we will naturally use these skills as required. Just this weekend at our missional community my wife Kate and another lady helped a young lady who is trying to get her life back together after drugs etc., to make her decision to follow Jesus. She felt such love and joy and lightness - as the darkness was lifted off her by Jesus and she felt the assurance of her eternal destiny and the presence of his Spirit resting on her life. It is exciting to see and support people in coming to know and follow Jesus. Kate is now going to meet with her regularly to help her grow as a disciple or follower of Jesus.

If we are hungry to see others meet and follow Jesus, we will discover the excitement of seeing God at work in our everyday lives on a regular basis.

bless you, Phil Brown

OIKOS DIRECTOR



WITHOUT MORE MISSIONARIES WE WILL LOSE

Martin Bragger

I have always admired the Missionaries of previous centuries, for example those who took Christianity to the native tribes of Africa in the 19th Century, particularly the Scottish missionary David Livingstone.

A major aspect of the challenge faced by Livingstone and others was the need to penetrate a threatening landscape, often jungles full of threats ranging from poisonous plants, through dangerous animals to hostile tribes. However, apart from admiring them, I also think they have a lot to teach us about the missional challenge we face, and are largely failing at, in our own society.

"It's more missionaries we need, without more missionaries we will lose"

It seems that church authorities tend to focus on a whole range of things, land purchases for new church buildings, Classic church planting strategies, and increasingly a range of responses to an increasing multitude of social issues, but very little on what I believe is a first order issue for effective future Gospel ministry. That is the matter of who should be selected for the role of leading mission in the mosaic of pagan, church hostile 'Tribes' that constitute the cultural jungle of contemporary Australian society.

There is a story about Air Chief Marshall Dowding commander of British Fighter Command during the critical stages of the Battle of Britain during World War 2. Reportedly, an officer rushed up to Dowding with what he thought was exciting news regarding the number of the enemy shot down on the previous day. *"That's good"*, Dowding replied not quite so excited, *"but what we need is more pilots, without more pilots we will lose"*.

The thing to be drawn from that story is that Dowding was able to discern, among a whole range of undoubtedly important aspects of the War effort, what was the primary issue. I would paraphrase Dowding to say that in the context of our missional task, *"It's more missionaries we need, without more missionaries we will lose"*.

There often appears to be a failure to recognise the Kaleidoscope of ever morphing cultural universes in which the Australian church is set, the fact that we are in Athens not Jerusalem, in a culture where biblical knowledge is increasingly absent, for which reason we need to use the language of the *"poets"* of the culture (Acts 17:16-34).

In our mission context the primary need is for missionaries! I will certainly not deny that those who oversee *Unbounded Church* Missional Community expressions must be doctrinally sound and able to teach well, however that is simply not enough in what is in reality a Crisis, indeed potentially an existential Crisis for the Australian church. It ought to be self-evident that mission needs missionaries, however I am not sure that this, what ought to be, self-evident truth is always evident to many.

Given the ongoing missional unfruitfulness of what we have been doing, yet to continue to produce a flow of graduates from theological colleges who primarily see themselves, and indeed in many cases their primary gifting is, as Pastor/Teacher/Preachers is not the need of the hour. Rather, what is actually needed, and needed desperately, are Missionaries, and the fact is that Pastor/Teachers/Preachers do not necessarily Missionaries make.

Our current Leadership model is strongly shaped by the Christendom paradigm, primarily suited to maintenance, the building up of the 'saints', not mission. However, the person with a missionary heart, the heart that should be a primary requirement for the journey into the 'jungle' will display distinctive characteristics. Such a heart-

- Is 'Entrepreneurial' and is prepared to take risks.
- Is focused on building the 'Kingdom' not the 'church'.
- Is able to not just think 'outside of the box' but get outside the box.
- Is 'flexible and innovative'...
- Prayerfully submits its imagination to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the New Testament, and dare to *'imagine what is not'* for the glory of God.
- Has a *Star Trek* vision, i.e. a preparedness to go where *"no man (or church) has gone before"*, that is along a *'road as yet unmapped'*.
- Loves enough that it is prepared, Livingstone-like, to head into the alien and hostile jungle, to face discomfort and opposition in order to snatch the spiritually blind teetering on the cliff top of Hell.

