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Up Close and Personal with *Jesus*

Stuart Gramenz

Searching for Abnormal People Peter J Farmer

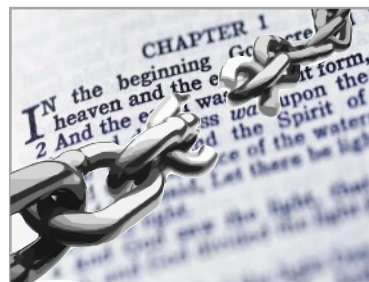
God's Word is **NOT CHAINED** Phil Brown

Step out and **SMELL THE ROSES** Andrew Beel

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



GOD'S WORD IS NOT CHAINED



As I was thinking about this article, these words kept coming to mind - "God's word is not chained." Some 2000 years ago these words were penned by the Apostle Paul as he was imprisoned and literally in chains. (2 Tim 2:9).

As I've thought about what is happening in our state and world, many people have said to me, "The world has gone crazy", and its true - it appears more and more broken.

As the world gets crazier and darker I find myself getting more excited about Jesus and the good news he brings of how he seeks to restore us to the Father and to live inside us through his Spirit. The good news is that Jesus is seeking entrance into everyone's lives to bring salvation, healing, order and peace. Whatever limitations are placed on us, God's word isn't limited.

We just have to get creative with how we communicate with others - in person where we can, and with other tools such as zoom and social media. Maybe in the Western countries we are experiencing just a small whiff of what others in other nations experience in much more severe forms of opposition and persecution.

As a friend said to me, "It's now all out in the open for all to see - good and evil." People's eyes are being opened in many cases. A neighbour of ours, who is not yet a believer, said to my wife - "Do you believe in evil? That there is such a thing as evil?" "Yes I do actually", my wife said.

Now is the time for us to be bold and to talk to people. Recently I was prayer walking with a guy who with his wife and family is seeking to start a new faith community composed of new disciples in the location they have recently moved to. As we walked, prayed, and talked we met several people, some of which he already knew from just walking around the neighbourhood. They met a Christian who lived in a nearby street who has been praying for revival in that street for years. It's amazing how God works.

It all starts with relationships and getting to know people and listen to their stories, their needs and hopes and dreams. We can then pray with them and for these needs and share what we have discovered as we let Jesus' rule unfold in our lives.

Yes, times "are a changing" or have changed and we need to adjust. The principles of the kingdom of God and the Gospel don't change, but our methods need to adjust with the times. The community of faith (church) needs to adjust.

I know of Pastors who are facing not being able to lead their congregations from the front or others where the numbers who can "come to church" are very limited. The church needs to go back to the core unit of Christian community - where Jesus said, "2 or 3 are gathered in my name" there "I am in the midst of them." Sometimes it may be just your immediate family and maybe some others who are part of your "household of faith" or "faith community" - terms that seem to better describe church than what it has come to mean in Western countries.

In a sense the church needs to go underground and exist in relational groups and networks that have flexibility and adaptability in how, where and when they gather. It can no longer be just a place and a program one attends once a week.

A follower of Jesus must embrace the call to life on mission - not to be religious or to push churchianity, but to journey with people and point them to the beauty of Jesus and how to have a relationship with Him.

We need to remember that all around the world disciple-making movements are taking place in locations and with *(Continued on page 19)*

OIKOS Australia

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

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Step Out and Smell the Roses

Andrew Beel

I have become a strong believer in the necessity for us as Christians to be willing to leave behind nearly everything that we have known so we can implant ourselves more fully within the context of the non-Christian culture which surrounds us. Often, as 'churched' Christians we really have little ability to truly differentiate that which is cultural and that which is genuinely Kingdom related. Whilst we remain firmly in ensconce in our church is all Christian meetings, reading Christian books, listening to Christian music, watching Christian movies and the like we often have little idea where non-Christians are at, what they are thinking and what they truly believe. Most of what we know about them has come second-hand to us.

In my desire to reach out to the gay scene I can read lots of Christian literature about gay people, their political agenda, their problems etc and yet still have no real idea as to what really is going on for them. Likewise, whilst I remain in my Christian cocoon, it is easy to assume that the difficulties gay people might have with much of what I do and believe, is simply because of the lack of desire to submit to Jesus. I might actually find out in relationship and genuine conversation that some of the things that they do find difficult or offensive Jesus also found difficult and offensive. As outsiders they may well have a perspective that I need to hear, and their eyes may well be open to blindness in me that I have simply excepted because it has been with me for as long as I can remember and affirmed by all the others who share the same blindness.

Often hanging out in a non-Christian context with non-Christian people has forced me to constantly examine what I believe and why. I also have to truly ask whether certain things are indeed helpful in conveying the heart of God revealed in Christ or not. And whilst I might really appreciate listening to sermons on the end times (I don't) or discussing the deeper points of systematic theology do people in the gay scene or various other scenes spend their time wondering whether Barak Obama is indeed the antichrist or if Calvinism makes more sense than Armenianism. And whilst Jesus may indeed be an answer to questions that people are not asking, I certainly don't want to be trying to answer questions that people are not asking.

I also find myself much more aware of the sort of language and words I use. Not only do I think about whether a word would be understood by people in the gay scene, but then I think as to whether such words need to be used even with other Christians. I want to be able to communicate as much as possible with language and concepts that are understood by all, believers and non-believers alike. Paul indicates similar regarding speaking in tongues in meetings and the need for interpretation or, as he would suggest, it is more preferable to prophesy that all could understand and respond.

Andrew Maren in his book, *'Love is an Orientation'* writes of a similar ministry to mine. "When I first started the Maren Foundation, I realised that I could go to Christian churches, organisations and universities all day long, but if what I was saying had no impact with gays and lesbians, everything would be pointless so then I stayed right in the middle of the GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) community." Andrew writes that after two years of spending time in this community "when it finally became broadly known that I was an evangelical Christian, people didn't reject me but rather started seeking me out with questions about God."

Over the last few years as I have spent time seeking to share and walk with, love and listen to people outside my church context, I have become to realise how hungry many Australians are for God. They may think church isn't relevant and they may not always appreciate the Christian perspective but given time and genuine relationship many people eventually open up concerning their search for something deeper than the narcissistic materialism on offer. Of course, most won't come to church to ask their questions and offer their thoughts, but if Christians make time to get to know them in a context where they are comfortable, it generally doesn't take too much love, effort and listening for most to start opening up and asking more. I am almost sure there is a biblical basis for this. Oh yes, come to think of it, Jesus did leave heaven and spend time with sinners on earth, developing a reputation for being a friend of people in the wrong crowd.



