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OIKOS Australia

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

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DIRECTIONS

There's more with us than with them!

In the current climate in Australia Christians are facing criticism, undermining of credibility, mockery and increasing reduction of person liberties. It is easy to feel overwhelmed with the avalanche of cultural Marxism being imposed upon everyone as our country is pushed further into subjection and control. Many are hoping that this will change with the recent Federal election, but while it may slow somewhat, it is doubtful that it will cease.

We are pursuing the kingdom of God instead of the dreams and dictates of a world control by the globalists and Marxist's and others.

The future at times appears bleak for Christians in Australia, as it is in many places around the globe. In fact, Christians are the most persecuted minority in the world.ⁱ However, as it is often said - you need to read the last chapter of the book - the good book! The good news is that Christ and his followers are ultimately victorious despite going through severe opposition, persecution and in some cases even death. However, the Lamb is ultimately victorious.

I often think of that story in the Old Testament where overnight the Syrian armies surrounded Dothan intent on capturing Elisha the prophet. Elisha had been giving prior warning to the king of each time the Syrian King was planning an ambush to capture him. When the servant of Elisha got up in the morning and look out from the walls of the city he was alarmed to see it surrounded by the Syrian army. In fear he cried to "Alas my master! How shall we do" (2 Kings 6:15 WEB).

I am stirred by Elisha's response: "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those with them" v16

Elisha then prayed "Lord open his eyes that he may see". Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hill full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As the enemy approached him Elisha prayed that they would be smitten with blindness (2Kings 6:16-18 NIV).

We need to look to God for his prophetic revelation and to see that the forces of Heaven outnumber the forces of the enemy and to pray that the enemy is smitten with blindness. Contrary to appearances "there are more with us than with the enemy" - even in Australia.

We need to be respectful and wise but courageous and audacious in sharing the Gospel with people, demonstrating the kingdom of God and announcing his coming rule. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirits power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4-5)



(Continued on page 18)

Do you follow Him?

Michael Butler

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

In AD 40, it is estimated that there were around 1,000 followers of Christ. Some 300 years later, nearly half the Roman empire, or close to 33m people claimed Jesus as their Lord. There has never been such a rapid growth of a movement in the history of the world. It was, of course, about this time that Constantine sealed what many think was one of the greatest acts in history, he made Christianity the State religion. Really?

What started as movement that persecution, famine, geography or politics could not hold up, grew into an institution that has stood still, almost ever since. That is, until now. While most of the Western church is oblivious, God is moving his church forward like we haven't seen for nearly 1800 years.

That's right, Christianity, or at least followers of Jesus, are being birthed globally at a scale that is in some cases breathtaking. We are, far and away, the fastest growing 'religion' in the world. Few in the West know anything of it, yet all over the world, followers of Jesus are taking seriously his command to 'go into the world and make disciples.' Sadly, we are still stuck in church, debating whether miracles still happen today.

What a waste.

Consider this story.

A woman in a country where the Bible is barely known, came to Christ and immediately set about being obedient, by looking for ways to start a Discovery Bible Study. The only problem was, she had to travel 90mins each way by train to work a 13hr day so she could feed her family. Her solution? She asked the Lord to open her eyes to what he wanted her to do, and then the revelation came. Within weeks, she had 4 people at her seat doing Discovery Bible Study; within months, the entire carriage was doing the same, and thereafter another entire carriage was doing the same thing. These mostly women, also prayed and fasted about their local communities, and as they left the train at different stations, groups would pray and then witness into their local communities. A movement of followers of Jesus began, multiplying rapidly. What a story, one of thousands we can recant.

So then, what of us, why in our own country, is it so hard to see much fruit, why are movements that multiply unheard of?

Well, they are happening, albeit slowly. But, it would seem two crucial things make the difference.

Firstly, we simply don't pray into this enough. As I read stories of movements of Christ being birthed, I see long prayers into the night, day after day, week after week – accompanied by serious fasting. It seems followers in many countries have long recognised that they are in a

spiritual battle. We have yet to wake up to that, and instead substitute the power of the Holy Spirit with our own strength.

Beyond that, sadly, it seems the very institution we have become is the very thing that prevents the Gospel from moving ahead. Closely related to the first point above, we have allowed somebody else to 'live' our life for Jesus. We have been hoodwinked (and lazy) in believing that ordinary people are simply not able to preach, heal, lead others to Christ and found churches. Yet that exactly what is happening in many places around the world. Isn't it *exactly* the model Jesus initiated with a few fishermen, a tax collector and a Zealot?

This is far more serious than we imagine. Firstly, we simply do not understand Paul's language above, about following Jesus. We ignore Jesus' commands to give it all up and pursue him. Further, we risk - those who want to insist calling themselves by a 'church' title - being responsible for the eternity of thousands, possibly millions, by having them believe that attendance at a weekly service will actually save us.

We must, must, open our eyes to what it means to Follow Jesus, which above all, is what he called each of us to do. If we would do that, our world around us could change. What a thought.



MICHAEL AND SALLY BUTLER lead *Manly Disciple Makers* in Manly, Sydney, (see page 11) You can read of some of their adventures on nobrokenreed.org or get in touch at justbutlers@gmail.com

Breaking the Stained Glass Curtain

Neil Cole



When I was a younger man, pundits often spoke about curtains that needed to be removed so that our societies could be open and influence one another, hopefully for the better. The bamboo curtain that kept communist China from interaction with the world eventually parted. The iron curtain that separated communist Russia was torn down with sledgehammers. There is one remaining curtain that needs to come down if the kingdom of heaven is to impact the rest of the world: the stained glass curtain.

Church, as we have known it, is mostly removed from influence in society. A misguided extractational approach to our world, where we extricate new adherents from their non-Christian web of relationships to join our separated community, has only succeeded in extracting us from any positive influence. The result is that we are most often isolated from our neighborhoods and have a reputation for doing little that is good for them. We shout at the world from a distance and are rarely heard. Instead we are the butt of late-night jokes. We must face the truth that no matter what we think of ourselves, blessing the community around us is not the reputation we have with our neighbors.

There are exceptions (there is no reason to tell me so) — I'm sure your church is awesome! This perspective, however, must be sought outside the church; your own view within is not what I'm talking about. If they notice us at all it is usually not because we are providing something positive. We are supposed to be known for our unconditional love (John 13:35), but that has not been the case for quite some time.

Here is an observation about how our neighbors view us from my book, *One Thing: A Revolution to Change the World with Love*. Most cities are openly hostile to churches and trying to prevent them from acquiring property. In many cases, the local Denny's Restaurant does more for the community than the local church. At least Denny's provides jobs, meals, and pays taxes for public services and city

infrastructure. The typical church doesn't do any of that. [*One Thing: A Revolution to Change the World with Love*, pp. 221-222]

I have recently been doing kingdom work in the community of Watts, which is a very volatile neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. Watts is two square miles with more churches within its' boundaries than any other societal enterprise. More churches than schools. More churches than stores. More churches than government services...and it is one of the worst neighborhoods in America.

Watts is ground zero for two racial riots in my lifetime. Poverty, drug addiction, teen pregnancy, single-parent homes, STDs, gang violence, vandalism, corruption, prostitution, theft... and churches are all rampant in this part of the City. Given this reality, it is hard to tell someone that these churches are really making a difference in a convincing fashion. In fact I have found that churches are usually prevalent in all of the worst neighborhoods in America. It is time for us to acknowledge this elephant in the room and ask some hard questions. Are we more a part of the problem than the solution and everyone sees it except us?