The cultural shift is now so great that, for the journey into the 21st century Australian 'jungle', it is primarily Missionaries we need, and Pastor, Teacher, Preachers do not necessarily Missionaries make. So...

"It's more missionaries we need, without more missionaries we will lose"

MARTIN BRAGGER - NSW
unboundedchurch.com





REMOVING IDOLS OF THE HEART THAT PREVENT MISSIONAL LIVING

The disciple-making process can stall when idols of the heart distract disciples from joining God in his mission (1 Cor. 3:3; Heb. 5:12).

In Western contexts, the threat of consumerism especially prevents missional living. This threat is found not only in the shopping mall but in the church as well. In our consumer-oriented culture, worship can become “all about me” where Christians “church shop” until they find a place that satisfies their wants. But, as Hirsch posits, “discipleship is all about adherence to Christ.” The antithesis of consumerism ideology is missional ecclesiology. As Guder suggests, missional disciple-making is “reforming a group of consumer, needs-centered individuals to live by an alternative narrative.” This alternative narrative, the gospel, must transform disciples to think, act, and live like Jesus Christ.

In the book *Worship and Mission after Christendom*, Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider speak of the need for Christians to de-idolize. De-idolizing begins by naming or identifying idols that prevent missional living, turning from them, and then nurturing affections of the heart that promote missional living. Sometimes the excuses not to engage in missional living are indicators of idols of the heart. Only by submitting in obedience to the will of the Father, to the reign of Jesus Christ, and to the

work of the Holy Spirit, can idols lose their power.

Cultivating affections of the heart also raises the importance of spiritual transformation—the metamorphosis or change from a previous state or form to another. In the Scriptures, spiritual transformation is described as: “the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2), being “conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Rom 8:29), and having “Christ ... formed in you,” (Gal 4:19). Again, new spiritual habits must displace old carnal habits and new Christ-like reflexes must replace former self-centered reflexes (Gal. 2:20; 5:16–26).

In church history, John Wesley advocated three groups, namely, the society, the class, and the band. While the society was a large group for Christian instruction, and the class was a group of twelve that focused on Christian behavior, the band was an intimate group of four (men with men and women with women) to cultivate affections of the

heart toward God and Christ-like living.

More recently Breen has popularized the use of huddles to help disciples identify kairos moments, and then respond in repentance and faith to join

God in his work. Similarly, as suggested by Neil Cole, Life Transformation Groups that are comprised of two or three people, meet weekly to foster accountability in Bible reading, to confess sin, and to pray. All of these accountability-sized groups are designed to cultivate affections of the heart for missional living.

Certainly, spiritual practices and habits help us overcome idols of the heart and old habits. Solitude and fasting can break the chains of lust or sexual sin. Worship can release us from preoccupation with ourselves. Keeping a prayer journal can help us overcome bitterness with joy and gratitude. Practicing the presence of Christ can help us overcome temptations to old vices and addictions. Nevertheless, spiritual habits are not ends in themselves as Bill Hull states: “The aim and substance of following Jesus shouldn’t be about prayer, Bible study, or meditation. These tools simply serve the greater purpose of knowing God. They help us develop intimacy with God and fitness for serving.”



DAVID GUSTAFSON served twenty-five years in ministry, first as campus director with Cru at Fresno State University in California, and then as pastor in two Evangelical Free churches in the Great Lakes District. His areas of expertise include evangelism and missional praxis. He and his wife, Sharon, have four children, and he enjoys bicycling, backpacking, and cooking stir-fry. davidmgustafson.blogspot.com

**DISCIPLE-
MAKING IS
REFORMING A
GROUP OF
CONSUMER,
NEEDS-
CENTERED
INDIVIDUALS
TO LIVE BY
AN
ALTERNATIVE
NARRATIVE**



the year that was...