ANDREW BEEL and his wife, Sharon, come from Perth, WA, where they serve in mission to the more marginalised subcultural life of the city. This article is reprinted from a 2012 OIKOS Magazine.

CO-WORKING

RETHINKING VOCATION

Brad Brisco

Believers participate in Christ's priesthood, not within the walls of the church, but in the daily business of the world. ~ Lesslie Newbigin

To illustrate why we need to rethink vocation, let us ask you a question. Think about what you did yesterday. Just take a couple of minutes to think about your day. Now answer this question: What percentage of what you did yesterday was spiritual, and what percentage was secular?

Let us ask you a follow-up question. Does selling insurance, running a coffee shop, driving for Uber, teaching at a public school, or waiting tables at the local restaurant matter to God? If we attempt to answer that question by simply listening to the vast majority of the preaching in North America, the answer would, unfortunately, have to be "Not much." In one survey, over 90% of Christians said they had never heard a sermon that applied biblical theology to work. Yet Christians may spend more than half of their lives in work-related activities.

The idea of rethinking vocation must start with considering this sacred/secular divide, or what some people refer to as the problem of dualism. Dualism, simply put, is wrongly dividing something that should not be divided. The Greco-Roman thought was that the world is divided into two competing domains: the sacred (spiritual) and the secular (material). Such a worldview tends to assume that the spiritual is the higher realm, and the secular, or material world, lacks deep meaning. Dualism leads to multiple divisions in thinking; including the

division between the clergy (spiritual) and the laity (secular), the church (spiritual) and the world (secular), and between so-called religious practices (Bible study, prayer, worship) and so-called secular practices (work, art, eating).

Where this form of dualism happens often is in our understanding of vocation — and this actually becomes harmful to our understanding of ministry. The word 'vocation' comes from the Latin *vocatio*, meaning "a call or summons." It is normally used to refer to a calling or occupation a person is drawn to or is particularly suited for. The problem of work dualism goes back to the fourth century when Augustine compartmentalized the way people lived, speaking of the "contemplative" life and the "active" life. For Augustine, the contemplative life was given to sacred things and was seen as a higher calling, while the active life was given to secular things and regarded as a lower calling. This kind of thinking helped create a distorted view of work that continues today.

For example, the language of "full-time Christian work" or "full-time ministry" is commonly used to describe those whose vocational calling is to be a pastor, missionary, or parachurch worker. **However, a proper and biblical understanding is that all Christians are called to "full-time ministry," doing good work well for the glory of God, regardless of their specific vocation. If God reigns over all things (and He does), then all things are sacred.** But

too often people leave their homes on Monday morning and somehow think they leave God behind. Instead, the church needs to help people recognize that, regardless of what God has called them to do, they are contributing to — and participating in — God's redemptive mission.

We need to understand the harm a dualistic view of vocation has on our understanding of calling in general, but also on our calling to both be in the marketplace and to plant a faith community. At the North American Mission Board, we have started using the language of "co-vocation." The prefix 'co' means "together" or "in common." English words like cofounder, copilot or companion are examples of words that denote partnership and equality.

Co-vocation embodies the reality that if a person is called to be a dentist, a teacher, or a plumber — and at the same time called to start a church — the different callings are not isolated from one another. Instead, they are actually interlinked and equal. The language of co-vocation pushes against the temptation to compartmentalize different aspects of our lives. When we begin to understand that each of our callings is legitimate and necessary aspects of God's mission, they can be leveraged together for His purposes and glory.



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100+

Searching for Abnormal People

Peter J Farmer

WHERE'S WALLY?

The apostle Paul said, *'Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.'* – 1 Corinthians 1:26-30

Notice who God chooses?

God chose *the foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised, the nothings...* to shame the wise... So if God chose those people, shouldn't we also search for such people in our quest to make disciples of nations?

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN [John 4:3-42]

Take for example *the Samaritan woman*...what was unusual or abnormal about this situation? A number of things.

Jesus had to go through Samaria, a region Jews would normally avoid. He talks to a woman at a well. This is something Jesus' disciples were surprised at when they returned from shopping in the local village. She is a Samaritan and Jews don't associate with Samaritans. It's midday, an unusual time to be getting water from a well. Jesus gets into spiritual conversation with her almost immediately. He goes straight to the heart. He makes an *'I AM'* statement and ends up staying in the village for 2 days. The whole village comes to believe in

Jesus, not just because of what the woman says, but because they met Jesus for themselves. They say, *'We know this is the Saviour of the World.'*

The Samaritan Woman was *abnormal*. She had previously had *five husbands* and the man she was currently living with was not her husband. She immediately went and told the village, *'Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done.'*

Until you find the *abnormally prepared person*, nothing will work. They are so convicted by God, they want their entire family and friends to hear about Jesus!

So from meeting this one woman, a whole village comes to believe in Jesus!

Notice that Jesus also did quite a few unusual things, including being prepared to stay in the village until the work was done. *Are you willing to do things that are unusual?*

THE GUY WITH THE LEGION OF DEMONS [Luke 8:26-39]

This guy was so abnormal, he would run around tombs naked whilst screaming. No matter how many times he had been put in chains to restrain him, he had broken free of them. When Jesus arrived, the man ran towards him shrieking, *'What are you doing here! Have you come to torture us before the appointed time?'* The demons inside the man *knew* who Jesus was. They begged Jesus not to cast them out of the region. Jesus asked them their name, to which they replied,

'Legion, for we are many'. Jesus drove the demons out of the man and into the pigs feeding on the hillside. As a result 2,000 pigs ran down the hill and drowned in the lake below. The people from the surrounding towns saw the man sat clothed and *in his right mind*. They begged Jesus to leave the region. The man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus said, *'Go and tell your friends and family what the Lord has done for you!'* So the man went out and told 10 towns in that region!

So from meeting this one man, 10 towns come to hear his story of how Jesus set him free! That's pretty abnormal!

The first time Jesus went to *The Decapolis* (10 Towns) He got kicked out. But the second time, the people of that region brought all the sick and demon possessed to him! This *abnormal person* made quite an impact on that entire region for Jesus!

ZACCHAEUS THE CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR [Luke 19:1-10]

Zacchaeus was a notably small man. He was the chief tax collector of the region. He went out of his way to see Jesus by climbing a sycamore tree. When Jesus came to the tree, he stopped and called to Zacchaeus, *'Come down from the tree, I'm coming to be a guest at your house today!'* The people in the crowd were indignant. *'He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner'*, they grumbled. After Jesus spent some time at Zacchaeus' house, Zacchaeus declared, *'I will give half my* (Continued on page 9)

Simple Missional

Simple missional forms of church were used in the first century – and are proving relevant today.