As I have travelled and examined our Western Christian enterprise I have

been forced to conclude that our efforts are not making any significant headway in changing our society. We need to make a big change immediately, but what kind of change? That is what led me to write my recent book *One Thing: A Revolution To Change The World With Love*.

While every pastor is looking for the next 3-step solution to church growth, I

concluded that our problem is spiritual more than strategic. We've tried so many strategies and ended with the same lack of significance. Yes, proximity is a challenge because of our lack of incarnational presence, but not the actual problem. The reason we are separated from true influence is not simply because of our address and "y'all come...and stay" posture in the world. There is indeed a more severe undercurrent that subverts all our efforts and mutes our message.

I believe we have forfeited a true gospel spirituality for a false one that depends on our own effort and displays

our own strength (or lack thereof). Wanting to be appealing to the world we have become the opposite. If the real gospel was alive in us we could not contain it in our current structures, it would bust loose into its natural expression—movements of transformed lives. We would be unable and unwilling to remain as isolated and ineffectual as we currently are, occupied with our own self-interests.

We must realize that being incarnational is not just about being in the world; it is about letting the life of

Christ in us infect the lives around us with His love and message of freedom and hope. Incarnational mission is about bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth now where it is needed most. Just getting out there with our current messed up spirituality will only cause more problems. Don't do that. We must cease practicing a do-it-yourself, 3-step, pragmatic spirituality that endeavors to do works for God rather than letting God do the work in and through us.

As Tozer once said: *"God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible. What a pity that we plan only the things that we can do by ourselves."*

It is possible to have the creed and not the deed. We don't need a statement of faith; we need a real faith that makes a statement. We lose any hope of a good reputation in our neighborhoods by continuing to do what we have been doing. More of the same will only produce more of the same.

We are deceiving ourselves if we think that meeting on Sundays for songs and sermons is changing the world. We must do more and it must be done outside our walls, but first inside our souls. Break down the stained glass curtain and get out into the neighborhood to help people with genuine love rather than self-interest. Let's stop being a people known as a voting block called "evangelicals" (Good News bearer) lets actually be good news. That's what Jesus did. I believe it is what He is calling us to do now.

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You have, perhaps, heard of the “tiny house movement.” If you haven’t, a quick search on the internet for “tiny house” will yield about 55 million results. One could say that tiny houses are quite big these days.

The folks who are living in tiny houses seem to love them, elated over the benefits of simplified living. They speak of how nice it is to live in just a few hundred square feet of space and being free of debt, clutter, major maintenance and so on.

Of course, as much as those of us in the “not-so-tiny-house movement” (still the majority) might admire tiny-house enthusiasts, we can think of a few disadvantages to tiny houses. Like “you can’t have any kids,” and “it’s kind of nice to live in more than one room,” and “forget about having friends come for dinner during inclement weather,” or “can’t let visitors stay overnight.”

In any case, there are definitely “different strokes for different folks.” And although I’m an unlikely candidate for scaling down into a tiny house, I have surprised myself by scaling down into a tiny church (which meets in my not-so-tiny house).

The reason I’ve surprised myself is because during past decades I’ve planted and pastored churches that eventually consisted of hundreds of congregants. And my goal was always to grow to thousands. I dreamed of the day I would be a megachurch pastor. In my mind, the bigger the better and the more successful. (Which is one reason why I counted pregnant women twice.)

But having done it all—that is, rented public school auditoriums, remodeled an old theater, constructed a new church building with paved parking lots, raised funds for building programs, signed bank loan documents, led worship (and tried to cast demons out of worship team musicians), hired youth pastors, led board meetings (and tried to cast demons out of board members), prepared and preached thousands of sermons, organized church dinners, led men’s ministry, directed staff members and committees, officiated at weddings and funerals, recruited new volunteers to replace burnt out volunteers, did hospital visitation and marriage counseling and a host of other standard pastoral duties—and having experienced some degree of “success” in all of it—today I’m loving my tiny church. *Really* loving it.

So What is a Tiny Church?

Of course, the “congregation” of a tiny church is tiny. The maximum size is about twelve. The minimum is three. Jesus promised, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matt. 18:20). Based on that promise, you might think the minimum is two, but if so, you’ve overlooked the fact that Jesus promised that He would be joining the gathering. So the minimum is three, not two.

Some might claim that such a gathering does not constitute a church. If we are honest with Scripture, however, we will have to admit that when the New Testament speaks of “church,” it never refers to a building. It always refers to a group of believers. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which literally means “an assembly.”

In the Bible, “church” can refer to the assembly of all the believers on earth and in heaven (the universal church), all the believers in a region, such as the “church at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2), or to a small group that meets in a house, like the church that met in the houses of Aquila and Prisca (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), Nympha (Col. 4:15) or Philemon (Philem. 1-2).

If we are *really* honest with Scripture, we must admit that there is no mention of church buildings, which makes church buildings—dare we say it—*non-scriptural*. (But who could ever be *that* honest?)

And all of this makes it kind of funny when people who are associated with churches that meet in special buildings tell me the tiny church that meets in my house isn't really a church. Really? Were the *churches* that met in the homes of Aquila and Prisca, Nympha and Philemon not actually churches? Is a small group of believers who gather in Jesus' name and whom He Himself joins not a church? Are the millions of churches around the world that meet in houses not actually churches?

No, in my house, a church meets. A *biblical* church. It is not just a "Bible study." It is not just a "cell" or a "small group." It is a church. End of discussion!

An Objection

"But a true church needs a pastor!" some may claim. OK, I tend to agree. In my tiny church, I suppose that I could be considered to be a shepherd (which is what "pastor" means). But considering the fact that the "*Good Shepherd*" (John 10:11, 14), the "*Great Shepherd*" (Heb. 13:20) and the "*Chief Shepherd*" (1 Pet. 5:4) solemnly promised to join us every time we gather in His name, it seems my pastoral ministry is of secondary importance, to say the least. It is quite possible that I could even occasionally be absent and everything might go OK in a gathering of people who are all indwelt and joined in a special way by the Good, Great and Chief Shepherd, who is also the Head of the Church (universal)! Right?

And that is one of the many things I love about the tiny church that meets in my house. I am not the center of the "show." I often felt uncomfortable with the central role I played in the previous churches I planted and pastored (with the exception of all the times when I secretly loved it...).

I can still remember the rush of being up front, center stage. Lights, and sometime cameras, were directed at me. All the seats in the auditorium faced me. All the people sat at a lower elevation than me. A big cross was my backdrop. Make no mistake, I was THE MAN OF GOD. Called.

Appointed. Anointed. My job required supernatural power: to hold their attention and keep them happy, in hopes they would return next week.

And this I did every week in spite of the fact that the Bible I claimed to believe says, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26)—all obviously given by the Spirit for the common edification. Those kinds of scripture passages were so embarrassing to "Bible-believing" churches like mine. Apparently, when the body of Christ—of which we are all important members—comes together, it is not God's plan that only one member, "the mouth," do everything while all the other members are functionless and sit silently listening.

