

AUTUMN 2019

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# OIKOS

AUSTRALIA

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## DIRECTIONS

**At Oikos, we are thinking about multiplication. With 25.5 million Australians, only 52% identify themselves as Christian – this opportunity is one we are passionate about impacting!**

Did you know that one pair of rabbits can end up with 4 million offspring in only 4 years time? That is rapid

growth! Does your group, simple church or disciple-making strategy – have a clear plan where those in your group, clearly know how they can train to equip others to disciple new people and plant new groups/churches.

*"If not, your strategy may need to be adjusted. Everything you do in disciple-making must pass the test of reproducibility. When we make things too complicated, we don't get "rabbit" churches that multiply quickly" - DMMS Frontier Missions"*

Many things stand in the way of this kind of rapid multiplication of disciples. The main problem is that we over-complicate discipleship and evangelism activities. We must keep our discipleship training simple, inexpensive and easy to learn. Then we can quickly reproduce disciple-makers and be training others.



There is a great hope for a movement to be launched in Australia if we keep things simple and reproducible.

How are you doing in raising up and releasing others? Does your group know how to share the gospel, invite people to Jesus, what to do if someone says yes? Do you have a vision for growth & raising up others?

2 Timothy 2:2 is our guide. Paul trained Timothy. Timothy trained faithful men. They trained many others. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

That's multiplication. That's generational growth. It's what we do to see Oikos become a Disciple-Making movement!!

Who are you developing as under you? Who are you passing the baton too? Effective disciple making involves multiplication of simple churches and disciples.

Kate & I recently hosted a fabulous gathering of 30 people for an Oikos Regional in eastern Victoria where we shared stories, built great friendships and connections and learned more of the clear path for seeing an Oikos Movement in Australia. We are looking forward to another Regional Gathering in Melbourne on 24,25 May (save the date in your diary).

We would love to hear what you are doing.

*bless you, Phil Brown*  
**OIKOS DIRECTOR**

## OIKOS Australia

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

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What does it mean to be a

# PROPHETIC CHURCH?

Cath Livesey

Photo: jon-tyson-unsplash

**W**hat does it mean to be a prophetic church, a prophetic body of people?

To fully answer this question we need to see the big picture of exactly what Jesus has called his church to be. As much as I love prophetic ministry and mentoring prophetic people, there is more to a holistic prophetic culture than just activity and experience: we need a broader paradigm than is currently found in many charismatic churches. If all we focus on is giving people prophecies, we miss out on the breadth and depth of prophetic spirituality. If all we focus on is prophets, we miss out on seeing the way the church itself can be prophetic in its very nature.

So to understand the prophetic function of the church we have to step back a little bit from prophetic ministries and individual callings, and begin to view the church in terms of who we are called to be as the Body of Christ. The prophetic function is part of the church's intrinsic identity and purpose: how we are shaped and defined. We are called to be a prophetic community, and this community needs to look like Jesus.

Our number one goal as the Body of Christ should be to imitate Jesus as closely as we possibly can. The church is defined by Jesus: it is Jesus who shows us who we are and what we are called to do. All authentic Christian ministry is based on him. The church, by its very nature, is called to be Jesus-shaped, and

the fivefold ministries from Ephesians give us a clear perspective on what a Christ-like church should look like. Jesus has given these five identities to the church so that we can be all that he has called us to be, fully representing him in the world.

So as we consider how the church in its very nature can be prophetic – embodying the prophetic function – we need to embrace the prophetic pattern we see in the life of Jesus. Our life as a prophetic people must be directly formed around the life, ministry and teaching of Jesus. We can only define a prophetic church according to Jesus' ministry as the true and perfect prophet.

When we look at Jesus' life and ministry we see that he is uncompromisingly prophetic in a whole host of ways:

**He is the revelation of the Father: he perfectly shows us what God is like.**

**He is the Word of God in flesh.**

**He is the mediator of the New Covenant between God and people.**

**He confronts evil and breaks the power of sin.**

**He calls people to return to God and live righteously.**

**He speaks truth to power (both religious and secular).**

**He only does what he sees the Father doing.**

**He is led by the Spirit and ministers in the power of the Spirit.**

**He prioritises prayer and worship.**

**He speaks prophetically of the future.**

**He discerns the hearts and minds of people.**

**He challenges injustice and unrighteousness.**

Jesus is the perfect expression of the prophet and so gives us the blueprint for a mature, holistic, multi-faceted way of being the prophetic church. We need to be prophetic in the way that Jesus was prophetic. Not just as individuals but as a Body with a collective prophetic consciousness.

The really good news is that as we choose to emulate Jesus' prophetic role in our churches we get to participate in his very work and ministry as the greatest prophet there has ever been. The prophetic function is deeply rooted in the person of Jesus. In building a mature, holistic prophetic culture in our churches we are continuing his work, not having to manufacture something new. And as we do this, Jesus will be more present in our midst as his perfect prophetic identity gets expressed through his people.

*(Continued on page 18)*



Neil Cole

# Don't just about **SING** the Incarnation

I read an article once highlighting the missional strategy of a church. At Christmas time they sent their choir to the local mall to sing Christmas carols at the patrons walking past as a means to get the Gospel out. This was presented as a successful outreach. No one was spoken to. No relationships were made. No one was able to ask a single question of the religious people singing in strange robes. People heard the same songs already playing over the piped-in music throughout the shops, that's it.

Like a flight attendant at the start of every flight, the choir was singing an important message of life and death significance to people who had no time to listen because they'd been inoculated to it. And the "churched" people are convinced that this was a significant work for God. One can argue that this was missional, but it certainly was not incarnational. I believe that those who would represent Christ must be both missional and incarnational or they are not Christ-like. Jesus challenged us: "As the Father has sent me [in the same way] I send you." (John 20:21)

The heart of our message is that God didn't expect us to make our way to Him in heaven. He came to us—on our terms, on our turf. God became "incarnate". This is a theological word that is worth explaining.

Incarnate means He was "in flesh" or "in a body." When I order chili "con carne," I am ordering chili with meat...or flesh. Jesus was God incarnate. He was God with meat on his bones. Jesus was truth "fleshed out" for all to see. He "became flesh and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

There is nothing more remarkable than the humiliation and incarnation of Christ. Ironically that is what that choir was singing about in the local mall as masses of people walked by without a second thought.

Incarnation is not easy and certainly not comfortable, but it is an adventure. When Gandalf approached Bilbo and proposed an adventure, at first the hobbit declined the wizard saying, "An adventure? They're nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things...they'll make you late for dinner!" I've often said, "If you want to win this world to Christ, you are going to have to sit in the smoking section." Jesus went a whole lot further than that.

## **Jesus Was Incarnational**

Jesus is fully God. Jesus is fully man. This is a profound mystery to amaze our minds for all eternity, and I might add, is worthy of all our songs and more. He knows our struggles and our temptations first hand. He relates to us and represents us. When Jesus came He didn't keep His distance, singing songs at the public.