Here are insights gleaned from the New Testament and history on these easily reproducible biblical forms.

1. All New Testament churches met in houses. Early Christianity was a house-church movement. The first churches that the apostle Paul specifically planted and addressed letters to were at Philippi – one in the ‘household’ (oikos) of Lydia and the other in the ‘household’ (oikos) of the jailer. The earliest church building – at Duro Europos on the banks of the Euphrates River between Syria and Iraq, was a modified house. It dates from 200 years after Jesus (235 CE). Before opposition broke out Jerusalem believers could celebrate in the temple courts, but they regularly met in homes to share the Lord’s meal, pray and fellowship. (Acts 2:42-47) All the churches that we read of in the New Testament met in houses.

2. There were multiple churches in each community. In Rome, the homes in which most lived were very small – somewhat like bedsits, with space for just a few people. In other cities, excavations reveal homes with space for 20 to 25 people – with some luxury homes in Corinth having courtyards that may have been large enough for 40-45. There were at least five house churches in Corinth (in the homes of Aquila and Priscilla, Titius Justus, Crispus, Erastus and Pheobe) and five around Colosse (in

Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, and in the homes of Nympha and Archippus) – and, these are just those mentioned. There were no doubt others, in other ‘relational streams’.

3. They were in close proximity to the people. Even if every church in Jerusalem met on a roof-top, an ‘upper room’ able to accommodate 80+ people – and that is unlikely, there would have been more than 100 house churches for the 5,000 believing ‘men’ (Acts 4:4) plus women and children. If each church was 10, 15, perhaps up to 20-25 people – but rarely more; there may have been 400-500 gatherings (churches) in Jerusalem alone. This meant these churches – sharing ‘the Lord’s supper’ with praise, fellowship, discussion of the apostle’s teaching, and meeting each other’s needs – were accessible to their neighbors. In those times personal space was limited, with houses crowded with extended families and open to others in the community.

4. There was a high level of participation. Paul provides a window into the house churches of Corinth: ‘When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All these must be done for the strengthening of the church’. (1 Cor 14:26) Anecdotal evidence indicates that greater numbers in church result in increased numbers of spectators – not participation. A common question asked of me is: ‘How can we get more people involved in witness – and church?’ When

I ask, ‘How many attend – and how many are now involved?’ The responses display a pattern: ‘30 attend – and 15 are involved’; or, ‘80 attend – and 15 are involved’; or, ‘300 attend – and 15 are involved’! NT house churches fostered participation.

5. Early Christians were urbanites. First century churches were primarily urban. It is difficult to imagine the squalid and dangerous conditions. The 150,000 in Antioch, the base for Paul’s missionary journeys, lived in an area less than 5 square kilometers. With public buildings (forum, agoras, temples, etc) taking up to 40% of the city, residential sectors were crowded beyond the extreme. Water and sanitation were limited. The stench and filth of the city would have been smelt kilometers away. Open fires for cooking filled the city with smoke – and the danger of fire. Poorly constructed buildings frequently collapsed. Knowing their crucified Lord had risen from the grave gave Christians courage to risk death while serving neighbors stricken by deadly disease and plague.

6. Church was on the path of life. Church was on the path of life. Church was not a building Christians went to, nor an institution or denomination they belonged to. They were church in their cities and communities. They lived within their extended families – parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins; some as slaves, and others with servants and slaves. (35-40% of the population of the Roman Empire were

slaves.) Animals (sheep, goats and donkeys) sometimes shared their homes. They mingled in their communities, aware of the needs and hurts of all, serving as ‘the body’ and ‘presence’ of Jesus’ – doing what he would do if he were physically present. (John 14:12) As church – the ‘two or three’ gathering in the name of Jesus (Matt 18:20) – they lived and witnessed on the paths of life.

7. They had natural inbuilt leadership systems. Households provided natural leadership for the home churches. Lydia would have been the natural ‘leader’ in her ‘household’ (oikos), as was the jailer, Jason, and Aquila and Priscilla in theirs. (Acts 16-18) It is only natural that Crispus facilitated the church in his home; as would Titius Justus, Pheobe and Archippus in theirs. The oikos church did not need appointed leaders. However, with many such churches in a town – Paul appointed ‘overseers’ to foster these networks. These were mature believers, not given to power-seeking – but encouragers, able to facilitate disciple making and the planting of new churches in unentered relational streams.

8. They were revolutionary conversational communities. Churches were conversational communities – eating, serving, sharing. In the early years, where synagogues welcomed them, Christians shared in Sabbath fellowship, scripture reading, and prayers. However, early churches reflected their households (oikos). As in families, their shared meals were testimony to their Saviour. Expressing gratitude for their ‘bread’ and ‘drink’ as symbols of the crucifixion of their ‘Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’, family meals were revolutionary statements. Jesus Christ who had been crucified on a Roman Cross and was now alive as evidenced by the living presence of the Holy Spirit, was their Lord and Saviour – not Caesar, who loved these titles!

9. They were ‘zero dollar’ – but ‘high cost’ church plants. Money was not spent on promotion, programs, or buildings. First century believers shared faith with friends and neighbors, inviting them to their homes; and today, simple missional communities avoid expensive programming and the purchase or rental of buildings with utilities costs,

insurance, maintenance, parking, etc. The most effective church planting today is ‘zero dollar’ planting, but there is a cost! It is the sacrifice of time and energy to share faith in family and social networks – and ‘offerings’ help with the rent for someone who has lost their job, provide food for a struggling family, assist a single mum with school expenses, or support a justice mission project in their or another community!

10. Their structures were simple. Jesus cultivated his movement on four simple invitations – (1) come & see, (2) follow me, (3) come & be ‘fishermen’, (4) receive the Spirit; and his commission to ‘go and make disciples of all ethne’ – all relational streams. He did not institute a complex organizational plan or structure, rather it was experiential, relational, participatory, and Spirit anointed. He handed on a relationship with himself and the Father through the Holy Spirit. (John 14:12-13) We easily fall for the trap that the spread of the gospel needs our complex corporate-like systems for success. But neither Jesus nor Paul were enamoured with such systems that elevate a few to positions of status and authority over others. They believed in the ‘priesthood of all believers’!