In the tiny church that meets in my house, I never prepare or "deliver" a sermon. We study the Word together. I don't send a subtle message via a weekly monologue that only seminary and Bible school grads are qualified to interpret and share God's Word. On the contrary, I intentionally convey that (1) *every* believer, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can learn to rightly interpret God's Word, (2) *every* believer should be practicing everything they understand in God's Word, and (3) *every* believer should be sharing with other believers, whom they are responsible to disciple, what they practice. This is biblical (Matt. 5:19; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 2:2).

America's Got Talent

Because I never deliver any sermons, that means my sermons are never judged on how "good" they are, as



they always were in my previous churches. So I no longer have to worry that, although a great performance earns rave reviews, it also raises the expected standard for every performance thereafter. And I no longer crave compliments (or dodge digs) as congregants shake my hand on their way out the door:

"Great sermon today, pastor David!"
"Thanks, layman Joe! I hope you'll come back next week to hear another well-rehearsed speech, not longer than 20 minutes, full of funny illustrations, and one that is not too convicting, but that makes you feel good about yourself!"

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'I hope you will come back next week!'"

"Don't worry, Pastor David, you'll always see me in the last pew, just as long as there isn't a home game that starts at 1:00!"

"Ah yes, I know you're a big football fan! Do enjoy the game this afternoon! And don't forget that Jesus died and rose again, and He desires that none should perish. Hundreds of millions of people are waiting to hear the gospel for the first time, which is their only hope of gaining eternal life and escaping hell. And Jesus warned us that, if we are not His committed disciples, we are utterly worthless to Him."

"What did you say?"

"I said that I so appreciate the five dollars you put in the offering plate whenever you attend our uplifting services!"

"Ah, glad to contribute. It was nothing."

“You aren’t kidding about it being nothing! Your checkbook is no doubt one more sure indication that you are on the broad road that leads to destruction!”

“What did you say?”

“I said, ‘Are you sure you don’t want to stay another five minutes to enjoy some Christian fellowship, a donut and a cup of coffee? It won’t cost you a dime!’”

And that is another thing I love about the tiny church that meets in my house. I am no longer tempted to treat “goats” like they are “sheep” (see Matt. 25:31-46).

First of all, few goats will even consider attending something as strange as a small gathering in a house of people who actually love Jesus. In their religious minds, darkened by tradition, you don’t attend church in a house. You attend church in a church building.

Second, if a goat accidentally did attend, he would quickly realize he did not fit in among true disciples of Jesus who are striving to obey and please Him. He would feel very uncomfortable around people who worship and talk as if Jesus actually is King of kings and Lord of lords. So he would either repent and become a Christ follower, or he would never return. Here’s the biblical norm: *If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you* [just like Jesus promised] (1 Cor. 14:24-25, emphasis added).



Biblical Goals

What I love the most about the tiny church that meets in my house is that we are actually focused on being, making and multiplying disciples. Our goal is not to fill a building with hearers of the Word, but to fill the world with doers of the Word. We aren’t judging success by counting noses and nickels on Sunday mornings. Jesus’ mandate is that we make disciples. Disciples are people who obey Jesus’ commandments. One of those commandments is that we make disciples. All of the members of the tiny church that meets in my house are interested in learning to effectively share the gospel and disciple those who receive it. Sure, we are all battling different degrees of fear in that regard, but we’re all interested and making efforts. Any professing Christian who is not interested in those things is deceiving himself that he is a Christian. Yet those kinds of “believers” seem to be the majority in many churches, and pastors keep preaching to them every week like they are God’s people!

We follow a simple format each time we gather that lends itself to everyone’s individual spiritual progress. We first “look back.” Everyone shares how they’ve done the past week on their spiritual journey, particularly focusing on any commitments they

made the last time we gathered—all in response to the impact of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Then we “look up,” by studying the Word together and by listening to the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Then, based on what we gain when we “look up,” we “look forward” by making commitments of obedience

and by praying for the Lord’s help. It is intentional, every time.

I can’t help but contrast those gatherings with how it was when I was the pastor of a big box church. Even after a watershed personal repentance that occurred late in my pastoral

career—one that resulted in many subsequent impassioned and convicting sermons—there was little way of gauging my impact or the personal spiritual progress of any of my church members. There was no method or means of accountability, no way to really measure spiritual progress.

Imagine if any human institution operated as so many churches do. Imagine an army whose soldiers listen to an (optional) weekly lecture but aren’t expected to ever show up for duty, a sales force that never has to report on how sales are progressing, a college in which students are never tested and never

graduate. What would be accomplished by such silly scenarios? Very little or next to nothing! That’s a picture of vast numbers of churches, and what is often passed off as “making disciples”! It would be funny if it weren’t so tragic!

It took me quite a few years to realize that teaching, by itself, does not constitute disciple making. Jesus did not just teach or lecture His disciples. He modeled obedience to His Father before them. He also gave them ministry assignments and required follow-up reporting. He let them fail. He corrected them. He ate with them. He interacted with them. He answered their questions. He washed their feet. That is how disciples are made.

Paul wrote, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). You can only imitate what is modeled.

The ultimate goal of our tiny church is that every member will be pioneering

Our goal is not to fill a building with hearers of the Word, but to fill the world with doers of the Word

and leading a tiny church themselves, imitating what they've seen modeled. But they will never disconnect from our tiny church. Rather, I hope to continue discipling them as they launch and lead their own tiny churches, and even as their disciples begin to make disciples.

The Love of the Brethren

This brings me to another thing I love about the tiny church that meets in my house. Among ourselves, we're experiencing genuine Christian fellowship. Rather than looking at the backs of the heads of the people in the pew in front of me, I'm looking into the faces of people whom I am increasingly getting to know and love.

And they're beautiful. Nobody wears the "Sunday mask." We share our struggles and our victories with each other. We encourage one another. We pray for each other. We enjoy each other's company. We're friends. Some among us are "accountability partners," who spend time each week together discussing what we are learning, applying and sharing with others from our daily Bible reading.

On a side note, we've never "taken up an offering," because there are no expenses in our tiny church. We don't have a mortgage on a building, utilities or upkeep. We don't have any staff salaries to pay. Our friends often bring food to share at our common meal, but even that really isn't necessary, as my wife and I can handle the weekly meal expense.

Yet all of us are generous givers to the degree that God has blessed us. We give towards what we are passionate about, namely, the furtherance of Jesus' kingdom. So we support missionaries, and we assist our poor and persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. That way our spiritual family whom we are commanded to love is not being robbed by church mortgage payments and staff salaries. We are actually, according to the Bible, laying up treasure in heaven, rather than paying what are essentially "church club membership dues."

What About Kids?

There is still more that I love about the tiny church that meets in my house. I love the kids who come.

You might wonder what we do with kids. We only have two very small ones in attendance right now. One is baby Luther, who does baby things. The other is a delightful toddler named Ivy who does toddler things, like playing with toys in a nearby room. Both children fit right in with us. And they have something to teach us, because the Head of Church told us, "Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). (When I pastored a big box church, we removed those teachers from the sanctuary whenever they had something to say!)

In a healthy tiny church, experienced parents can teach and model good parenting as a service to parents who are struggling with their children. It's part of discipleship. In fact, parenting itself is discipling—the discipling of children. Let's face it, one of the main reasons we have to segregate children from adults in big box churches is because neither parents nor children are being disciplined! We "solve" the problem by a temporary weekly quarantine!

What About You?