*This is a little of the story of one missional community/simple church this past year.
We would love to hear of what God is doing in your simple church.*

At COB (Communities of Blessing, Eagle Point, Vic), our simple church gathering last weekend, we had a Christmas thanksgiving and Kate (Brown) read out a letter the Holy Spirit had prompted her to write, retelling the highlights from the year for our simple church

One of the biggest faith movements in all of history is underway today. It's the spiritual undercurrent of Simple Jesus Followers. These people are everywhere, they are not on billboards, but rather loving each other and their neighbourhoods, in simple ways.

God has been amongst us; his kingdom has been breaking out we just want to honour Jesus for how he has been at work amongst us this year....

We had more than a dozen unbelievers amongst us in the past year and enjoyed a camp away which included a baptism.

We have sent money to meet the needs of missional Groups in the Philippines and also locally here for various needs.

We have 4 people in our church who have started other groups which gather at other times (multiplication). We have gathered over 25 times, as a larger group in each other's homes, shared meals and rich fellowship, prayed together, explored the Word and its application in our lives together, loved on each other and on our community.

We have a former atheist, young lady, attending our gatherings and committing to Christ, we have had Buddhists and new age young adults in our gatherings reading scripture and participating in our spiritual conversations. Discovery Bible Reading we have found is a powerful

tool, as we explore the ways of Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us.

Some highlights come to mind....

- In Feb, Oikos friends Stan and Rachael visited us sharing about being missionaries to refugees and Syrian/Iranians in Australia.
- We celebrated Jack's baptism at the Lake. He is 17 years old and even his Dad participated though not currently involved with our group, but just wanting to support his son's decision. We welcomed Casey who became a Christian in the last 18 months. We have seen another young lady recommit to Jesus and another who has struggle with drugs - commit to Christ - just this week at our gathering!
- The MIA (men in action) our 7 teen guys, had a discipleship camp together. This is a bunch of 16-18-year-old guys who challenge each other to grow spiritually and to reach out to their mates.
- Many of our group have been faithful in praying for others, sharing the gospel, expecting the supernatural amongst us. A number of us are praying with those in our work place, prayer walking on some special intentional days out, at our community market.
- Some of us girls shared in the Women's retreat with "Without Walls" at Raymond Island. 15-25 women from a wide range of backgrounds meet weekly to share and grow as disciples. One lady is sharing widely in her Catholic parish.

- In April - Phil & I hosted the Oikos National Conference in Lilydale with 80 + people attending.
- Esther & Rick, Jackie & Ross & the Browns opened their homes around 25 times to love each other in community, to be the church & disciple each other.
- We celebrated milestone birthdays - Jamison & Joel Turning 18 yrs, Mike 85 yr. Multigenerational discipleship and missional communities are healthy spaces for each of us to learn from each other.

We have been using the "Sticky Note" - discipleship accountability - to inspire and challenge us to be growing disciples not just attenders. We regularly ask each other the following: How are you going in having spiritual conversations, pressing in to God in our personal lives, sharing our answered prayers, loving our neighbour? ...

Just last week we helped an old pensioner with emphysema move. Others have prayed for healing for non-believers and seen God's power at work. Many spiritual conversations have planted seeds into people's lives.

We put the spot light on Prayer - to intentionally pray for 5 people each day. One of our group saw an impact and a new openness in people she had been praying for.

We have been seeking to see each other GROW as disciples. We want to see that we are not struggling with the same things we were 1 year ago, that we are growing & being fruitful in our lives. That is, all of us are maturing in Christ....

(Continued on page 18)

A young man with dark hair, wearing a yellow button-down shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is leaning out of a window with a light blue frame. Behind him, a white curtain is partially visible. To the right, a colorful striped cloth and a white garment are hanging on a line, suggesting a laundry area. The overall scene is brightly lit, likely by natural light from the window.

India Report

Victor Chouhdrie is a well known figure in the global simplechurch movement. As a pioneer of the movement in India he has seen thousands of new churches birthed out of his ministry. Here is his recent Christmas newsletter.

STARFISH ALLIANCE MINISTRY REPORT CHRISTMAS 2018

Our ministry is now in the abundant fruit bearing stage, not only in India but in several most unreached nations of the 10/40 Window nations, What the good Lord is doing here and elsewhere is unprecedented. New believers are being added daily, (Acts 2:47) disciples are multiplying disciple-makers (Acts 6:1,7; 2 Tim. 2:2) and churches are rapidly reproducing new churches. (Acts 16:5). It is like the Book of Acts all over.