11. They were easily reproducible. Disciples made disciples and baptized them, and, in turn, they made disciples and baptized them! Jesus modeled a simple plan. When you find a receptive person (person of ‘peace’) – one of reputation and influence: (1) eat with that person, (2) as you eat, heal, and (3) as you heal, say, ‘The kingdom of God is near.’ (Luke 10:6, 8, 9) As the gospel is shared and takes hold in a new relational stream or social network – such as that of the Samaritan woman (John 4), or the family of Zacchaeus (Luke 19), Nympha (Col 4:15), Philemon (Phile 1, 2), or Phoebe (Rom 16:1, 2); and new disciples are fostered – a new church is gathered. Without complex systems or structures, people gather around food, the Word, prayer, service and worship.

12. There were supportive networks. Jesus chose from his ‘large crowd of disciples’ twelve that he designated apostles (Luke 6:12-19) – sent to multiply his movement. Paul, an apostle, selected and appointed ‘overseers’ in cities where numerous household (oikos) churches

were being planted. The term elder was an appropriate term – for they were to be experienced Christians. Local churches were led by household leaders, but the overseer was to network – to keep the various home churches connected, to encourage them to multiply. They needed to be generous, mature encouragers. The story of Acts indicates Luke was left by Paul in Philippi, maybe to fulfill this role; and Paul wrote to Titus on Cyprus asking him to ‘appoint elders in every town’. (Titus 1:5)

13. There were no hierarchical systems. The house churches of the first century were radically counter-cultural. The hierarchies of Greco-Roman society were not reflected in the communities of believers. There was no place for a privileged upper-class kleros (clergy) of philosophers and politically powerful over an ignorant common laos (laity or idiots) class. Jesus indicated the models of Rome and religion were not his, saying, ‘You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.’ (Matt 20:25, 26) The model for the house churches of the first century was God – ‘just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.’ (Matt 20:28)

14. Parents take responsibility for their children’s spiritual growth. There is only one reference to kids being part of New Testament church life, a natural reflection of the idea of church in homes. When believers from the Mediterranean port city of Tyre gathered to farewell Paul (the apostle) and his traveling companions, they all – men, women and children met and prayed with him on the beach. (Acts 21:5) In simple forms of church parents and households take responsibility for the spiritual development of their families. Kid’s love house churches where the spiritual instruction of families is not delegated to others, and where children, teens, and youth – cross generational and mixed ‘families’ (not only nuclear) – are the church.

15. Teens connect with the ‘big vision’ of simple churches. Early worship times involved every member, open participation, spontaneity, freedom, vibrancy, unpredictability – two-way

conversation. Clement of Alexandria (150-215) was the first to mention the idea of one-way speeches or weekly sermons in early church history, observing even then that they did little to effect change in the lives of believers. Simple church is built upon conversation and involvement, exploration of the Word of God and its application to life in the context of food, fellowship and mission. More than that, the 'big vision' of global mission – planning and involvement in cutting edge projects locally, regionally and internationally (Acts 1:8) – gives teens and youth a sense of God's heart.

16. There is no tensions over music, culture or ethnicity. Believers in Jerusalem churches shared many things in common – dress, food, drink, literature, songs and dance; but when the gospel reached into Gentile cultures, people gathered to worship Jesus as Lord and Savior – dressed differently, around very different meals and drink, reading entirely different literature, singing different songs and dancing to different music. The variety in our communities is enormous – no longer the homogeneity

of the baby-boomer era when all understood the same illustrations and enjoyed the same music. Simple church provides opportunities to ensure faith is shared in relational streams in ways that people can understand and appreciate – that they can share with others.

17. They are inclusive. The transitions stories of Acts are inspiring and confronting. Although Jesus had modeled 'the kingdom of God' encompassing Jews and Gentiles, men and women, 'slave and free'; and commissioned his disciples to witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), it was difficult to acknowledge Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), the sexually different (Acts 8:26-40), or Romans (Acts 10:1-11:18) as fellow believers and members of church. This caused tensions across boundaries proscribed by religious Jewish policy – but in simple churches all could be included without tension. They know the neighbor who comes is a Sikh, uncle who asks questions about grace is inter-gender, the new family present are struggling migrants – and they are to be 'the body of Jesus' to all!

18. They are good environments to hand on faith. No one can argue about the challenge of handing on faith to next generations. Although in churches most kids 'accept Jesus' by 14 years of age – by their early 20s, 50-80% turn from the faith of their parents. Sociologists point out – (1) the more complex a faith, the more difficult it is to hand on, and (2) faith is always reinterpreted by recipients – so faith systems keep changing, much more that most religious people like to admit. Simple churches provide a good environment for handing on faith: a safe place in which to reinterpret faith – and importantly, a model of church that they can reproduce for their next generation friends. Participation in defining faith and handing on faith are critical factors for receiving faith!



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"The right kind of evangelical order cannot be exhibited among all sorts of people, but those who are seriously determined to be Christians and confess the gospel with hand and mouth, must enroll themselves by name and meet apart, in one house, for prayer, for reading, to baptize, to take the Sacrament, and exercise other Christian works. With such order it would be possible for those who did not behave in a Christian manner to be known, reprov'd, restored, or excluded, according to the rule of Christ. Here also they could, in common, subscribe alms, which would be willingly given and distributed among the poor, according to the example of Paul. Here it would not be necessary to have much or fine singing. Here a short and simple way of baptism and the Sacrament could be practiced, and all would be according to the Word and in love. But I cannot yet order and establish such an assembly, for I have not yet the right people for it. If, however, it should come about that I must do it, and am driven to it, I will willingly do my part. In the meantime, I will call, excite, preach, help forward it, until the Christians take the Word so in earnest that they will themselves find how to do it and continue in it." Martin Luther

The DNA of Christ

Neil Cole

In the organic world, whether crickets or churches, DNA is the internal code that maintains the integrity of each multiplied cell. In every organism, DNA is what encodes each cell with its proper process and place in the body. In the expansion of the kingdom of God, DNA maintains the strength, vitality, and reproductivity of every cell in Christ's body.

Just as the DNA is exactly the same in almost every cell of a body, the DNA is the same throughout the body of Christ, for all its members and in every cell. The DNA is the pattern of kingdom life, from the smallest unit (the disciple in relationship to Jesus and others) to the largest unit (a family or movement of churches). The pattern is the same, and its expression remains constant.

The Key Elements for Healthy DNA

The DNA of the church can be simplified to three things, namely, divine truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission. They are needed in every part of the church, from its smallest unit to its largest.

- **Divine Truth.** Truth comes from God. It is the revelation of God to humankind. This comes from the Son, the Spirit, and the Scriptures. The Son (Jesus) is both God and human and came to reveal to us in his person what God is like and what God requires. The Scriptures were authored by God and reveal God's unfolding plan for humanity. The Spirit of God is also Divine Truth, since he brings revelation and direction to believers.