Jesus relates to us in all the ups and downs of life's mess. In fact, it is in the mess that His beauty is beheld most. He brings goodness and light to the darkest and ugliest edges of our lives. He is not the sanctified and sanctimonious spiritual guru untouched by the world that is so often portrayed in cinema. He didn't arrive with flowing robes and an angelic back-up choir (well, actually there was an angelic choir).

God the Son was painfully squeezed, naked and slimy, though a birth canal like the rest of us. He was delivered by an unwed, teen mother without a hospital or home. Omnipotence became dependent upon a teenager for survival. God incarnate had to have someone change His diapers (or swaddling cloths, depending on your translation). The God who spoke the universe into being could only communicate by crying like every baby (don't believe the propaganda of Silent Night... "no crying he made"). Omniscience had to learn how to eat solid food, to walk, to speak. Holiness had to be potty trained. The One who walks on water had to learn how to swim. The Logos had to learn how to read.

Jesus lived a real life with real problems. He dealt with sibling squabbles.

He disappointed and embarrassed his mother. He buried a stepfather. He got hungry, thirsty and tired. He swung a hammer and probably hit the wrong nail at times. He smelled like sweat after a hard day of work. His calloused hands got dirty, deep under the nails.

Jesus can relate to all peoples. His followers should as well if we wish to claim His name. As a child He was a refugee in a strange land on the run from a hostile regime ruled by an egomaniacal king. He dealt with frustrating people and corrupt politicians. He paid taxes he

shouldn't have had to pay. Many times He was homeless and dependent upon the kindness of others. In spite of having so little, people stole from Him. He was the object of bigotry and hatred as a minority in a world that didn't understand Him or His people. His own people turned on Him and had Him killed. He was betrayed by a friend and denied by his closest comrade. He was slandered with lies and falsely charged for a crime He didn't commit. He received unjust violence from law

enforcement officers and was sentenced by a bogus system. He was wrongfully executed by political powers stacked against Him.

He came to us as one of us and died for all of us. Eventually, He even came to me somewhere in the 20th century in the midst of my own mess. We need to let Him come to the lost today as well, wherever they are found. People need to see Him as one of them, who experienced all their challenges and temptations. He's one of us, in fact, the best of us. He bore our evil and gave us His good. We should live that way. That's the adventure we were born again to experience.

#### Jesus Is Now Incarnate in Us

Jesus is still incarnate—we are now His feet, His hands, His eyes, His ears and His mouth. We are the body of Christ. We are His temple and His Spirit dwells within our flesh (1 Cor. 6:19). We are not deity, but Deity dwells in us. I propose that this truth is a dramatically life-altering reality that people should notice. The fact that people don't notice is an astounding failure on our part. We have covered up the best part of us with the less impressive parts in order to win the approval of those in the world and entice

them to become like us. What fools we have been.

Several years ago, Sir Walter Moberly in his book *The Crisis in the University* identified the failure of evangelicals to penetrate university campuses with the Gospel. To those who claimed to follow Christ, his indicting statement still has teeth: "If one-tenth of what you believe is true, you ought to be ten times as excited as you are."

Ouch! This is the word of a non-Christian that has listened to our message and studied our behavior. It stings because it's true. We must begin to let the Word of Christ and the Spirit of God richly dwell within us so that His divine presence is noticeable because it leaks in our words and actions. It was for this that Christ came, died and rose again. Theologian Leslie Newbigin rightly says, "The Church is sent into the world to continue that which He came to do, in the power of the same Spirit, reconciling people to God." (John 20:19-23)

Just as Christ lived the gospel out among people, we must take our lives into the world and live out the gospel. In fact, a gospel that is not "fleshed out" is not a true gospel. I would argue that if we do not live out the good news among the people who need it, we are not representing the real gospel but a caricature. A false gospel doesn't change the world, it doesn't even change a life...it just lulls people into a self-centered state of isolation and ineffectiveness. We can no longer afford to only sing about the incarnation; we need to be it. It starts with an awakening inside that soon finds itself outside, furthering an adventure that Christ began in a manger two thousand years ago.

"As the Father has sent me, I send you."  
- Jesus



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**We must begin to let the Word of Christ and the Spirit of God richly dwell within us so that His divine presence is noticeable because it leaks in our words and actions.**



# Become More Attached

**It's easy to live in our cities and feel little connection to them.** There are lots of reasons for this: we spend long hours commuting in our cars or sitting in our workplaces; we fill our schedules with busy tasks that impede us from fully experiencing much of anything; we are consistently tempted to transport ourselves elsewhere through the use of our smartphones; and, at the end of the day, we are exhausted and just want to hunker down in our homes.

While it takes time and intentionality to pivot toward the places that we live in, we can trust that when we do, a meaningful connection will be cultivated—the kind of connection that compels us toward our neighbors, that exposes us to the good things that are going on all around us, and that moves us to think creatively about how we might leverage our passions, skills, and resources for the common good of our cities.

If New Year's Resolutions are your kind of thing, here's a few ways to experience a deeper connection to your city in 2019:

## **Experience it holistically**

The more present we are in our cities—experiencing them with all of our senses—the less likely we are to dream of being somewhere else. Our senses are

powerful tools that move us toward a more robust attachment to whatever it is we are encountering. From dining in local eateries and cycling around our neighborhoods to smelling fresh bread in the local farmers market or reading a book in a public library, the more we encounter our cities with our whole selves, the more rooted we become in them.

Wander your city and be intentional about utilizing all of your senses (touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste).

## **Walk instead of drive.**

If your city is anything like mine, it's fixated on car-based transit. While opinions on car usage vary, there is one thing that is abundantly clear: driving in a car changes the way that we engage our surroundings. The speed that we drive our cars—paired with their physical design and the focus needed to drive them—hinders us from fully experiencing the built, natural, and social environments of our cities.

When we choose to walk, we gain an attachment to the places we inhabit because we get to observe them in all of their detail. We're given the opportunity to choose our own pace, to look up at what exists above street-level, to have spontaneous run-ins with our neighbors, and to follow our curiosity into the nooks

and crannies of our cities. Beholding the nuances, characteristics, and intricacies of our cities will only help us to foster a closer attachment to them.

Invest in a good pair of sneakers and hit the sidewalks.

## **Become a regular in a third place**

In his important work, *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg defines “third places” as public places—outside of our workplaces and homes—where people can gather to enjoy conversation and the company of others. Practically speaking, third places are important because they provide a context where people can encounter their neighbors, where contextual ideas—for the common good of the city—can be catalyzed, and where people can be truly seen, heard, and known. From barber shops and cafes to pubs and playgrounds, third places play an important role in building communities and inspiring empathy between neighbors.

When we choose to linger in these spaces—on a regular basis and with an openness to connection—we'll encounter rich conversations with our neighbors; we'll be more “in the know” about the good things that are happening in our cities; and we'll see both loneliness and polarization





# to Your Place

## Steve MacDouell

subverted as hospitality is extended between people.

Pick a third place; commit to spending time in it on a weekly basis; and seek connection in and through it.