From the beginning, starting in 1993, the Lord led us to follow the Book of Acts model of planting Christ-centered and Gentile focused simple house churches that have the DNA of rapid multiplication – “they broke bread and shared the whole wisdom of God from house to house.” (Acts 20:20,27) The resource hungry Western church model requires so much baggage to get going, that it cannot easily replicate itself. That is why in the last 200 years since William Carey came, there is only 2.3 % Christianity in India. The house churches are the **simplest**, most cost effective and biblical strategy designed by our Lord to fulfill His End Vision i.e. to reach all the 636,000 villages, 4535 People Groups and 19,500 mother tongues of India. Not surprisingly, it is the simple new believers that are reaching their own oikos and transforming the spiritual profile of this nation. 1 Cor. 1:26-28

We are blessed that many of our family members are close by working in the local mission hospital. We "meat" very often at pot-luck dinners. Even greater blessing is that my highly qualified and accomplished medical and "normal" members of the family are all engaged in missions, laying up treasures in heaven. (Matt. 6:19,20) But our greatest joy is the daily news from our spiritual children from all corners of India and abroad. Most times the news is good but sometimes it is not (persecutions).

All our training teams are volunteers as we do not have a single salaried worker in the harvest field. However, we do raise support for them, especially for new ministries to help them kick start micro-businesses. This avoids dependency

and makes them self-supporting. (1 Timothy 5:8; Acts 20:33-35) Of course, there are many failures and they go through periods of hardship and need help.

Our Master trainers have diversified all over the world, equipping local Persons of Peace to turn their worlds upside down. However, here at our village farm house, we do continue to offer short term (3-5 days) cutting edge training on catalyzing DMM (Disciple Making Movement) to small groups from India and abroad. Every now and then we organize International Summits. Last year we organized a Summit on Urban CPM (Church Planting Movement). Many mighty men and women of God from many nations participated, such as Nepal, Kenya, Zambia, Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, China, Israel, USA, UK, Germany, Switzerland and of course from India. It was awesome. Next year a team of Africans, very keen to kick start a Disciple-Making "Movement" wants to come here for further training so we are praying for resources.

My recent book "DOST" (which means A CLOSE FRIEND), is proving very helpful in reaching high ranking Sons of Ishmael. It's E-Copy is available in multiple languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Bahasa, Bengali, German and of course in English. There are around 500 million

Muslims in the Indian subcontinent with very few laborers, if any. Despite our low key and below the radar approach, the price they pay for accepting Isa-al-Masih as saviour is very high. Most of them lose their jobs, families and sometimes life. It is extremely painful and hurting situation. Many are on the run and must be relocated and rehabilitated, both emotionally and financially.

Of late persecution in India has greatly spiked, with violent fanatical religious mobs bashing up prayer groups. Christians are considered soft targets because we do not retaliate. They work in cahoots with the police and get the victims arrested, falsely accusing them of converting people with inducements. However, these persecutions are also proving to be a blessing in disguise. Many Christians are now interceding for their persecutors while others are proactively opening their own homes for Disciple Making. 1 Cor. 16:19

Some of our family members have decided not to give expensive gifts to



each other this Christmas, instead we are planning to bless these most needy and hurting families. We also help those workers who are engaged in changing the spiritual landscape of this nation often in most difficult and hostile terrain. As I was writing this report, I got a phone call from a worker in the field about the equivalent of the \$30 we had sent him to take care of the immediate needs of the new believers that had to run for their life. Instead, he invested that money to help them buy fresh fish from the fishermen at the reservoir. They sell them daily in the local market and already making enough money to take care of their families.

Their needs are simple, so everyone can participate with us by sending even the least penny through my PayPal account (vchoudhrie@gmail.com). But if it is a larger amount, then you can help us to build simple houses for those who are dislocated. Please get in touch with Gene Davis at (fmf.india@yahoo.com).