Do I think God is against big box churches? No, I believe that God, being gracious, favors as much as He can anything and everything that bears any resemblance to the biblical pattern. He, unlike so many of us, is much more inclined to draw big, inclusive circles than small, exclusive circles. Remember that Jesus once said, "He who is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:50). Big box churches undeniably bear some resemblance to the biblical pattern, and so God blesses them as much as He can. Of course, however, God prefers 100% conformity to the biblical pattern. And surely greater conformity results in greater blessing and fruitfulness. Why be satisfied with second, or third, best?



Obviously, I haven't written this article for those who are satisfied, but for those who are dissatisfied, just as I was at one time. There are hundreds of thousands of Christians around the world who are the casualties of big box Christianity. Many are former pastors who have been spit out or burnt out by the system. (Many are pastors still.) And then there are all the deacons, elders, Sunday school and Bible class teachers, and others, who have never quite had what it takes to serve as big box pastors, but who actually fit the biblical qualifications for leadership found in the New Testament. Many of them could be fruitful disciples of Jesus who make and multiply disciples.

If what I'm talking about resonates with you, I'd recommend that you gather 3 to 5 other spiritually hungry believers and commit to meeting together once a week for 10 weeks while using the discipleship training course found at ZumeProject.com. That's what we've initially used at the tiny church that meets in my house. We stretched it out to more than 10 weeks, as the concepts, although simple and biblical, need time to sink in, as they are sadly foreign to Western Christianity. But as we've intentionally applied and committed ourselves, we've been making spiritual progress. *That is exciting* to this old, recovering pastor. And that is why I'm totally loving my tiny church!



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The TRINITARIAN Community



Eun Strawser

The concept of the “Trinity” is often so complex that sometimes we don’t really know how to engage with God as “three in one”. But, if we as church planters want to engage with the culture around us through a missional community, understanding the Trinity can help us answer key questions in regard to what community is meant to look and feel like.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11)

Remember that the Bible is really about how God wants to reveal Himself to us — how God is telling His story to us. The narrative of Jesus’ baptism can sometimes take us for a loop because of how strange and fictitious it sounds.

But if we were to really engage with who God is, that is, the Trinitarian community

of God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and how God wants to reveal Himself to us, then we would come to realize how living in this manner of such close proximity and deep love is not as fictitious and strange as it sounds. Jesus’ starting point — the manner by which He launches His whole purpose in His life on earth, how He begins His mission to restore all things to Himself — His starting point is the reality of the Trinitarian community.

Who is God?

He is the Trinitarian Community. There’s a nuance in the theology of the Trinity. The importance isn’t just in defining the distinct but unified “three persons” of God in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in understanding how the three interact with one another.

The baptism of Jesus is a picture of God showing us a glimpse of what that interaction is like. The Son’s starting point is that He hears, He always hears, the Father’s voice. The Father doesn’t begin by telling Jesus what He should do, but He tells Him who He is — and the Father doesn’t tell Him that He’s this thing or that, but He tells Him:

1. Who He is in relationship with the Father

2. How the Father feels about him

Jesus’ starting point is that the Father tells him that you’re my Son and I feel immense pleasure because of you.

And when we look at Jesus’ interaction with the Holy Spirit, it isn’t that a physical dove came floating down from the sky — it’s that Jesus physically feels the Spirit’s presence on Him at all times. The Spirit’s interaction with Jesus also does two things:

1. He is never alone
2. The Presence of God is something that He feels on him (like a dove) at all times

Jesus’ starting point is that the Holy Spirit is with Him and He actually feels and is aware of His Presence on Him.

Who are we?

We are invited into God’s Trinitarian Community.

Jesus says, *My prayer is not for them [the twelve disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent*

me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23)

When we look at the language Jesus uses, you can hear the language of the Trinitarian community over and over again – it's this circular and intertwined dance of love and being sent and dwelling in one another.

He explicitly says over and over again that we are invited into this kind of community. The beauty of the Trinitarian community is that it's not something God wants to withhold from us – it's the very way that He wants to interact with us. It's the way that He wants us to interact with one another. He tells us that, in interacting with one another in the way that the Trinitarian community interacts, is the very way that shows the world who Jesus is.

How we love one another reflects Jesus to the world around us. So, as people who are invited into God's Trinitarian community, we experience God in the

same way that Jesus interacted with the Father and the Holy Spirit:

- We hear the Father's voice telling us who we are — that we're His people, His child, His beloved, His tribe, His [fill in the blank with the most intimate relational word you can think of – that's you to God]
- We hear the Father's voice telling us that before we've done anything, He feels immense pleasure because of us — He's so uniquely fond of us — He enjoys us — He loves us for who we are, not what we do
- We know that we are never alone because the Holy Spirit is with us
- We experience and feel the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives
- We interact with one another in community in the same way that God interacts in community
- We remind one another of who we in are relationship with God and how He feels about each of us — that is the starting point for all of us
- We remind one another that the Holy Spirit is present with us right now and we have access to His power at all times



How can we start?

How can we interact with the Trinitarian Community? In our community, we use a simple prayer to engage with God on behalf of one another by asking God three specific questions:

"Father, what do you think about this person?"

"Jesus, how do you feel about this person?"

"Holy Spirit, is there anything you want this person to do?"

Leonardo Boff writes, *"Community is the deepest and most foundational reality that exists."* Can you imagine a community of people who interacts with one another the way that God interacts in community because of our relationship with Him?

Out of a deep sense of love and identity and the daily experience of His Presence with us, we live in the way of Jesus, calling one another into this depth of love, identity and presence.

EUN STRAWSER is a bi-vocational church planter and physician in Honolulu, Hawaii where she's surrounded by her tribe, Ma Ke Alo o, a people of Presence, which includes her red-bearded husband and their three, seriously, amazing children. www.mkao.community

DISCIPLE MAKING TRAINING - MANLY

AUGUST 17th, 2019

This will be a full day event in Manly and a great chance for learning, practical application on sharing the gospel, fellowship and connecting together. To those of you who feel trained to the hilt, we still need you to come as we are expecting a lot of young people who will learn from your experience and we can send them out on the streets with you during the event!

Also please pay careful attention to the venue details as this is a split venue gathering (details below). For those coming to Manly from a distance it's best to train to Circular Quay and take the ferry to Manly wharf and allow time from there for a 15-minute walk to the first venue. Parking a car in Manly can be tricky, but plenty of paid parking is available.

Please let us know your plans and please feel free to invite others who are keen to learn to make disciples and spread the Kingdom - we're excited!

When: Sunday August 17th 2019

Where:

9:30 AM - 1:00 PM "Ocean Beach Hall" North Steyne Surf Club, 93-95 North Steyne, Manly (411 Training and DBS and light lunch provided)

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM Manly Beachfront and Manly Corso - "Fruit Picking"!

3:00 PM - 5:00 PM "Community Northern Beaches", upstairs in the hall, 12 Wentworth St, Manly (reporting back, sharing and fellowship)

Cost: A donation to cover venue hire - thank you.

Bring: Walking shoes, maybe an umbrella, a pen, an attitude to serve the Lord and an expectant heart.

Booking: Please email Sally at justbutlers@gmail.com

For further info: Sally and Michael Butler - 0404 834 402

AUSTRAL

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF PORT KEMBLA

Ailsa Matesic

We moved from Albion Park early this year and are now in Port Kembla (PK), to make disciples. We have two single dads with children who are Christians and who we are becoming family with. They live 15 min walk away. We also have Amanda and Luke and 3 boys who have continued to be with us on our adventure. They live 5 min walk away. We are not investing much time at all trying to convince "Christians" of our journey, although I (Ailsa) meet once per month with PK pastors, for the sake of growing oneness and for Port Kembla.