### **Support local businesses**

Online shopping has not only kept us from experiencing our local setting, it has sent a lot of our money out of our neighborhoods—often to the detriment of local entrepreneurs who are risking much to maintain businesses that make our cities more unique, distinct, and dynamic. Local businesses help shape the culture of our neighborhoods, and whenever we support them, we celebrate the unique gifts, passions, and expertise of our neighbors.

Create a checklist of local businesses; try to visit, spend money in, meet the ownership of, encourage, and post—on social media—about as many of them as possible.

### **Meet—and collaborate with—your neighbors**

In the context of my city, it is not uncommon to see people spend most of their time working, playing, shopping and socializing outside of the neighborhoods that they live in. Our lives are increasingly fragmented; in many ways, we have lost a sense of rootedness in

particular place. While it's never been easier to live above our neighborhoods, something meaningful transpires when we commit to an intentional, abiding presence in them.

On a practical level, our neighborhoods matter because they are one of the few things that we tangibly share with other people. They provide a context for relational connections to be established and for localized creativity to be inspired. As we sit around tables with our neighbors, listening to the needs, hopes, and ideas that exist all around us, we will be given the opportunity to collaborate for the sake of our neighborhoods—whether that be hosting local art shows, running block parties, arranging movie nights, starting book clubs, caring for those in need, or advocating for place-based projects that will inspire more community formation.

Meet your neighbors; invite them into your home/social circles; and, over time, start to scheme about how you can make your neighborhood a more hospitable, networked, and collaborative place.

### **Befriend the networkers**

Getting more involved in the life of our neighborhoods and cities can seem like a daunting task, so here's some good news: there are people who are ingrained in the life of our cities, who are

aware of the good things that are already happening, and who are more than happy to connect you to the people and projects that are making a difference. Find these people, and you will become a part of the important work that is already occurring.

Start turning up to local gatherings; look for the people who are bringing other people together; get to know them, and you will get to know the city.

As we commit to a deeper, more consistent presence in our places, we will experience a stronger attachment to them; we'll be moved by the needs, longings, and hopes that exist all around us; and we'll discover our part in the story that is unfolding in our localities.



### **Steve MacDouell**

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*neighborhood in Central London, Canada, where he enjoys instigating place-based projects, hosting workshops, and inviting everyday citizens to leverage their time, their ideas, and their creativity for the sake of their neighborhoods.*



# An Unexpected Portrait of

A man wearing a denim jacket, a black cap, and dark pants is running down a city street. He is seen from behind, with his right arm raised and his left leg forward. The street has yellow double lines and parked cars are visible in the background.

*“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’  
“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’” Luke 14:22-23*

**I**n the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a parable about a man who throws a great banquet (if you’re not familiar, read Luke 14:15-24). A man prepares a big party for all of his friends and neighbors, and one by one, they all offer horrible (and highly offensive) excuses as to why they cannot come. The man then tells his servant to go out into the streets and invite in everyone that he can find to come and enjoy the party. It’s a beautiful picture of who is invited to come and be a part of the Kingdom of God.

Lots of analysis has been focused on this interpretation. Whether it is the correct one or not is subject to debate, but you have to admit, it’s a good one!

There are two main characters in this story, the man and his servant. It seems pretty obvious that the man is representative of God the Father, but who is the servant?

In re-reading this story recently, I was struck by the idea that the servant is the model Evangelist. He does several things that are characteristic of those who have the gifting of an Evangelist:

He is obedient to his Master

He experiences rejection (and the resulting anger) on behalf of his Master

He gets excited about the work that his Master has him doing

Let’s take a look at these three observations as we drill down on how this passage helps to define the heart of an Evangelist.

**JOEL KARAHADIAN**



# the EVANGELIST

## Obedience

Obedience may seem like an obvious trait, but it's probably the most important for a healthy Evangelist (or any APEST gifting). The servant wouldn't be very good at his job (nor would he keep it long) if he didn't do what was asked of him, even when he might initially disagree.

It starts off easy enough: "I'm having a party, go tell my friends everything is ready." But it gets progressively more difficult. The friends reject and insult his Master, then he has to go out to people he doesn't know in the streets and invite them in. It's a scary prospect. This one action alone is most likely the reason we don't see volumes of evangelists pouring out of the doors of the church. What we need is a shift.

First, we need to see the work of evangelism through a lens that makes sense today. Check out my posts for more on that. Even more, however, we desperately need a return to an obedience to Jesus that is greater than our fear of reaching out.

The servant in the story helps us see the fruit of what joy can look like when the heart is more drawn to the will of the Master than its own.

Through the process of obedience he begins to see what the vision of the banquet can be. He never questions his Master's intentions, and as a result he is able to share in the joy of seeing the banquet full of people.

## Rejection

What a strange characteristic to highlight for the evangelist. The point here is not so much about the fact that the evangelist gets rejected (see the Parable of the Sower), but about how the servant in the parable responds to that rejection. The servant doesn't

internalize it, and he doesn't take it personally.

Don't miss the twist in the narrative: He is angry on behalf of the Master because of how rude the original invited guests are, and in fact, they are so rude that he gives up in frustration after speaking to only a few of them. But he doesn't internalize that anger, and he doesn't dwell on it. He conveys it to his Master, who in turn is angered, but knows how to respond.

The mark of a great Evangelist is the ability to allow God to respond to rejection and not to internalize it, or in the words of Jesus to "shake the dust off" in response to rejection. And he doesn't let the rejection get to him, because he never stops doing his Master's work. There is never a point where he sits down and gives up simply because a few people didn't respond to the message he brought them.

We all experience rejection in some form nearly every day, and yet we keep going. When we have a goal in mind and are motivated to achieve something, rejection doesn't phase us. If we're searching for a job we don't give up because the first interview didn't go well. Or if we're dating we don't give up after one or two bad dates. In addition to the mundane, we all have passion projects that we spend countless hours working on such as hobbies, artistic pursuits, home renovations, etc., where we don't let any setbacks phase us. So how do we respond to rejection when eternity is the goal? Do we give up, or like the servant in the parable, do we sense the urgency and keep doing the work we are called to with resolve?

## Excitement

This part requires a little bit of imagination on the part of the reader.

When we read the text unaffected and alone, as we often do in Western Christian culture, it loses a lot of its punch. But we have to remember that this is a story being told by Jesus at a party. It wouldn't be much of a story if it only involved 2 dimensional characters spouting dialog back and forth.

Theologian and Middle East scholar Kenneth Bailey notes that the servant in the story is excited in verses 22 and 23: *"The obedient servant becomes a witness for his master and takes the invitation to the outcasts. This action on his part widens his vision and excites him. In the process he notes the empty tables and starts to fill them."*

Why shouldn't the servant be excited? His Master is throwing a party! After the insults that he sustained at the hands of the original guests, wouldn't it be exciting to see the party proceed anyways, and to be full at that! The servant longs to see his Master's vision of a full party realized, and as such he is excited as that vision comes to pass, just as the evangelist is excited and invigorated by bringing outsiders into God's story of redemption.