- **Nurturing Relationships.** Humans were never created to be alone. We are social creatures and have an intrinsic need for relationships. Our relational orientation is a reflection of the image of God in us. God Himself is relational and exists in a community—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is love because God is relational. To the Christian, God is love because he has always existed in relationship. Is love possible without someone to love? This should be the defining characteristic of our faith. All men should know that we are Christ's disciples by the love that we have for one another.

- **Apostolic Mission.** Apostolic means that someone is sent as a representative with a message. We are here for a purpose. We have been given a prime directive to fulfill—to make disciples of all the nations. This part of us also comes from the nature of God. Jesus is an Apostle. He is the Chief Cornerstone of the apostolic foundation. Before he left this planet, he sent his disciples into the world with a mission.

Dangers of Genetic Engineering

We live in a day of radical advancement of science and technology spiraling out of control. We now have the ability to clone life, and even genetically engineer it. With these advancements comes great responsibility. Medical ethics has taken on a whole new level of significance. When we identify and map the DNA of Christ's body, we also face dangers. Here are some crucial warnings.

Do Not Unravel the DNA

DNA is only potent when it is together. Once the component parts of the DNA are unraveled, they have little or no significance. It is the same in the church. Most churches will gladly exclaim that they have all three portions of the DNA, but they have unraveled it into separate components and so lost its power. "We have excellent preaching on Sundays, which is where we have the divine truth," one will say. "And we have small groups during the week, which are our nurturing relationships; and a strong missions committee, which is our apostolic mission." The key is not in having a separate ministry committee or program to handle each area. DNA must be whole, intact, and in every cell. In other words, every meeting, every ministry, every disciple must have all three components at the same time. To break down the DNA into separate components and put them in different places and times is to unravel the DNA. Then life and all that comes with it is lost. Mission without love is dead and can actually undermine the cause of Christ. Relationships without truth are dysfunctional and toxic. Truth without application in relationships and mission is delusional. To

separate each part is to destroy the whole thing.

Do Not Subtract from the DNA

Whole DNA is crucial to the health and function of the body. It is complete in its simplicity and complexity. To subtract even a portion from it has devastating results. Many churches are given to specialization, thinking they will find a unique niche that makes them special. But if we concentrate on one part of DNA and eliminate any other part we will lose the whole of it—death and mutation are the result. For example, many traditional churches focus on teaching, and if they add anything else, it is an attempt to build stronger relationships. One reason traditional churches are not multiplying is the absence of the outreach chromosome. Many churches need a good dose of apostolic mission. In the human body, to be missing even a single chromosome results in severe retardation, and even death.

Do Not Add to the DNA

One extra chromosome in the human gene can result in Down's syndrome and mental retardation. A person with Down's syndrome is a person who can love and be loved, but this syndrome is not the expression of the body and life that God intended for us. It is a corrupted form that prevents the person from maturing and functioning in full capacity. Many traditional churches are unhealthy precisely in proportion to their mutation of DNA. They have added to what God intended, and it has slowed the church and halted all reproduction. It is quite tempting to add "good" stuff to the DNA. Unfortunately, whatever we add to the three basic components of divine truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission results in bad side-effects—it dilutes the three components, and it elevates the additives to the same stature. It is better to let the DNA remain in its simplicity. All good things can be found within them, so do not dilute the importance of the three or elevate anything else to their level of importance.



NEIL COLE travels around the world catalysing the development of organic church networks cole-slaw.blogspot.com

Living in the Relational Church

Wayne Jacobsen
Part 1

“So, after 2,000 years, how do you think he’s doing?”

I can’t resist asking that question whenever I’m studying Matthew 16 with a group of believers. There we find the only recorded instructions Jesus gave to his disciples about the church. “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” He didn’t ask them to do it. He didn’t give them a blueprint of an organization. He simply said he would build his church and it would be strong enough to withstand any assault by darkness.

So it only seems natural to assess how he’s doing. If he’s been at it for almost 2,000 years, what do we have to show for it? I’ve asked that of all kinds of people, even at pastoral conventions. When I do, you can feel the tension in the room. People shift awkwardly, a few chuckle nervously. They know better than to say he hasn’t done well, but they also know the church is fragmented by division, scandalized by

immorality, vilified for its arrogance, exposed by its misplaced priorities and far from replicating the ministry Jesus modeled for us in the Gospels.

We either have to conclude that Jesus hasn’t done an exceptional job, or consider that there is a vast difference between what he calls church and what we do.

I used to be disillusioned by what I thought was God’s church. Seeing his people lost in priorities that were far from his own and doing things in ways that seemed to benefit the institution more than extend God’s kingdom in our lives or the world, I lamented the sorry state of the church.

Not anymore! In recent years I’ve come to realize that our religious institutions are not the church God sees. What God calls ‘church’ are all the people who know his Son as their Lord and leader. They are scattered over the whole world, growing to know him better and to demonstrate his character in the world. This is the bride God is preparing for

his own Son. I've seen parts of her all over the world. Far from being weak, divided and corrupted, the church of Jesus Christ is growing in beauty, strength and power everyday. How is Jesus doing at building his church? Incredible! His people exist in every nook and cranny of the world, and they are finding ways to relate to each other that glorify his name, not cause people to disparage it.

What God Calls Church

To see it, however, you have to look past the institutions and buildings we call church and find those people who are living in him. Please don't misunderstand that statement. I am not speaking against those institutions as evil, only encouraging you not to confuse them with church. Yes, many people frequent them who are part of God's church and are growing to know him better. That's not at question, but to see God's work in the world, you have to look beyond the groups that call themselves church and see the bigger picture—all those God is calling to himself throughout your city and the world.

If not, we'll confuse our religious systems with the church and miss the great thing God is doing in preparing himself a bride. We must be careful to call church what God calls church, or we'll end up saying things that don't make any sense.

For instance, I was with a young couple recently. A few months before, they had simply had enough. Tired of the backbiting, bored by being a spectator on Sunday mornings, wearied of being manipulated to do more for God, and burned-out on too many responsibilities, already they told me they had left the church.

"How could you do that?" I asked. "The church is not something you can leave, unless you've left Jesus."

Of course they hadn't and they only meant that they had left organized religion in hopes of finding a more authentic expression of his life than the group they were in. But that is a very different thing than leaving the church. Let us be careful with our terms. When religious organizations co-opt the term, 'church', it is easy for us to get confused, thinking that's what they really are. But they are not. They might be gatherings of people who are part of the church, but in and of themselves they are not the church.