Our missional family's intention is to represent Jesus and His Kingdom here to those who do not know Him or know how amazing He is, and to represent His Kingdom values here in PK.

A week with us might look something like this...

MONDAY - After my own family prays together for 15 mins, we send each other to GO! (we do this 4 mornings per week). While Michael minds Amanda's 3 boys, I meet with Amanda, who is a key leader/elder at 8am to pray/listen and discuss how our spiritual family is going. At 9 am a few of us meet with YWAM for their weekly community worship.

TUESDAY - Once or twice a month Cris and I invite people who are not yet believers, or whoever the Lord leads, to have dinner with us.

WEDNESDAY - We started a weekly DBR (discussion bible reading) in February with 4 families represented. We planned to just go for 12 weeks, each week discussing a story of hope in the new testament. First week of June we multiplied. So now the 3/4 core men meet on Wednesday night. Tonight they hope to be joined by 2 other men, Jacob and Dave, who have shown interest in Jesus. The men are looking at doing a prayer walk in the neighbourhood before

they get together. After 3 months Cris hopes to pass on leadership to Pete, or whoever is willing and walking with Jesus.

Nearly every Wednesday at 2 pm I meet with a small team of people not connected to our missional family. We discuss how we are going making disciples and upcoming training which we hold monthly for anyone wanting to make disciples. Some Wednesday nights some of the women and children meet for dinner but this will be spontaneous.

FRIDAY - 7am til 8am Amanda, Destiny and I (Ailsa) prayer walk the main street or wherever we are prompted. Then we meet at our frequently visited café, called Arthurs, to read the bible. We will meet not yet believers and invite them for coffee and bible, discussing the stories of hope we did last term.

Destiny and I prayer walked and bumped into Jacki, 62, someone I'd met on the street 2 weeks ago. Jacki came to Arthurs with us and had a coffee. We were able to have some spiritual conversations and prayer. Jacki is interested in doing this with us Friday mornings. I also meet with her for coffee or meals at other times, gradually embracing her into our missional family.

Every second Friday night, Destiny and I meet at Amanda's with 2 young schoolgirls who belong the single dads. We want to be an example of women who follow Jesus to them.

SUNDAY - Our missional family meet Sunday, usually for dinner, but could be breakfast or a day out. This is our family fun day, e.g. dinner, games. There's still opportunity to reflect on Jesus, the cross and resurrection, to pray for each other. It's also a great opportunity to invite



Team getting ready to prayer walk in Port Kembla

others who are NYB (not yet believers) or who are on a similar journey. The odd Sunday we will have someone come equip us with what the Lord wants to say.

Most of what I've said here is intentional. And this is largely my perspective, not mentioning what others are doing and who they're connecting with and praying for. Amongst all this is our everyday lives and a heap of spontaneous visits, prayer walks, fun, connecting with NYB, meals etc.

We have a Regional Gathering weekend coming up in September, tentatively 20-22nd. Still listening in on the Lord but at this stage it will be encouragement, meals, prayer walking, and an emphasis on walking together as generations and family who are making disciples. Will keep you posted on that.



Group of ladies meeting in hotel in East V also engaging in regular prayer walk



what's happening around the nation stories

A SPRINKLING OF AUSSIE STORIES

Phil Brown

Fertile soil produces an abundant crop and across Australia the fields are ripe for the harvest. In the past couple of weeks we have connected with 6 new house churches and numerous other people interested in house church/simple church! There is a growing number of people being stirred across the nation, who are deeply committed to Christ, and looking for a more New Testament expression of being disciples and simple church. Our opportunity at Oikos is to support them in making disciples and growing and multiplying Simple Churches.

Across the nation we have new individuals and groups connecting with us, in WA, Tasmania, NSW, Canberra, Vic, and Sth Australia.

TASMANIA

During a recent trip in Tasmania we visited a number of groups, including a vibrant House church that has grown near Devonport connecting regularly with 20-25 people of all ages. Another couple called us whilst we were travelling. We were both amazed that we were only an hour from their home - when we live a thousand kilometres away in a different state. We immediately turned around to meet them. Living on the East coast, they have established an amazing Art gallery which is a bridge to connect with people in the community. Through their art classes and community connections they are intentionally living life simply and being available to those God leads. They also host a house church in their home. Another inspiring group are gathering near Hobart reaching out to their neighbourhood and business community.

God is setting up divine connections with where connections being made

through the OIKOS tribe that inspire and encourage each other in living life on mission. We journey together and share our learnings.

VICTORIA

One inner city house church was started just a few months ago in the Melbourne. They have been praying and intentionally seeking to reach the lost and recently saw a Muslim come to Christ.

Another amazing couple in eastern Melbourne, who have worked in missionary contexts, have recently planted a house church and meet weekly with a group. They have a clear vision to see generational growth from their group. They see everyone in their group as a potential leader. They train and equip everyone to take turns facilitating the gatherings and equipping them with simple tools so they can share the gospel and disciple others. A clear plan, with simple tools is a must for house churches, and a vision to see your house church as a parent group and releasing others to raise up other groups/churches in other contexts.

Recently a house church in Eastern Victoria that gathers 30 - 40 people has been inspiring their group to plant and establish new groups. They meet fortnightly and on the off weeks the members connect with those they are regularly praying for. Their activities include prayer walks - intentionally going into the local town to pray and share the gospel as the Holy Spirit guides them. Gathering times often include learning a new skill - how to share your testimony in 15 sec or 3 mins, how to make a prayer strategy map (oikos map) how to find POP (persons of peace), how



Phil Brown and sons with artist & house church planters Laurie & Sherry in Tasmania

to share the gospel (3 circles), how to hear from God, how to pray for people. 6-7 new groups have been established from their core group. Every member is encouraged to start their own group & still be supported by the others.

10:02

Every day I set my phone alarm at 10:02 am to remind me to pray with others around the world for more harvesters - as the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few - in obedience to Christ's command in Luke 10:2. I believe that God is answering our prayers.



Kate Brown with Maureen, house church planter with her husband, in East Melbourne



Victoria
ks



Young house church in Maccas practising how to share the gospel with their friends

South Australia

Most people who come to our Oikos Regionals are passionate about following Jesus and exploring ways to help others connect to him. Many people they reach would never enter a church building. Some may be afraid of what their relatives would say if they saw them go to a “church.” They may have attended church at some point and had a bad experience. People want to know God, but some have *little interest* in organized religion.

Introducing the concept of church, or gathering with other believers, in your home group is important in launching a Disciple Making Movement. After people have committed to following Jesus, move them gently toward becoming a body of believers.

Oikos regionals are fabulous times for encouraging each other to this end. Individuals and groups from all backgrounds connect together and share

stories, sharpen our disciple making tools and build each other up.

On the weekend of 20-21 July, 29 participants from various backgrounds came from across the state of South Australia. There was much enthusiasm and encouragement as stories were shared about God’s supernatural work amongst us. Some of the highlights included one participant’s amazing journey from Rwanda as a refugee & now seeking to reach out to the lost in Australia. Other missional stories included Paul’s ministry to share the gospel through his artwork drawing cartoon caricatures, community men’s



group, and ministries to those in prison, bikers’ groups and in drug recovery.