It goes without saying, but the Church is in desperate need of this servant type evangelist! We need thousands because the task is greater than any one of us can do alone, and the banquet still isn't full.



*This post was originally published at [fivefoldbible.com](http://fivefoldbible.com), written by JOEL KARAHADIAN, Musician, Sociologist, New Urbanist & Writer / Worship Leader / Missiologist @JKLeadsWorship*





Ben Sternke

# Why LISTENING is the First Step of Evangelism

Photo: ambroochizafer, pixabar

**N**ormally we think of evangelism as a process of telling. We are proclaiming or sharing something. And it is that, of course, but I've become more and more convinced that effective evangelism starts with listening.

Here's the thing: most evangelism strategies focus only on the telling part. They help people figure out what to say, how to present, the right things to proclaim.

## One size does NOT fit all

There are two problems with these kinds of approaches: They assume that everyone has the same problems and pain-points, and

They assume a fairly narrow definition of the gospel that only has to do with forgiveness.

## First let's talk about people's problems.

People generally are open to the gospel (or anything new generally) when life stops working the way it used to. When they have a problem or are experiencing some kind of pain.

Too many evangelism strategies simply assume that the problem people are experiencing is that they feel guilty for their sins, but I've found this to be less and less true.

The way we think about the gospel has been over-influenced by the Reformation, when people were

feeling really guilty about their sins. For them, a gospel that proclaimed their sins were forgiven and their guilt gone was tremendously good news!

But for lots and lots of people today, that's just not the presenting issue. That's not the problem they are experiencing. At least not first. The "presenting problems" of the people I know are usually things like:

- Loneliness and friendship issues
- Family pain and estrangement
- Justice issues
- Fear and insecurity
- Shame

For a number of reasons, people generally don't feel guilty about their sins all the time.



Instead of trying to make them feel guilty so we can give them a solution, perhaps we ought to think about how the good news speaks to the actual issues they're wrestling with. Which brings us to our second point (about the gospel).

### The many-splendored gospel

Here's the thing about the gospel: It is about more than forgiveness. The gospel is SO MUCH BIGGER than a free ticket to heaven!

I like the way Dallas Willard put it: ***The gospel is the good news that life with God in his kingdom is available to everyone.***

This means, yes, our sins can be forgiven (and need to be forgiven).

But it also means:

- The lonely can be set in families.
- The broken can find restoration.
- The sick can be healed.
- The despondent can find purpose.
- The weary can find joy.
- The shame-ridden can be known and accepted.

It means a LOT, in other words. There are a million implications. A million facets to the diamond of the gospel.

It's kind of like a big house with lots of doors. The house is life in God's kingdom, but the "front doors" are as various as there are situations, circumstances, and personalities.

One door is labelled "Friendship" and that's how they find their way into the kingdom. Another door is labelled "Forgiveness."

Another door is labelled "Justice."

Another door is labelled "Community."

They're all doors into the kingdom, so they all lead (eventually) to abundant life, but they are different entry points based on the perspective and "presenting problems."

### Listening for the right door

So how do you know what facet of the good news to proclaim in a conversation? How do you know what to do? Typically people want to share the good news. They want to tell their friends about the life they have in Christ. They just don't know how to do it without coming across a salesman.

Here's the secret: it's actually WAY easier than memorizing a perfect gospel presentations.

**Here's the first step: listen to people and be curious about them.**

Don't try to force-feed a pre-packaged "gospel presentation" to someone who isn't really interested in the "answers" it provides.

For example, someone may be sharing their sorrow over a long-term relationship ending. They are knocking on the "Intimacy" door, or maybe the "Friendship" door.

But if I think the "Forgiveness" door is the only legitimate way in, I won't be really listening to them, I'll simply be trying to guide them to a different door.

"Too bad you feel sad about that relationship, but what you need to feel is guilty about your sin. Then I might have some good news for you."

Can I suggest that this is a bad strategy? Of course it is! Don't force-feed. Instead, we listen. Listening is a key component to evangelism, because I don't know what

facet of the good news to open and share until I understand a bit more about the person I'm talking with.

### An evangelism example

So, let's try this kind of evangelism out in the scenario I mentioned above (the sad person whose long-term relationship recently ended).

After appropriate listening and question-asking (and most people don't ask nearly enough questions), a simple articulation of the gospel for this person might sound like this:

"I can see that this really hurts for you, doesn't it? I think the reason it hurts is that you were made for covenant, you were made for relationships, you were made for intimacy with others. You were made to be seen and heard and welcomed and loved. God created you that way, and he sees you, and hears you and welcomes you and loves you, and he's grieving with you over this broken relationship."

Now, I just made that up off the top of my head. I'm not sure it's very "good," because it's a made-up scenario, and it would obviously change a lot based on who I was talking with and how well I knew them, etc.

But hopefully it gives you an example of how listening is the first step of evangelism.

One of the very best ways to be an evangelist is to simply cultivate a healthy curiosity about other people. You'll find yourself in all kinds of interesting situations!



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# WHAT MAKES A SIMPLE CHURCH?

Phil Brown

**Oikos has always supported house churches or simple churches as they are more commonly known today.**

Simple churches are not defined by simply meeting in homes as they can also gather in various places – cafes, community centers, sports centers, etc. While location does influence the nature of the gathering simple churches are defined more by following some core biblical principles and practices.

*The Apostle Paul urged the Corinthian believers to “follow my example as I follow the example of Christ”. (1 Cor 11:1)*

Paul goes on to praise them for “remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions (or “teachings” NIV) just as I passed them onto you” (1Cor 11:2 NASV). He further writes on the subject of order in churches that “If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice - nor do the churches of God” (1Cor 11:16).

It seems that there were some core principles and practices that characterized new churches according to Paul.

In second Thessalonians 2:15, he again urges the church to stand firm and to

hold to the “traditions” which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (see also 2 Thes 3:6-7, 1 Cor 14:33b, & 14:36 et al.) The point is that there are certain principles and practices that should be part of faith communities.

This is not an exhaustive list but one to prompt our thinking and investigation of the New Testament church.

- The focus is on Jesus Christ as Lord and savior and experiencing his life in our lives and gatherings. This is the basis of fellowship. (1 John 1:1-7)
- Preaching the gospel of the kingdom. (Math 24:14)
- Equipping and training disciples to be disciples and to make other disciples as a core activity of the church. This includes teaching people how to hear the voice of God and to become mature disciples who can equip others. (Matt 28:18-20, John 14:27, Heb 6:1-3, 10-12)
- Interactive participatory gatherings. (1Cor 14:26)
- A highly relational connection: A focus on loving each with regular interaction and community - even

daily fellowship wherever possible. (Acts 2:42-47, John 15:12-17)

- Mutual edification, encouragement, and fellowship as the goals of gathering together (Acts 2:42 etc)
- The Lords supper as a meal. (1Cor 11:17-34)
- The Baptism of believers. (Math 28:19-20)
- Church government by consensus. Non-hierarchical elder led, rather than elder ruled (1 Peter 5:1-4).
- Equipping through the ministry of apostles, evangelists, prophets pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11-13)

“Church” should be simple enough for each believer to do and to reproduce without needing to have a seminary education. (see Acts 11:19-24).