The church of Jesus Christ could never be contained in any organization, and in fact, the way he works makes it impossible to fit in the most skilfully constructed structures.

Lone Rangers Need Not Apply

I know you've probably heard people say such things proved to be lone-rangers, never seeming to thrive in the life of Jesus. But that is a long ways from who God's people really are. Just as institutions can't be the church by declaring it so, neither can individuals.

Who is the church in the world? Is it not those who live the same confession Peter offered? "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."? You are part of the church as you live under the Head, following him as your Lord and leader. You can't be the church by following someone else who is doing that, you have to do it yourself.

And following him will not lead you to independence. How can it? God is a community and wherever he is known, real community will emerge among his people. Father, Son and Spirit have dwelt in true community for all eternity, knowing the sheer joy and wonder of sharing life, love and glory with themselves. You can't touch his love and not find it drawing you toward others God puts in your path.

As brothers and sisters begin to connect with each other in real fellowship, they will soon discover that what they know about God is always in part, as if through a darkened window. But in fellowship among believers who are growing to know him better, there is a fullness of wisdom and revelation. That's why Paul said in Ephesians 1 that the church is "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Imagine any singular group of people fulfilling that incredible promise! The reason why our view of God is often limited, is because institutions are only able to pull people together who see the same thing in the same way. Their view through the darkened glass never gets any clearer, they only grow more convinced that what they see is more accurate than what anyone else sees.

God's kind of community, however springs up among people who are pursuing a vibrant friendship with the Living God. For I've thought the life of God flows to people through our so-called church structures. But it isn't so.

Life does not exist in the church, it is only in Jesus.

Those who gather then to get fed or pumped up to get through another week miss what relational church is all about. We can only find life in him and once we find it there, our connection with other believers allows us to share that life together. 'Church' cannot ever be a substitute for knowing him. We can't follow him by conforming to the religious system in which we find ourselves and why would we want to. He's offered each of us the joy of knowing him every day.

Institutional Dynamics

That's why a growing personal relationship is critical to relational Christianity. It can only begin as people are equipped to know the living God and follow him. Having a growing relationship with him, will teach you how to relate to other believers. It doesn't flow the other way around, and years of trying to make it do so have only disillusioned those who really want to know God better every day.

Gene Edwards was right when he says the model for church life is found in Jesus' relationship with his disciples. He never taught them how to have a 'service' or how to construct an organizational flow chart. He didn't tell them that church life was about attending a meeting, conforming to a group ethic, or regimenting people's lives by the most well-intentioned program.

Instead, he taught them how to relate to God as Father and each other as brothers and sisters. The language he used with them (and indeed the language Paul uses in his letters) was not the language of institutions, but the language of family.

Because most of what we call 'church' today operates on institutional dynamics, many believers today have no idea what God has designed church life to be. Institutions must focus on creeds, programs and procedures that attempt to get people to conform to the 'way we do things here.' Usually a group of top-heavy leadership draw the most attention and people are encouraged to submit unquestioningly to their insights and counsel.

Institutional dynamics encourage people to promote an image, and does not free them to be real. Gossip and one-upsmanship games abound as people try to find their place often at another's

expense. The same things you see in the corporate world are the basis of life as an institution. And if you ever leave an institution, you will often be ignored. Many people who have left religious institutions have commented that they felt like they ceased to exist even for people whom they had considered close friends.

Family Dynamics

Life as a family, however, is built on an entirely different set of methods and goals. In a healthy family people are not cooperating to achieve an end, they are simply learning to relate to each other in love. In a healthy family diversity is not only allowed, it's cherished. People don't relate to each other through lines of authority, but by functional gifting. If someone's car started to make strange noises on the way over, they feel no compulsion to ask the older brother to attend to it. They will already know who in the family has the most 'car-sense' and seek their help.

Healthy families don't press people to conform, but let people grow together at their own pace. They have the freedom to disagree without separating into multiple families. They share together in each other's journey, serving with their gifts, offering insights and abilities where they are helpful, and supporting each other no matter what they go through.

Many believers today are finding fresh encouragement in the 'one anothering' Scriptures that the New Testament encourages believers to do for each other. They are discovering that teaching, counseling, serving, offering hospitality, sharing confessions, praying for needs, admonishing the selfish, and all the rest are not things we hire a staff to provide for us, but what the body was meant to do for each other. As we live in Jesus together he passes out gifts among the entire body, that each can give and each receive from God through others. That's why some have said that there is more 'church' going on in the parking lots on Sunday morning than is allowed to happen in the morning service.

If you've ever experienced real spontaneous, fellowship among a group of believers, you don't need me to tell you how rich it is. The joy of journeying together, of not having to pretend, of having people support you in your weakness and affirm you in your gifts is

reward enough. And yes, a lot of that can go on among believers who gather in institutional environments, but it isn't always there.

The important thing is that you recognize family dynamics when you see them and embrace them wholeheartedly. Conversely recognize hurtful, institutional dynamics which have nothing to do with God's kingdom and take your distance from them guiltlessly.

As much as Paul encouraged believers to get together in ways that encourage your life in God, he also told them to be free to walk away from environments that become destructive to that life. If you sense him leading you away from such a group, don't be condemned either by them or yourself. You will not be leaving the church at all, he may only be preparing you to find it in a more authentic way than you ever dreamed.

Finding Body Life

So where do you go to find relational church life? Why? to Jesus, of course! That may sound simplistic, but where else can you go? Trust Jesus to provide the fellowship he wants you to have. Remember, his church is built on those who are learning to trust him.

You might discover the freedom to live relational church right where you are. Don't worry about whether or not everyone else shares your same perspective, simply look for opportunities to share life with people hungry to know him more fully.

You may find, however, that some institutional structures actually devour those who hunger to follow God freely and he might call you out. Many people leave one broken institution, only to dive into another or start a new one on their own. Let me encourage you to slow down and don't do anything until he clearly speaks to you.

Watch for the people he begins to connect your life with, some may be lifetime friends, others new acquaintances. Don't hurry to start anything, learn to recognize what he is doing in your area to provide meaningful connections between believers that are hungry to know him—his honesty, his grace and his life! He has people who will share the journey with you and encourage your growth without manipulating you to conform to their expectations.

Where you find that in your own locality may differ greatly from how someone else finds it in theirs. It might be in a Sunday morning gathering, with a neighbor up the street, in a home groups or with people God spontaneously brings across your path. However it comes, you'll find that church life could never be a once- or twice-a-week event. It happens every day as we live our lives in him and share that with others.

As you've read in these pages before, there are lots of ways Jesus calls his believers to share his life together. In our next issue we'll look at what it means not "to forsake the assembling of yourselves together?" and detail some of the ways God invites people to share his life together.