Phil Brown with Beryl and Ken Seeley

ARTHUR PASSES INTO LIFE

I write with tears in my eyes after I received the news that our old friend Arthur had passed away. He was 76 and had been on oxygen for his emphysema.

Our family had adopted him as a grandfather as he lived alone without much contact with extended family. He was weak and could only talk in whispers & often struggled to breathe. We had also been blessed as he mentored the boys in the skills of fine woodwork and carving skills. Arthur had a great sense of humour and never complained about his lot in life. Our family visited with him from time to time and we usually shared some scones or other afternoon tea delights that the boys and cooked. We saw him at woodwork most weeks and he helped supervise and guide us in the things we were making with helpful suggestions and practical assistance. Recently we helped him move flat when his lease ran out - cleaning and moving all his things for a day.

We chatted about many things and I learned the importance of listening to the story of other people’s lives and offering unconditional love and acceptance. Amongst other things our conversations often touched on the

spiritual area. Many times we’d say “Hey Arthur, can we read this story from the bible?” and we’d share about the good shepherd and the lost sheep (he was once a shearer) or we read about the prodigal son. We’d pray for him and just pass on God’s love to him.

Arthur wasn’t religious and wasn’t interested in the church as he had suffered with a stern step mum as a young teenager when he wouldn’t attend church. He finally left home at 14 years of age and found himself in trouble at times. Nevertheless, he moved on. He was open however to making his peace with God and to consider Jesus. I stressed that a relationship with him was different from institutional religion and “churchianity”

On Easter Sunday we last visited him and my wife Kate asked the question if she could draw a picture about the meaning of Easter. At first, she drew a crazy Easter bunny. We all laughed together. She then drew the 3-circle gospel explanation to which he responded positively though it wasn’t the classic repent and sinner prayer process. He pointed at the picture and said I want to be in Gods design. So we prayed together with him and said “God, Arthur wants to turn his life towards you



Arthur with Jamison & Kieran Brown at their woodwork group!

and be in your design for his life”. He said that at the boarding school he learned the apostles creed. In fact in the last email he ever sent me he sent me a copy of the Apostles Creed. I replied that he had good theology!

You never know if this is the last moment someone will have to hear the gospel. In Luke 10, Jesus says the harvest I plentiful but the labourers are few. It’s amazing when we look for the opportunities - how people are often open to hear the Gospel. But the opportunity grows best from relationship and listening and seeking to connect to a person’s world.

It’s been such a treasure to know Arthur and I will miss him deeply but know I will see him again one day!

10 Principles of Circle Time

Kathleen Ward

My husband has been facilitating church in a circle for the past few years. We've tried to condense some of the "big ideas" we've learned over that time into 10 points...

1. Christ is the centre. Use the circle as a strong visual reminder that we have a central theme and focus, and that everything we do should revolve around Jesus.

2. One leader, many teachers, no professors. We have a leader – Jesus. All of us are qualified to teach one another. "Professors"/"experts" shut down dialogue and participation and unintentionally disempower God's people.

3. Stop performing, start empowering. Get off the stage and start giving people a voice, a value and an impact. Don't position them as a passive audience, dependent on a professional performer.

4. "The least of these" are the greatest. In Jesus' upside-down kingdom, the last are first, the foolish shame the wise and weak shame the

strong. The most unexpected people have the most to offer the community. When you empower the "least of these", you empower everybody.

5. Get them talking – unlock them early. Get them talking early on and you won't have to work hard later in the session. Don't talk too much – push the "ball" out to others. Ask open questions. Look for involvement, not "correct answers".

6. Create a "no-fail zone". Accept everyone, as Christ accepted you – and demonstrate that acceptance by affirming people's answers, opinions and stories. Set up a non-judgemental environment of respect, trust and safety.

7. Laughter leads to learning. Create a fun, active environment for learning together. "Haha" leads to "aha". When people have fun, it primes the brain for learning and helps the community bond.

8. Discovery is the best teacher. Learning is more powerful when you do it yourself. Don't spoon feed people – make them work for their meal. Lectures impart information, but don't help people think for themselves, change their attitudes and actions. Set up activities which make people think, problem solve and discover insights for themselves.

9. Whole body learning (head, heart & hands). Ears are not the only body part for learning. Engage different senses. Set up learning activities to involve the mind, mouth, emotions and movement.

10. Slow down, shut up and listen. Relax. Get comfortable with long pauses and awkward silences. Never answer your own questions.

Have coffee breaks. Don't try to cover too much ground – "Less is more".

Listen to individuals. Listen to what isn't being said. Listen to where the group is heading together.

Listen to the Holy Spirit – he speaks through the most unexpected people.

Trust yourself less and trust God more.



KATHLEEN WARD and her husband, Kevin-Neil, have a passion for seeing the church become a place of **connection, active learning and empowerment** for God's people. She believes the church can benefit from looking backwards to the early church ways of gathering together for mutual edification, and from looking forwards to the social revolution that is happening around the world because of our access to two-way, interactive media, allowing every person a voice and the opportunity to participate. Kathleen and Kevin-Neil have four children and live in Perth, Western Australia.
facebook.com/ChurchInACircle





A Surprisingly Simple First Step into A LIFE ON MISSION

Deb Sternke

Picture:joelmott-unsplash

Lots of people are talking nowadays about going from “doing ministry” to “life on mission.” And it’s an important and necessary shift we *need* to make if we’re going to really learn again what it means to follow Jesus.

But the transition to missional living is easier talked about than practiced.

FREAKED OUT

This showed up in my life when I realized that living on mission is more than being nice or being a good neighbor. Living on mission involves learning to proclaim the good news of Jesus in a way that’s contextually appropriate, authentic, and winsome.

But this just freaked me out. I’m not a natural evangelist. Actually, the thought of evangelism terrifies me. My palms get sweaty, my heart races, I’m looking for the exit and thinking of excuses to give for why I need to leave now. I’ll jump at the chance to tell you about a great movie I just saw, or my favorite coffee shop, or that amazing restaurant we ate at.

But when it comes to evangelism, it doesn’t come naturally for me.

And it’s easy to see why. Most of what I’ve seen and experienced in terms of what evangelism looks like has been either:

- **Walk up to a stranger** and ask if you can talk to them about Jesus (coercive evangelism!)
- **Just be a really, really nice person** (evangelism by osmosis?)

These are just two ditches on the opposite sides of the road, and neither one really works. I just haven’t had an imagination for how to engage in a way that looks like Jesus.

GOD IS ALREADY AT WORK

One of the main problems about both options above is that they both start with something we can do. This is actually one of the main obstacles we run into when trying to start living on mission: we start by thinking, “What can I do?”

But what if God is *already* at work in our neighborhood? Living a life on mission would need to start with *seeing* where God is at work and joining him there. As our friend David Fitch says, “If we truly believe God is at work in the world, we must take the time to pay attention, listen, and discern what God is doing in the lives of those around us.” I realized that starting some kind of evangelistic program would be skipping this first step of discerning what God was already up to.

How can I engage in a practice that would help me pay attention to what God is doing? I wondered.

THE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE FIRST STEP

One day, I was sharing this struggle with a friend, and she said, “Deb, you’re not good at evangelism, but you *are* good at listening to God in prayer. Why not use that gift to take a first step into evangelism?”