Be blessed by being a blessing to those who live in darkness and in the shadows of death and thus fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the water covers the sea. Matt. 4:16; Hab. 2:14

Shalom and merry Christmas, Victor

THE YEAR THAT WAS (Cont. from p16)

We practiced sharing a gospel presentation - the 3 circles, and how to share our own story of finding Jesus in 30 Seconds. Sharpening our spiritual "tools" is important, as we need to be faithful in the simple things.

We connected together as a group in the community at fireworks, at the street van festival, in market places & coffee shops. We shared the gospel, we prayed for the sick and prayed blessing over people including those in the business and artist community.

We shared the Lords supper together and gave thanks for the goodness of Jesus and his amazing grace to each of us. We welcomed and disciplined many new people amongst us, over 12 newbies this year.

We have supported each other through our ups and downs in life!

Yes, there is much more to be done - but we thank God for his presence and life though his spirit amongst us this year.

There are many other stories that could be told, but it is in the everyday lives of committed disciples or followers of Jesus across this land and beyond, that God's Spirit is working in amazing ways - though you will not hear anything about it in the news or media.

These men and women, families, children, youth and young adults are the unsung heroes of the kingdom of God bringing change like salt and light in their local communities. We hope and



pray and work to see these multiply across the nation as the Kingdom of God quietly grows and impacts lives and communities.

KATE BROWN As well as wife and mother, Kate is involved with International Children's Care and spends a lot of time in the Philippines where she also connects with simplechurch communities. She and Phil have 4 children and live in Eagle Point, Victoria.

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HOW HOUSE CHURCHES SHOULD PREPARE FOR DISASTER

Rad Zdero



The topic of the church's readiness to deal with disaster, harvest, and hostility is an important matter that was recently blogged about. Indeed, are we ready? And are we ready in the "right" things? It is one thing to be ready personally on spiritual and practical levels, but it is quite another to be ready corporately as the church.

Several years ago, I had an unusual dream. Being a non-Charismatic skeptical person, I asked God to confirm it. He did several times. In the dream, the Lord said, "God is not satisfied with denominations, but is drawing out a remnant for himself that will accomplish his will." And that we must "prepare for revival" in my region. My sense was that God asked us to put into place tangible expressions of relational, intentional, and missional unity. We must shift from simply awareness of each other to practical partnership.

Airports, computers, roadways, human brain cells, ecosystems, and many other things in the man-made and natural world are networked. Simple/house churches should be networked too. Spiritual water can only flow properly if the spiritual plumbing system has been set up! Consequently, simple/house churches will not be ready THEN for disaster, harvest, or hostility, until several things happen NOW ahead of time.

FIRST, simple/house churches must trust, partner, and network together locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally NOW, so that coordination and cooperation can happen THEN, just like the early church (Acts 2:41-47; 5:12, 5:42, 20:20; Gal 1:18, 19, 2:6-10; 3 John 1:3-8).

SECOND, simple/house churches must learn true hospitality toward strangers and the afflicted by providing for their needs and empowering them NOW, so we will know how to do it wisely THEN, just like the early church (Matt 25:31-46; Luke 10:30-37).

THIRD, simple/house churches must give generously and share money and material resources with each other NOW, so we will be able

to efficiently funnel funds to the Body of Christ THEN, just like the early church (Acts 2:44-45; 1 Cor 9:1-14; 2 Cor 9:1-7; Philip 2:25, 4:15-16).

FOURTH, simple/house churches must develop leadership hubs for connecting, training, and launching a new generation of local leaders of churches NOW, so we can facilitate spiritual growth in quality and in quantity THEN, just like the early church (Acts 20:17-38; 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:5-9).

FIFTH, simple/house churches must identify, finance, and launch a new generation of traveling leaders who visit and equip entire networks of churches NOW, so we can strengthen and expand Kingdom frontiers THEN, just like the early church (Mark 3:13-15; Luke 10:1-10; Acts 10:1-48, 13:1-3, 15:36-41; 1 Cor 9:1-14; Eph 4:11-13; Tit 1:5; Philip 4:15-16; 3 John 1:3-8).