I know it can be discouraging, looking for a depth of body life that it seems too few hunger for today. But Jesus would not have stirred your passion for it, if he didn't have a way to meet it. It just may not come in the way you're expecting it. So don't focus so hard on any one thing, that you miss the other doors he opens for you. Tell him how much you hunger to know an authentic body life that matches what he shared with his disciples. Ask him to connect you with people who share a passion to live in the dynamics of family.

Then enjoy whatever connections he begins to make. Don't force it into your mold, or feel the need to make a group out of it. Just learn what it is to relate to brothers and sisters, even in groups of twos and threes, that lets Jesus be at the center. Love others in the same way God loves you and you'll see the church Jesus is building all around you and all over the world.

It will astound you! After all, he's been doing that for 2,000 years. He's actually amazingly good at it!

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What does Community mean?

Roger Thoman

Photo:madfishdigital-unsplash

'**M**issional' and 'missional communities' are the buzzwords these days, and I am deeply appreciative of that. But let's not forget that the flip side of the same coin is the community of believers: learning to love and care for one another, providing a place of safety and healing, speaking into one another's lives in word and action. This is also at the core of a vibrant, impactful, outward-facing community.

At the forefront of our desire for a house church model is to build true community, what Eldredge calls "a band of intimate allies." I quote his article in its entirety: Community is almost a ruined word. I refuse to give up on it though. Just because its been misused, battered, and tattered does not mean it can't be useful. But it needs some definition.

Community means availability. It means time spent together. Real time. Time for conversation, interaction, and a deepening of communion, of intimacy between 2 or more people. Community is never general or generic. It is always specific and definable by people spending time together. Now, time spent together does not guarantee community. There has to be a certain quality to the time spent together. Time doesn't guarantee it but it is a pre-requisite.

Community means vulnerability. If we aren't willing to open up our lives to others we will never experience true community. This is why mutual confession builds community. We come to the table with our strengths and our weaknesses and we lay ourselves bare, exposed to the scrutiny and more importantly the love, acceptance and forgiveness of others. This doesn't happen overnight nor should it. It needs to be a progressive deepening. People who lay themselves bare at a first encounter scare me. There is something unhealthy in over-exposure especially as a first approach. These things take time and discernment to know how much to share and when. Mistakes will be made. Over-hiding and over-exposure will happen. There can be no set rule for such things. But if we expect to gain community and constantly flee vulnerability we will never have it.

Community means a shared life. This ties back in to availability but goes beyond it. Our life in one regard is made up of time. So if we want a shared life we must spend time together. Resources also need to be shared. Basically our checkbooks and our schedules can be a good gauge of community.

Community means stability. Benedict was a genius to introduce a vow of stability into his Rule. If we want to experience community we need to be rooted somewhere among some people. If we constantly move on in search of greener pastures we will not be around long enough to grow the roots necessary for community. Community can not happen on the fly.



ROGER THOMAN is an irreligious Jesus-Follower devoted to His Kingdom through multiplying disciples and simple churches among the nations.

Up Close and Personal with Jesus

Stuart Gramenz

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Stuart Gramenz tells us about a lesson he learnt about hearing the voice of the Lord. From his book "Up Close and Personal With Jesus."

One day whilst reading the book of James, something I've read many times suddenly jumped out at me. Abraham was called God's friend (James 2:23). A tinge of envy rose in my heart and the thought went through my head, "How do we get to become God's friend?"

Now, up till this point, God did speak to me and quite often, not an audible voice, but an inner voice. However it was more like a boss and servant relationship rather than a friendship. He spoke to my heart and said, "Do you want to be my friend? Because I want to be your friend." A quick "Yes!", roared out from my spirit. He then showed me that all His disciples were more than travelling companions. "No longer do I call you servants but I have called you my friends." (John 15:15)

He went on to say to me, "If My original disciples were My friends, don't you think I would want all My sons and daughters to be My friends with Me as well?" Then I started to think how those original friends interacted with Jesus. They sat and talked with Him face-to-face. The conversations were informal.

They didn't speak in religious terminology. They weren't overawed by the fact that the Son of God was with them. They didn't walk around in a perpetual state of shame and guilt.

To add weight to His point, He reminded me of Moses, who was one of His trailblazers in personal relationship. "The Lord would speak to Moses face-to-face, as a man speaks to his friend." (Exodus 33:11) Moses had the revelation that, even though God was totally awesome, He was able to approach Him.

Unlike Moses, in my mind God was awesome but not really approachable, and I quickly realised that I had to come to terms with the fact that, although He is all powerful, the creator of the universe wanted to speak to me as a friend, not just as a boss. When the apostle John came into the presence of the Lord in His awesomeness He tells us, "His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire. His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters... His countenance was like the sun shining in all its strength. When I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead. He laid His right hand on me, saying, do not be afraid." Revelation 1:14-17

The Lord obviously wants us to know that He is all powerful, but He doesn't want

us to be overwhelmed with or scared by Him. It was going to require a brain retrain because, up till then, all my conversations with Him were formal and distant, with me doing most of the talking.

Help!

I asked the Lord to show me how I could do this and His inner voice told me to imagine myself as one of His early disciples. I was to sit in a chair and picture Him seated opposite, smiling at me. Picturing Him sitting and smiling at me took a little while, but then He gave me what was to be an even more difficult task.

"Look into My eyes," He said gently. I tried to make eye contact but dropped my head.

"What's the matter?" He said quietly.

"I don't know," I replied.

He told me to try again and after I had failed on a couple of more attempts He said, "Are there any areas of sin in your life?"

My mind raced and I quickly confessed some areas of which the Lord had been convicting me. Immediately I received His forgiveness and my heart condemnation left.

"Now try again. Look Me in the eyes," He said softly. I tried a few times, failing, and then staring at the floor after each attempt.

“What’s the matter?” He asked again. Feeling like a complete idiot I told Him that I really didn’t know. He then showed me that, although I was comfortable in talking to Him in a distant impersonal way, it was totally the opposite when it was ‘face-to-face’.

“It’s because you feel totally unworthy to be near Me in my presence, isn’t it?” I immediately went on the defence, with Scriptures about His grace and my righteousness flooding into my head. I had knowledge of the Scriptures but when it came down to the bottom line, I was caught out, exposed. I knew that, despite having correct theology, I still felt like a grub in comparison to Him.

False Humility

As my education progressed, one of our good old traditional thoughts popped into my head... I was just a very humble person. I was, by my respectful actions, showing how great He is and how insignificant and undeserving I was.