That sounded like a great idea, but how? I asked. That’s when she suggested the surprisingly simple first step that I’ve been practicing regularly since then:

PRAYER WALKING.

But initially I had no idea what this was. I had images of walking through our neighborhood like a wandering nomad with a cardboard sign and a megaphone, shouting about conspiracy theories and how the end is near. But thankfully I got some help and training others who were prayer walking their neighborhoods regularly. It was simple and fun! It wasn’t weird or off-putting for anyone.

Basically, I’d just take a walk in my neighborhood and intentionally pay attention to what God was doing and saying, and I’d try to cooperate with him when I noticed something.

“Walk around and listen to God? That I can do!” I said.

Sounds simple, but it took some practice. Eventually we got the hang of it and began training our missional communities in a simple framework for prayer walking.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PRAYER WALKING

So, prayer walking is simply a way of paying attention to what God is doing. Jesus said he only did what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19). As we prayer walk our neighborhoods, we imitate Jesus by asking to see what our Father is doing.

How do you actually do it?

Just walk and pray! But more specifically:

- Be “normal.” It will just look like you’re taking a walk.
- Pray quietly under your breath or just be quiet and listen.
- Be open to interaction: saying hello, meeting someone new, stopping for a conversation.
- Pray for God to bless the people and homes and businesses you see.
- Listen and look for any impressions God gives you: pictures, scriptures, etc. (be aware of emotions or bodily sensations – this is often God revealing something to you!)

HOW DO I PRAY?

Basically, ask God to show you what he is doing, and see what you notice.

What would it look like if the God’s kingdom came more fully in this place? What would be different? Ask God to bring his kingdom more fully in this place.

Ask God for insight on how you can be present here with these people, discovering what he is up to. Ask the Spirit to reveal the Father more fully to the people here (including you!). Through this practice we are joining God in his missional work in the world! Give it a try by yourself, or better yet, invite some friends to join you. Do this with your small group or missional community.

AN OUTLINE FOR A PRAYER WALK

- **Plan a time** to prayer walk and let your community/friends know.
- **Gather everyone together** first and create groups of 2-4 people.
- **Cast some vision for prayer walk** (use the notes above or our printable guide online).
- **Pray together for God to show you what he sees and feels while you walk.**
- **Agree on a time** for everyone to be back to debrief (you’ll want 30-60 minutes).

- **Start prayer walking** – listening to God and noticing things as you walk (have people move off in different directions so you don’t look like a herd).
- **Gather back up and debrief:** process any insights, impressions, breakthroughs, and struggles together.

Life on mission starts with paying attention. If you’re like me and feel a bit “evangelistically-challenged”, prayer walking can be a first step in learning to live on mission. I’ve begun to see with new eyes and feel God’s heart for my neighborhood. I’ve met neighbors that I probably would not have met because I was out walking while they were picking up their mail or washing their car. I’ve heard stories as I’ve asked questions and been curious about the people.

Prayer walking is one of the ways I’ve gotten unstuck when it comes to living on mission. I actually look forward to it, too!



Deb and Ben Sternke and their 4 children live in Fishers, Indiana (a suburb of Indianapolis), where they are planting a network of churches. www.thetableindy.org

Finishing the Race & Surviving Failure Frank Viola

The Christian life is depicted by a race. Paul rejoiced that he finished the race well (2 Tim. 4:7). Someone cut in on the Galatians and shoved them off the track (Gal. 5:7). The writer of Hebrews exhorts his audience to run the race with endurance (Heb. 12:1). We also discover that a person can disqualify themselves from the race (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Over the last three decades, I’ve watched Christians, including servants of God whom the Lord used mightily, start the race out powerfully, even burning up the track, only to disappear from it years later. I was in Alabama recently speaking to a group of young Christians, and I talked about the three main reasons why countless Christians end up walking off the track. One of the reasons (as I shared with the group) is the inability to survive failure.

The track is littered with the carcasses of those who couldn’t survive failure, so they threw in the towel and disappeared. I went on to give Peter as a witness of a person who believed, obeyed, and preached the explosive gospel of the kingdom, yet he knew the depths of failure. Peter betrayed his Lord at Jesus’ darkest hour. Not once or twice, but three times. Yet a few days later, Jesus commissioned Peter to feed His sheep, without uttering one word about his failure. And it was Peter who ended up opening the doors of the kingdom to both Jews and Gentiles.

Years later, Peter failed again, provoking Paul to rebuke the great apostle to his face (see Galatians 2 for the story). And according to church history, Peter left the city of Rome to avoid persecution until he saw the Risen Christ in a vision.

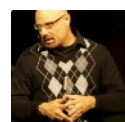
As he beheld the risen Jesus, Peter asked, “Where are you going, Lord?” The Lord responded, “I’m going to Rome to be crucified.” Peter immediately turned around, went back into the city, and was crucified for his Lord.

Think. The man who is universally known as the greatest of all the apostles failed. More than once. But he knew the secret of surviving everything, even failure.

Each one of us is a cargo ship load of failures. But the question before all of us is this: *can you survive your failures?*

Those who know the depths and heights of the Lord’s kingdom have received the mercies of God to survive every obstacle, including failure.

FRANK VIOLA frankviola.org





House Church & Spiritual Gifts

PHIL BROWN

As we washed dishes following a meal at a recent regional gathering, a discussion emerged on the role of the “5-fold gifting” that Paul writes of to the church in Ephesus. I have often heard people talk of it and see it as “the solution” that will fix the churches problems.

However, I am not sure (along with others) that I have seen it working as it should. Sometimes we have experienced people claiming to be an apostle or prophet and claiming authority. Yet their calls for obedience and submission to this claim did not built up believers - the fruit in some of these cases has not been good.

However, we must not react to the abuse or spiritual immaturity in some in expressing these gifts and reject them outright! Rather we should humbly pray for and seek their presence in our midst.

Sometimes in simple churches we have neglected emphasising the gifts and their use. We have also been a little afraid of some gifts, such as leadership, because we have seen or maybe even exper-

enced spiritual abuse from leaders in our past experiences. However, let’s go for the real thing and the healthy use of all the gifts together!

As we talked further my initial internal reservations began to dissipate, as I thought of the need to see simple churches better equipped for ministry and service and maturity. As my wife Kate and I talked further about this on the trip home, and in discussions with others since then, a few simple points came to me with a new clarity.

It is easy to get bogged down in all the different theologies, categorisations and different understandings - I wish to avoid this and see on a practical functional level all these gifts being used and flourishing in our assemblies (simple churches). Spiritual gifts are important, as they are stated in the Bible in a number of places. (See Eph 4: 11-16, 1Cor 12, Romans 12:3-8, 1Peter 4:8-11, etc.) Sometimes in simple church and missional communities we have not given enough recognition to this important teaching of the Bible.

The lists given in scripture include a number of gifts; some gifts are common to other listings, and other lists note additional gifts. This suggests to me that the lists may not be exhaustive. There are many gifts and combinations of them that we see in simple churches and all are legitimate.

We need to recognise and call forth the gifts amongst us. The so called 5 fold gifts - apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (APEST) - are gifted people who God has gifted to equip and build up the church “*to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*” (Eph 4:11-13 ff).