**PHIL BROWN** heads up Oikos Australia and lives with his wife Kate and family in Eagles Nest, Victoria. Check out his short **TOOLKIT** teaching videos at [oikos.org.au](http://oikos.org.au)







# *The CHURCH is like a* **DRUNKEN HORSEMAN**

**JOHN WHITE**

*The church is like a drunken horseman. Prop him up on one side and he falls off on the other. – Martin Luther*

**This is one of my favorite (and probably one of the most accurate) quotes from church history. The church, like a pendulum, seems to swing from one extreme to the other.**

Recently, I saw a post on Facebook that illustrates this principle. The title of the article was, “Why Churches Don’t Need Senior Pastors” and it was addressing this question: “Without a Senior Pastor, who makes the decisions in an organic church?” The post included a short video that explained that Jesus is the Head of the church and He “sets the direction for the church”. He “speaks directly to every member of the church”. Therefore, “every member has an equal say in important church matters.

Sounds good, doesn’t it. “The church is a Body. Jesus is the Head. Therefore, we don’t need a Senior Pastor.” In fact, we don’t need any human leaders at all.

That’s the concept we started with in house church 16 years ago. There were only two problems. The first problem was that it generally didn’t work. In most cases, we ended up with unhealthy, chaotic churches. The second problem, which we discovered sometime later, was that it isn’t biblical.

We were living out that famous quote from Martin Luther: “The church is like a

drunken horseman – prop him up on one side and he falls off on the other.”

One side of the horse: Humans (Senior Pastor, Elder Board, etc.) lead. The other side of the horse: No humans lead. “Every member has an equal say in important church matters.” We had gone from the top-down leadership of a Senior Pastor to the opposite extreme of no human leadership at all.

While there is important truth in the Facebook video, it also missed a key biblical leadership principle that can determine the health of any house church. What I’ve found is that truth often involves a both/and instead of an either/or.

The reality that our churches were floundering drove us to reread our New Testament. What we found was that there is another important metaphor for church besides that it is a Body. That second metaphor is that the church is a family (or household). “...God’s household, which is the church of the living God...” 1 Tim 3:15.

Joseph Hellerman says it this way, “Jesus intentionally adopted “family” as the key relational image for the social organization of the group he was gathering around Himself.”

While God is clearly the Father of this family, Paul understood that human spiritual moms and dads were also needed. “...we were gentle

*among you, like a mother caring for her little children... we dealt with you as a father deals with his own children...” 1 Thes 2:7,11”*

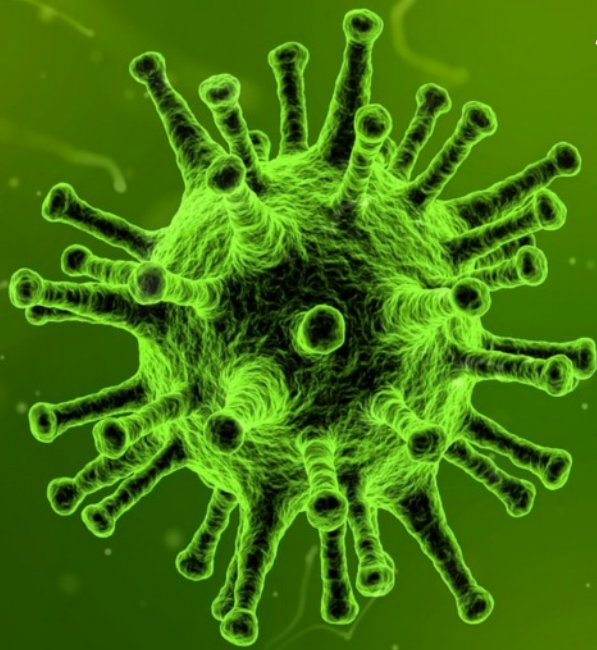
There are a great many implications for these two simple “equations”: “church = family” and “leaders = parents” (parents in the best sense of the word!) One implication is that we never start a new house church without at least one grown up (mature) spiritual parent as the leader. (We believe this is what Jesus was talking about when he directed His church planters to find a “man (or woman) of peace” in Lk 10:6.)

New spiritual families (house churches) are formed around these spiritual parents and, as with human families, these parents determine the values and practices of their families. As with human families, each member “has a say” in important family matters but only to a degree that is appropriate to their level of maturity. Three-year-olds do not “have a say” in what car to buy!

The same is true in spiritual families. This principle has been a huge factor in being able to plant many healthy house churches.



**JOHN WHITE** and his wife, Tamela, have been in the house church world since 1998. After 6 years with DAWN Ministries (Discipling A Whole Nation), they founded the LK10 Community where John is currently the Director. John and Tamela have two children and three grandchildren. [www.lk10.com](http://www.lk10.com)



# VIRAL:

## The Church's New Holy Grail

R. Maurice Smith

*“I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it.”* (Pliny Secundus to the Emperor Trajan, circa AD117, concerning the persecution of Christians)

If you aren't familiar with things which “go viral”, all I can say is “Welcome back from Mars and how was your trip?” In its most recent incarnation, “viral” is the phenomenon of “things” (usually a video posted on a social website such as YouTube) which attract huge attention (millions of views) in a relatively short period of time. Welcome to the “viral” age in which everyone seems intent on achieving 2 minutes of YouTube fame.

**Enter the Church.** It should come as no surprise that the Church would want to enter the viral fray. In the past couple of years at least three major Christian books on “viral Christianity” have come out. The first was by Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird about viral church planting entitled “Viral Churches: Helping

Church Planters Become Movement”. Then two additional books arrived on the scene. The first is by “Mr. Postmodern Pilgrim” Leonard Sweet entitled “Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival”. The second was by organic church planter Ross Rhode entitled “Viral Jesus: Recovering the contagious power of the Gospel”

**Let me be clear.** These are worthwhile books which I would encourage you to read. I am in favor of viral Christianity - an infectious faith that spreads like an airborne contagion. And I am in favor of anything that will stimulate our thinking and our praying in that direction. Please read those two sentences AGAIN before you go any further. Done? Okay, let's move on. One of the benefits of having been a believer for some 40 years now is that I've lived long enough to have seen a few things. I've seen and participated in genuine spiritual awakenings. I've also seen and participated in numerous Church programs. I came to faith during the contagious days of the Jesus Movement and have some sense of what it is like to live among contagious people. All of this has given me some small degree of, well, “perspective”. Here's my perspective.

**Achieving “viral” Christianity has become the new “holy grail” of the Church.** Ten years ago, the “holy grail” was achieving “The Purpose Driven

Life” (which “went viral” in 2002). Holy grails come and go. We should have learned this by now, but apparently not. Reading the blogs and watching the conference circuit, it appears that the focus today is upon how the organic church movement can become a “viral” movement. New rules, laws and principles are now being formulated to dictate the “how tos” of viral Christianity. You know, “If you aren't (fill in the blank), then you'll never be viral, successful, good looking, published, etc.”. Good luck with that one. Here's my perspective, for what it's worth, broken into a handful of thoughts.