SIXTH, simple/house churches must create high-tech and low-tech communication channels to effectively broadcast information about needs, opportunities, obstacles, and attacks NOW, so we can navigate future surprises and challenges THEN, just like the early church (Acts 15:22-30, 36; Col 4:16; 2 Thes 2:15).

SEVENTH, simple/house churches must be open to the extraordinary power of God to speak to us, speak through us, heal the sick, deliver the demon-possessed, and even raise the dead NOW, so that we will be prepared and experienced vessels THEN, just like the early church (Acts 5:12, 9:36-42, 13:1-3, 19:11-12; 1 Cor 12:7-12; James 5:14-15).

And that's just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Otherwise, simple/house churches will be caught unawares, not knowing how to deal with disaster, hostility, or harvest. Let's not miss the chance God gives us THEN! Let's get ready NOW!

RAD ZDERO is a Canadian who has been involved in the house church and small group movement since 1985 and is the co-founder of House Church Canada. He is the author of *The Global House Church Movement*



The Glorious Church

May 1, 2012 Tobie [9 Comments](#) naturalchurch.wordpress.com

It has been almost five years now since a group of us started meeting weekly in a house in one of the suburbs of Bloemfontein.

We have never had a name or the need for one. In fact, we have been highly suspicious of church names since the outset (See related blog posts [here](#) and [here](#)).

Recently I decided to do a blog for our fellowship, and so I was faced with the dilemma of a name. There was only one that I could truly embrace, that accurately reflected what I had come to learn and believe about the glorious church of Jesus Christ over the past 3 decades of my life: The church's name is... The Church.

Of course I mean "Church" in the sense of the Biblical "Ekklesia", that is, the "Assembly" or "Gathered Community". I certainly do not mean it in any one of the other ways sources like Webster define it, such as "a building for public Christian worship", or "a religious service in such a building", or "a Christian denomination".

Some of us appear to have a need to read more into this word than what the New Testament means by it. The error is quite understandable. Apart from the words that we use on this planet to speak about the Godhead, it is the single richest word in existence. Of course such a word calls for scrutiny and exploration. Of course it seeks an expression that will truly reveal its essence. Of course it calls for all kinds of synonyms.

But in doing so we need to go deeper, not wider. Such a word can never be expanded. It has to be expounded. And you are not doing so if you use adjectives like "First", "St. John" or "Shekinah". Even "Covenant" and "Grace" do more to detract from the glory of this word than add to it. If you choose to highlight one attribute associated with the Ekklesia you inevitably make the others fade into the background. Church names, like idols, have the habit of turning on you in the end.

There are great synonyms in Scriptures for the Ekklesia, such as "the wife of the Lamb", "temple", "body" and so on. These will take you deeper, not wider, and they should be reserved for that purpose. There are others, too, and even if you manage to fit all of

them on the sign outside your building, they will still mean nothing to the casual observer. To truly understand something of the church's nature requires the best part of a lifetime, which means you can save yourself the trouble of trying to provide a synopsis by cramming a selection of her attributes into a name.

There is no name more beautiful to me than my wife's, for it represents to me all that she is. She need not be called The First Glorious Reven Beautiful Wife Mother Lover of the Cedars of Lebanon (yes, she descends from there), for I know her to be all those things. I may whisper them to her, but I have no need to see them printed in her passport. This knowledge is reserved for those who are close to her.

Less is more, we often say, and this is truer about the name of the church than most anything else.

Writers know that one of the golden rules of their trade is to never overstate the obvious. In fact, you should hardly ever state anything that your readers can figure out for themselves. Don't preempt the mystery. Don't rob them from the exhilaration of the quest and the glow of discovery. Refrain from the temptation to mediate the revelation. Trust God's Spirit to decode their parables.

And so we adopted the only naming convention that we can find in the Bible. We called ourselves "The Church in Bloemfontein", followed by the street address of the house where we meet. We make it very clear on our blog that the name does not belong to us but to the body of Christ in Bloemfontein, that we are not the only church in Bloemfontein and certainly not more officially so than any other one of the local churches. The only distinction is the address, which is part of our name for the sake of maintaining the principle of locality.

We're challenging others who meet like us to do the same, although we certainly won't split hairs about it.

What do you think?



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