It is clear that these people with these gifts are to equip and train believers for works of serving and the exercise of the gifts brings unity and maturity in faith and in the faith community - the assembly. The gifts are not primarily for personal benefit but for the benefit of

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www.oikos.org.au
for video and teaching resources

the body. In our smaller churches we get to know each other more closely and it's easy to recognise and affirm each other's gifts!

The Holy Spirit can also give any believer a gift when it is required for a particular situation. For example, a person may not generally have a prophetic gift, but God may in a particular situation give them a special word for someone - usually to encourage or provide guidance. A person may not usually be seen as a teacher of biblical truth, but may be used to teach or give a word in season where there is a need. I believe that this does not mean that some people don't have particular gifts or cluster of gifts that they usually operate in. If this were not the case, then listing and identifying of the different gifts would be unnecessary.

As we talked, some simple and clear understandings began to emerge that excited me.

1. We already have people amongst us in our simple churches with these gifts! We need to recognise them and call for these gifts.

2. We need to find ways that we can support their work and use their giftings amongst us.

3. The prime role of people gifted with the fivefold gifts is not only to use their gifts but to equip and train others in using them.

Evangelists are not only to evangelise others but to model how to lead others to Christ in simple ways - especially for those who are not particularly gifted in this area.

A prophet is not only to hear from God and pass on the mind of Christ to people, churches, situations, problems, challenges etc. They are also called to help every believer sharpen their ability to hear God's voice and how to understand and apply it. They are also called to identify and mentor up new prophets.

Apostles are not only called to pioneer new churches and extend the kingdom into new areas or streams, but to help others have the courage to act on their God-given dreams and to be pioneers for God in their areas, and to identify and mentor new apostles.

Teachers are not only to teach God's word in a clear, powerful and compelling manner, but are called to train others in finding simple ways to study and apply the scriptures to their lives.

Shepherds or pastors are not only to care for people but to help all believers to take responsibility for caring for others. They are also called to model how to care and shepherd others in loving ways.

Others have recognised this truth. For example, Wolfgang Simpson writes: *"The most important aspect of house churches is that these ministries can also multiply themselves. Apostles spotting and training other apostles, prophets spotting and training other prophets, and multiplying themselves through the simple and Biblical practice of discipleship. This way the leadership structures can grow exponentially together in the multiplying house church movement."* He further



writes that, *"An Evangelist's true fruit is not a convert but more evangelists..."*ⁱ

Let us start calling forth and recognising the amazing gifts that God has given each believer and especially the fivefold (APOST) amongst us. In our local simple churches, in our regional Gatherings and National Conferences let's honour and be blessed and equipped by those with these gifts in order to be more mature, united and better equipped individuals and assemblies of Christ followers.

I haven't detailed all of the facets of gifts and I'm sure others will add what has been missed in this short article - maybe even correct something! It's all good and part of being the Body of Christ.

On a personal level I feel a new release and freedom to be what God has called me to be, and not to beat up on myself for the gifts I don't have - but to recognise others who have them, and to call them to use and do what I can only do poorly. None of us are equipped to do everything, but tougher as a team or as a body we can be! That's good and exciting news! **PHIL BROWN Eagle Point, Vic**

MORE WITH US (Continued from page 2)

As the enemy emerges more clearly, God's power is also increasingly being poured out. I'm challenged to do two things:

1. To spend time in his presence ensuring I'm connected to the Vine (John 15). This means time in his presence, and time in prayer and reflection and listening to God.
2. To seek to spread the Gospel and make disciples asking for God to demonstrate his supernatural power

to overcome the ultimate adversary who plans to kill, enslave and destroy people's lives. I'm going out on the streets doing prayer walks, praying for the area and for persons of peace. I'm training as many people as I can find in the "go skills" of making and multiplying disciples and forming new Gatherings of followers of Christ.

We are living in challenging, dangerous, but exciting times. We need to press on: not draw back in timidity and fear for

there are more with us than with them. One plus God equals a majority! I'm praying for breakthroughs and key connections to persons of peace. We are at war in a spiritual sense - let's not shrink back

bless you, Phil Brown
OIKOS DIRECTOR

ⁱ Greg Sheridan "Christians being fed to the Lions... and no one seems to care" *The Australian*. Jan 4, 2019.

The Future is Not Behind Us

Posted on [May 24, 2019](#) by [Dr. Martin J. Bragger](#)

² *All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! ³ Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' ⁴ And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'* Numbers 14:2-4

The above quote is a small section of the account in the book of Numbers where the majority of the leadership of Israel balked when presented with the opportunity of entering the Promised Land.

They had sent twelve leaders on ahead to scout out the new land who had returned with reports of a bountiful land flowing 'with milk and honey'. They had also reported that the 'people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large'.

It was the last bit that, despite the promise of a more fruitful land, caused the majority of the leadership to balk at the challenges and opposition they were told they would face if they went forward. They responded to the challenge with a craven lack of courage and lack of trust in God to see them through, even thinking that it would be better to retreat to the bondage in which they had previously been held in Egypt and from which God had miraculously set them free. The result was that they forfeited God's blessing and he let them wander around in the wilderness for another 40 years.

I think there are parallels with that Israelite behaviour and its consequences and the missional failure of the traditional church today. When it is obvious that God is calling us to go on mission, to enter into the new cultural land of the 21st century, alien though it is to most Christians, the response is a failure of most in leadership positions to lead God's people into the undoubted challenges and difficulties of the new cultural landscape.

Rather than unbinding, setting free, the church there is a widespread preference to remain in 'Egypt'. That is to remain in the bondage of the traditional forms of church and chronically failing missional strategies of the past, rather than trusting in God to lead us forward and enabling us to grasp the challenge of a new, and constantly changing day.

The problem is that it is largely the case that centuries of our current model of church has left most church leaders and members with 'frozen imaginations' in regard to how we 'do church'. There will often be an assumption, indeed insistence, that how church has been done is how it must continue to be done, i.e. 'Egypt' style. This despite the statistical reality of catastrophic decline, both numerical and in terms of Gospel influence (i.e. 'Salt').

This 'frozen imagination' issue was highlighted again in a review I recently saw of the book *'The Benedict Option'*. The author is Rod Dreher who accurately diagnoses the Church condition (i.e. 'We are losing the battle') and seeks to suggest another option for both the form of church and missional strategy. His suggestion is that the church should adopt a 'small and local' strategy reminiscent of that which kept the gospel



flame alive in the 'Dark Ages' after the collapse of the Roman Empire in Europe. However, this is not my main point, which is the *response* to the book.

The reviewer is a high placed church leader who is significantly involved in planning mission strategies. His response to the book is a classic example (one among many) of the 'frozen mind' thinking that won't or can't grasp the realities of the current missional challenge, but would rather cling to the bondage of 'Egypt'. i.e. the failing forms of yesteryear. Rather than applaud the attempt of the author to at least be willing to explore another option there is only criticism and dismissal in response.

In the uncertainty of the ever morphing cultural landscape where the only thing certain is uncertainty, the type of leadership required must not be those who will keep us in 'Egypt' but rather be those who are flexible, visionary, entrepreneurial, creative, are capable of creative thinking and who are willing to take risks, indeed, as has been said, those who are able 'live on the edge of chaos'.

Indeed as Alan Roxburgh has written-*"What the church urgently needs are men and women capable of leading others toward missional transformation for a future church which has not yet been imagined."*

It is such leaders that are desperately needed and for which we must pray.

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