**Thought # 1: You and I won't become viral by studying virology.** Honestly, we resemble a gathering of epidemiologists who think that studying the nature of viral infections is the same thing as being infected. It isn't. Studying virology will make you smart. Being infected will make you contagious. For the most part, American Christianity is smart, but it just isn't contagious in any meaningful sense. Talking contagious isn't the same thing as being contagious.

**Thought # 2: Being “viral” doesn't mean putting your existing activities on steroids.** After some reading on various sites promoting “viral” Christianity I come away with the impression that in some quarters of



the church “viral” church planting is nothing more than working harder at what we are already doing. The only thing we’re really changing is our vocabulary. A comment by a major writer on the subject went as follows: “This combination of qualities (8 things he says we must do) along with the blessing and favor of God, could, in fact create a new season in this country where the viral videos on You Tube are discussing the exponential growth and expansion of the gospel work in America”. In other words, if God would just bless our hard work and program we could be on YouTube. Yep. Let me know when that works for you.

**Thought # 3: Beware of “Typhoid Jesus”.** Why is there no “viral” church planting movement in America and the West (and there isn’t, according to the guys studying and promoting it)? Because our Western Christianity - for the most part - is populated by people who have been inoculated when they should have been infected. They were told to make a profession, attend Church, serve on a board, become an usher, teach a class, sit quietly and put something in the collection plate for the new building program. And that’s exactly what happened.

Meanwhile, like the Church of Laodicea, Jesus stands on the outside of our Churches knocking at the door. The problem is that He carries the real contagion. He is “Typhoid Jesus”, and if you let Him in and if you allow His contagion to run unchecked, the chances are high - VERY HIGH - that the contagion He unleashes will destroy your carefully constructed “church” program. Do you REALLY want “Typhoid Jesus” running around loose in your Church, infecting people with crazy ideas like those people in the Bible who left everything to follow Him? Better to ignore that knock on the door. It’s trouble knocking.

**Thought # 4: Genuine Christianity has always been viral.** That’s the point of the historic quote from Pliny, Governor of Bythinia in the early 2nd Century, that we quoted at the beginning of this letter. But the Church was NOT viral because believers ran around calling

themselves “viral” or doing “viral” activities. No, rather, it was unbelievers - like Pliny - who saw and understood the “contagion” in their midst. Viral and contagious people are dangerous to the status quo, and Pliny understood this. Viral Christianity is about a relationship with “Typhoid Jesus” that spirals out of control. Viral Christianity isn’t about books and better methods. Viral Christianity is about a Person, a Presence and a message.

### A Different Metaphor

There is another name for “viral Christianity”. It’s called a “spiritual awakening”. Indeed, historically speaking, those times when Christianity has been the most “viral” are periods of historic spiritual awakening when God has poured out the fire of His Presence and Christianity spread like a wildfire. It was the fire of God’s Presence among His people that Isaiah longed for when he declared, *“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence - as when fire kindles brush-wood and the fire causes water to boil - to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence!” (Isaiah 64:1-2)*

To put it simply, the history of spiritual awakenings from the days of Isaiah until our own day tells us that it is the fire of God’s Presence among His people that produces viral faith. Those early believers whom Pliny described as a “contagion” were not contagious as a result of any “viral church planting methodology” they had been taught at a church planting workshop in Antioch. No. They were viral, contagious and dangerous to the status quo because they were bearers of that fire of God’s Presence for which Isaiah had prayed, which the Spirit of God had poured out upon the Church at Pentecost and which has motivated and empowered the Church from the Day of Pentecost until now. And in seasons of historic spiritual awakening, God in His Providence touches His Church with fresh fire which spreads like a wild fire or a contagion.

The issue isn’t whether or not God wants a viral Church. He does. The question becomes how we get there. I do not believe it will happen by simply offering better “viral methodology”. But I do believe God has a plan. I believe it is the plan of God to return the fire of His Presence and Holiness to His Church. And the impact of that fire will be more viral than anything you and I can imagine. And the history of spiritual awakenings for the past 250 years bears profound witness that this is true.

I believe in viral Christianity. But I also believe that the viral Christianity which turned the ancient world upside down (Acts 17:6), caught the attention of Romans like Pliny and which has characterized every great spiritual awakening of the past 250 years represents a genuine move of God’s Spirit among people who - at least initially - were seeking Him for a visitation in their own generation.

### The Viral Book Project

In the Spring of 2007 God gave our fellowship one of the most profound words I have ever received in 40 years of being a believer. He declared that He intends to return the fire of His Presence to His Church by restoring holiness and the fear of God, genuine repentance and greater intimacy with Himself. I have written and spoken numerous times since then about what I believe this means and have summarized that message in *“The Inextinguishable Blaze: God’s Call to Holiness, Repentance, Intimacy and Spiritual Awakening”* which is available in a print edition on Amazon and on Kindle and Nook.



**MAURICE SMITH** is the author of several books on organic house church and spiritual awakening. He resides in Spokane, Washington with his

wife Gale. Apart from writing Maurice is a keen radio presenter and the instigator of Feed Spokane, a coalition of meal providers and community partners in the greater Spokane area. You can contact Maurice at [safehousesofhopeandprayer.org](http://safehousesofhopeandprayer.org)

# Discovering Your Own Life Message

Roger Thoman

*You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 2 Corinthians 3:3*

**T**he simple/organic church lifestyle opens the door for every believer to step into his unique calling and recognize his unique 'letter' written on his heart by the Spirit of God. Every person has the privilege and responsibility of tuning into the process in which God shapes each one for his destiny. Part of that is recognizing the core message—the life message—that He has formed in us.

Tony Stoltzfus says that every Christian has *"a special life message that's a summary of their story—the place where their various life messages join together in one theme... That one-of-a-kind message is the heart of their call."*

There is power in recognizing and affirming our life message so that we are freely sharing this core of who we are with those around us. It fuels our spiritual passion and excitement. Often, it leads us into a clearer understanding of the Kingdom calling in our life.

Recently, as a group exercise, we looked at ways to identify our life message. We used three different methods which I share here. The idea is that you might be able to identify your life message using any *one* of these three methods. (Note, that I adapted this from Tony Stoltzfus' excellent book entitled *'Leadership Coaching.'*)

## 1. Finding Your Current Life Message by Looking at Your Suffering

Write down a key difficulty you suffered through that has significantly shaped you. Then, write down the core message

that this experience built into you for others!

## 2. Finding Your Current Life Message by Looking at Your Soapbox

What are the themes you come back to over and over when you are helping or serving others? What are you always talking passionately about? What do you most yearn to impart to people? Write down the core message!

## 3. Finding Your Current Life Message by Looking at What Injustices You Want to Fight

What injustices make you want to rise up and fight for the good of all? What's the injustice you see, where you have a compelling vision of the better future that could be? Write down the core message that you want others to hear!

I love the way that God shapes us uniquely and then uses that uniqueness for His glory!

On a personal note, it was a challenging season in my own life (which I describe in the first chapter of *Simple/House Church Revolution*) that led to a re-write of my life message twelve years ago. Out of this came an unexpected re-direction in life and ministry and the formation of Appleseed Ministry. The life message would be something like this: "It's not structured church or religion that transforms people and nations, rather it's all about the simple life of Jesus, flowing personally through his irreligious followers, leading to a lifestyle of loving and discipling others."



**ROGER THOMAN**  
*@rogerthoman describes himself on Twitter as an irreligious Jesus-Follower devoted*

*to His Kingdom through multiplying disciples and simple churches among the nations. [rogerthoman.com](http://rogerthoman.com)*



# CHAINED IN CHURCH

Erroll Mulder

**L**iving in Africa means that you get used to the unexpected. Even so I was struck by a recent headline of our local newspaper which shouted **'CHAINED IN CHURCH!'** An obviously immature mother, believing her thirteen year old daughter was demon-possessed, took her to her local church for exorcism. The leadership chained her in the church building after the teen tried to run away. She was held captive for two days before a concerned resident notified the police, who could not track down the 'out of town' pastoral couple. Thank God she was rescued by the police and placed in a safe house until issues could be sorted out. An investigation of the abusive mother and church leaders is under way.

In a much subtler way, many across the globe are 'chained in church.' They are victims of pastoral/leadership abuse, thriving on guilt-inducing preaching and ministry and the proceeds of 'prosperity promises,' etc. I know of businessmen in financial difficulty who committed suicide when their 'seed-money' did not bring the desired reward.

But in an even subtler way, many promising and committed believers are kept chained by the senior pastor's 'vision' and making his/her life-dreams come true at the expense of their own perhaps more valid kingdom-dreams. [cf. sociologist Josh Packard's *Church Refugees*, the story of the 'dones']

One of the things I believe God has called me to be in my senior years is an informal mentor of sorts to younger believers and leaders. In this journey I have listened to the painful stories of very committed young men and women who desire with all their heart to know God and enlarge his kingdom. They relate stories of ugly church 'control,' both administrative and economic. *'You are free to use your gifts to serve in this church, as long as you align with the senior pastor's vision or the church*

*program.'* Often any latent apostolic spirit is boxed in by church administration, in stark contrast to the spiritual order in 1 Cor. 12:27-28!

A pastor friend of mine used to illustrate as follows. God gives us a river of life in Christ. Denominations and churches turn the river into swimming pools, smaller and larger. The bigger churches have Olympic size pools with marked out lanes. Woe betide the swimmer who does not swim within the demarcated lanes. And of course, the swimmers must help maintain the pool often at cost of

*Use your  
ministry to  
build people,  
not people to  
build your  
ministry.*

much energy, money, time and family-life. Many of these churches would profess to be building God's kingdom, the trouble is 'which/whose kingdom??' Surely the Scriptures can guide us here.

I was immediately reminded of Paul's Galatian Letter and its theme of 'freedom in Christ,' summarised in 5:1, ***'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.'*** Sure, the context here is that of the one true gospel (1:6ff) that brings freedom not through observance of the law but faith in Jesus Christ (ch. 3ff).

However there is also a general principle here, i.e. of maintaining our freedom in

Christ rather than re-enslaving ourselves in being Christ's body in the world.

What about Paul's Ephesian Letter in which the apostle addresses the church's unity and diversity expressed in her spiritual gifts? In chap. 4 v. 8 Paul relates back to a victorious David psalm (68:17-18) in which David revels in Israel's God on behalf of his people: *'The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious – that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.'* In Ephesians Paul declares that this mighty God in Christ is now the *giver* of gifts to his Church for the sake of his saving purpose on earth: v. 7ff, *"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... 'When he ascended on high, he (Christ) led captives in his train and gave gifts to men'... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... from him (i.e. Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.'*

The experienced pastor-evangelist-singer Jacquelyn Heasley has rightly said in one of her famous one-liners, *'Use your ministry to build people, not people to build your ministry.'* I owe it to Frank Viola who on a visit to a very controlling denomination in South America boldly declared to its leadership that *true leadership always sets people free!* I ask why leaders think only they can hear the voice of the Lord: Jesus has a surprise for us, take a moment to read Jn.10:2-6!

This is where mentoring without 'control' comes into play. [PS: I can cite an

outstanding young leader today who, desperate for a mentor apart from the pastor, could not find one in his local church. God is sovereign, and today he is fruitfully mentoring many believers]

Surely our chief guide is the living Word, Jesus himself. I have often referred to Jesus' kingdom mandate for himself and for his followers, after his rejection by the Galilean synagogues and his home synagogue of Nazareth: Lk. 4:18ff (quoting the prophet Isaiah), *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the*

*Lord's favour... Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

From this base Jesus launches his public ministry, calls to himself his first disciples and sends them out (Lk. 10:1ff) into the wider district with authority over disease and demons.

Notice how Jesus, with divine responsibility on the part of his followers, transferred authority. How many loyal and committed young believers and leaders I have seen bruised, because they were entrusted with great responsibilities but allowed no authority, even in minor matters!

Brothers and sisters in Jesus reading this blog, do we have the guts to 'let God's

people go'? It will only happen when we ourselves have sincerely prayed with George Mathieson (1842-1906),

***Make me a captive, Lord,  
And then I shall be free;  
Force me to render up my sword  
And I shall conqueror be!***

**ERROLL MULDER** is a proud South African, living in Port Elizabeth (Nelson Mandela Metro), with his wife Melanie. About ten years ago the Lord sovereignly engineered their exit from the institutional church and they started to facilitate organic house churches in their area, "the most satisfying, joyful time of our lives, following Jesus on 'the road less travelled.'" [errollmulder.wordpress.com](http://errollmulder.wordpress.com)

### WHAT IS A PROPHETIC CHURCH? (Cont from page 3)

#### So what does a prophetic church look like?

Here I'm using the 3-dimensional pattern of Jesus' life as a framework for casting a vision for what the mature Jesus-shaped prophetic community can look like:

#### Upwards to God: Deep spirituality

- As a prophetic church we have a passion for the heart of God, desiring to feel what God feels.
- We prioritise worship, prayer, and the presence of God.
- We are prepared to challenge idolatry and cultivate a hunger for holiness and obedience.
- We create a culture of intentional and expectant listening, making space for this in all parts of church life.
- The presence and holiness of God is tangible and accessible.
- Our church is a place where people's personal covenantal relationship with God is encouraged and enhanced.

- We are developing a culture where individuals have confidence they can hear God for themselves.

#### Inwards to each other: Thriving prophetic ministry & community

- We prophetically reveal the Father's heart in the way we love each other.
- We help each other connect with God's heart so that together we are strengthened, encouraged and comforted.
- The Spirit's presence is manifested through his revelatory gifts as we meet together.
- We demonstrate prefigurative community – radical, holy, covenantal – witnessing to God's presence and power.
- We embrace a prophetic ministry that is servant-hearted, inter-generational and inclusive.

#### Out to the World: Bringing transformation

- We rejoice in revealing the true nature of God to the world around us.
- We are connecting with God's heart for the neighbourhood, city and nation.

- We are walking in the power of the Spirit as we serve our communities.

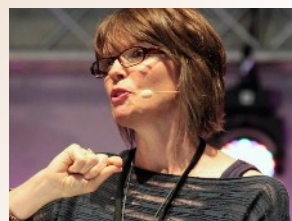
- We take a stand against injustice and unrighteousness and share God's concern for the poor and oppressed.

- We confront powers and principalities.

- We are not afraid to speak truth to power.

This is the prophetic function alive and well in the church of Jesus. This is the prophetic ministry of Jesus reflected in his people. This is the big picture of the prophetic church.

And be encouraged: it's not too difficult to get there!



**CATH LIVESEY** leads Accessible Prophecy [accessibleprophecy.com](http://accessibleprophecy.com), working with churches across the world to develop a healthy and mature prophetic culture

that both resources discipleship and empowers mission. She is the author of *My Sheep Have Ears* and *The Prophecy Course*

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for video and teaching resources





Martin Bragger

# The Behind the Scenes God

**T**here are times when we can feel very alone in our faith. Where we may be the only Christian in a family who may give us a hard time over what we believe and practice. Or we may be the only Christian in our workplace which can create difficulties too, and in this increasingly Christianity-hostile society, we may sometimes feel as if we are the only Christian for a long way around. As a result of this we can feel that God isn't really with us at all, but when that happens it is important to note that in this we are 'not alone in feeling alone'!

We see people feeling the same way in the Bible. For example, there is the case of the prophet Elijah in (1 Kings 18:17-19:8). He had been passionate for God in challenging the pagan 'gods' imported into the Israelite nation by King Ahab's wife Jezebel. Elijah had been God's agent in a great victory on Mount Carmel where Jezebel's 'gods' and prophets had been overwhelmed by the power of God, but this enraged Jezebel who set to hunt him down and have him killed.

Elijah flees for his life into the desert and ends up sitting under a tree, feeling very alone with that 'where is God?' feeling, and just wanting to die and at one point complaining to God that he is the 'only one' of God's people left. However, God speaks to Elijah and encourages him with the statement that He is still working 'behind the scenes', for He still has seven thousand faithful people left in Israel.

A similar despair is experienced by the prophet Elisha's servant who is with his master in the city of Dothan where they are isolated and trapped, with no hope of escape, by the army of the King of Syria, the people of God's enemy (2 Kings 6:1-17). However, Elisha prays to God to open the servant's eyes to spiritual realities and reveals the previously invisible 'horses and chariots of fire' of

## God's invisibility does not mean His absence.

God's army on the mountains surrounding the Syrian army. The servant, in the midst of his alone-ness and hopelessness has an experience of the God who is working 'Behind the scenes' God.

I was recently reminded of both of these stories at the Blood Bank when I was donating blood. One of the nurses was disconnecting me from the machine and we got into a conversation. I had spoken to her before about general things but not previously had any type of spiritual conversation. However, on this occasion, and I don't really remember why, the topic of death came up. Maybe not that surprising with a nurse!

She turned to me and said "But that (i.e. dying) wouldn't be a bad thing would it?" That surprised me because there are not many people who have that view of death these days, most don't see anything positive about it! So I asked her what she meant to

which she replied 'well I know I'm going to heaven'. Now I was fully engaged, and dug further into her statement by asking her why, on what basis, she was so sure, expecting a version of the generally held 'because I've tried to be a good person and live a good life etc' type answer. But no! What I got was a beautiful, succinct and very rare gem of an answer. What she said was 'Because Jesus died for me!'

Here was a Christian woman, evidence of God's presence, (a reminder of the 'Seven thousand in a sense') in whom God was working 'Behind the scenes' in a place I have been going to for years without seeing any sign of God's presence. A not unusual experience in 21st century Australia.

There may be times when we have that 'Elijah' experience and feel alone, isolated and even threatened in our faith in this increasingly Christian-hostile society and, even in places crowded with people, where the 'SALT' is spread ever more thinly, that we are the only Christian for a long way around. It is in those times important to remember the 'Behind the Scenes God'. God's invisibility does not mean His absence.



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February 18, 2019 / [7 comments](#) Wayne Jacobsen [lifestream.org](#)

## It's Right in Front of You

I get so many emails from people trying to find a group of like-minded people or frustrated with the current political climate in which our country finds itself. These are troubled times indeed, but we are part of a kingdom that transcends everything in this age. Our God is working behind it all for his glory and to bring history to a glorious conclusion as the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Christ and of his Father.

It's easy to forget sometimes that he is with us, too, working out his purpose in each of our lives. So quickly we get our eyes on people or our circumstances and forget that we are not alone in any of it. No, we don't always get our way, but there is always a path to take that yields to the glory of his kingdom and how it takes shape in us.

This quote from a recent Time Magazine article spawned some of [our discussion last week on The God Journey Podcast](#).

*Unless you're among the tiny group of people who exercise actual, substantial political authority, each of us can only have a large influence on a small number of people and a small influence on a large number of people. In other words, we have the potential to transform a life. We have minimal capacity to individually change American politics.*  
(From [Why Anger is a Wasted Emotion](#) by David French)

Man, I can raise my hand here. It may feel good to berate the idiocy of our national leaders, but to what end? How much time and emotional energy do we give to circumstances over which we have no control or influence?

Social media provides yet another illusion that our voice on the big-ticket items of politics or religion can really make a difference, and then are frustrated when it doesn't. What I love about the quote above is that it asks us to be present in the places where we can make a difference, which is in the lives of people right in front of us every day.

Who do you know that brightens your heart when you spend time with them? Who do you know in need whose day you can brighten? What conversations can you have today that will



move the needle in someone's life? Who could you reach out and encourage today instead of reading the end of this blog?

That's where our attention needs to be. I'm afraid the enemy has us wasting so much time venting on things that have no impact, instead of engaging the things right in front of us that do.

Somehow we're always looking for the big moment "out there" somewhere instead of living with what Father has put right in front of us. Many keep trying to find the right group of people to fellowship with, or the best model for church life, instead of celebrating his presence in whomever we are with today. Jesus seemed to live every day with what was in front of him, and some of his most impactful moments rose out of spontaneous engagements that he didn't pass by.

I'm finding my heart these days much more drawn to what I can impact and wasting far less time with words that merely flutter into the ether of cyberspace and are lost the moment after I push "post." And I'm having a far richer time.

Jesus said the kingdom of God wasn't "out there" somewhere; it's already *inside* you. What you need from God today, he has already brought right to your doorstep. All you have to do today is respond to what God has already put inside you, and to what's in front of you. That's where you'll find life abundant and fruitful.

You might well miss it if your eyes are set "out there" over the horizon, instead of "right here" where you are today.

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