He did not let me get away with one bit of it and showed me that true humility was not simply putting myself down. I had to exhibit true humility by humbly receiving His amazing free gift of righteousness, even though I didn’t deserve it. He showed me that by not accepting it, it was false humility, and I was really guilty of the sin of unbelief.

That really had my theological head spinning. I need to point out that during this time I did believe Jesus died for my sins. Nevertheless my shortcomings, my sin, was that I wasn’t taking full advantage of the promise of the relationship He offered. He then said something that shook me to my very foundation. “If you do not accept what My sacrifice has done for you, it’s like taking My blood, throwing it back in My face, and saying it wasn’t good enough for Stuart Gramenz.”

I was shocked but it was the strong medicine I needed to cut through my unbelief and false humility. I was just really deceiving myself, fooling myself into thinking my relationship with the Lord was personal. How could I have a personal relationship with someone who, because of my wrong perceptions, inhibited me? I had to transform my thinking so that, when I had these conversations, I could see

myself as He saw me, not as I used to see myself, and avoid being a spiritual coward. It was a very slow process. Daily I would sit on the chair and prepare myself by repeating some Scriptures. My two favourites were:

“Because of one sacrifice He has made perfect for ever those who are made holy.” (Hebrews 10:14)

“Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.” (Hebrews 10.19)

After a few weeks I finally reached a point where I felt totally comfortable just talking to Him and seeing myself as He saw me. I’d lost the formal religious format I once had and learned that He, as a good friend, not only wanted to hear what I had to say, but He wanted me to hear more from Him.

How does it feel?

God’s plan was to enable you to talk to Him without fear or shame. It involves the extraordinary sacrifice Gethsemane, total humiliation for Jesus, and horrific death, and to top it all off He received a punishment due to us. The purpose of all this was to enable you to directly receive a friendship with Him and to talk with Him without feeling worthy or embarrassed.

Can you imagine how you would feel if you sacrificed, saved up, bought an expensive gift for someone only to find that they didn’t want it, claiming they weren’t good enough to receive it? That’s exactly how the Lord feels when we don’t accept His gift.

There are two things that make up the first foundation of our Christian faith. Firstly we must accept the truth that God sees us as perfect and, secondly, we must have a relationship with Him that will make us more like Him. It is of paramount importance to our growth that we understand and receive this. If there is a traditional crack in this foundation of Truth, how can any relationship we try to build on it stand?

If we accept ourselves as perfect, yet still being perfected (made holy), we will be able to see other Christians in the same way. Love, acceptance and total forgiveness will be the outworking of it all.

STUART GRAMENZ has equipped tens of thousands of believers with ministry skills of evangelism, signs and wonders, and church planting since he began his ministry in India as a young Christian in 1979, preaching on the streets and from house to house, healing the sick and casting out demons.

Expanding his ministry work, he began to conduct ‘Jesus Heals’ Crusades, conducting the crusades over a 10-year period in India with team members from different countries. As a result of this ministry success, Stuart wrote the first of his bestselling books, “How to Heal the Sick” in 1982.

In 1992 he returned to Australia and began planting churches and developing an equipping track that would produce the balance of Godly character and power ministry. Spirit Led Academy resulted, to offer international accredited courses, based on a compilation of his teachings and ministry experience. See spiritlead.com.au

The work continued into Africa and elsewhere with large teams of pastors and leaders planting home churches in villages, equipping them to do likewise. Tragedy recently hit the Africa work with the death through Covid of their main apostolic leader, Jacob Phiri. This in the midst of them setting up a new support ministry, Seed Their Need, a micro finance work which currently supplies 20,000 Africans, in 7 countries, with an acre of land and seed, to lift them out of poverty. To support this initiative. See seedtheirneed.org

Stuart and his wife, Mary, live in Brisbane where he still writes, with 3 new books about to be published.



REDISCOVERING THE POWER OF HOSPITALITY



Andrew Mason

Biblical hospitality is a reoccurring pattern in the New Testament ministry of Jesus and the early church. It was a conduit through which kingdom activity flowed. A casual reading of scripture can cause this repeated dynamic to be overlooked. Paying closer attention to this detail however, can unveil one of God's favorite places to move in power.

Biblical hospitality is a readiness to welcome people into our home who don't ordinarily live there. With each NT episode listed below, we must remember that it first required the generosity of a person to open their doors to those who didn't ordinarily live there.

In *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church* by Joel Comiskey, there is a list of examples of Christ's Ministry in the Home (page 79)...

1. **Jesus in the house of Peter (Matt 8:14).** The healing of Peter's mother-in-law.
2. **Jesus in the house of Matthew (Matt 9:10).** Jesus is ministering to unbelievers.
3. **Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5-9).** Jesus is leading Zacchaeus to repentance
4. **Jesus in the house of Lazarus and his sisters (Luke 10:38-42).** Jesus is teaching the Kingdom of God
5. **Jesus in the House of Jairus (Mark 5:35-42).** Jairus' daughter is raised from the dead

6. **Jesus being hosted in a person's home (Matt 9:28-30).** Two blind people receive their sight.

7. **Jesus in the house of Simon the leper (Matt 26:6-13).** Jesus is anointed.

8. **Jesus with his disciples in a person's home (Mark 7:17-18; 9:33, 10:10).** Jesus is teaching his disciples the Kingdom of God

9. **Jesus in the house of another person (Luke 5:17-26).** Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed person.

10. **Jesus in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14).** Jesus is teaching the Kingdom of God.

11. **Jesus with his disciples in a person's home (Matt 26:18).** Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper in a house.

12. **Jesus sends his twelve and his seventy disciples to heal and teach from village to village and house-to-house (Luke 9:1-9, 10:1-11).**

In *The Church in the House* by Robert Fitts, it details foundational events that took place in someone's house... (pages 25-27)

1. **The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost happened in a house (Acts 2:1-2)**
2. **The early church gathered in homes (Acts 2:46)**
3. **Peter is divinely delivered from prison by a prayer meeting in a house (Acts 12:5, 12)**
4. **The Gospel was first preached to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:24-27)**

5. **The first churches that the Apostle Paul started were all in houses (Rom 16:5, Col 4:15, 1 Cor 16:19, Phlm 1:1-2).**

6. **Lydia's House was Europe's First Church (Acts 16:40)**

This represents the NT kingdom activity that was recorded. One could easily speculate there were many more examples of God moving in a home during the time of the Gospels and Acts that were never written down. Even when you factor in what most likely represents a small sample size of house-to-house ministry, the exploits listed above are still impressive... Evangelism, discipleship, community, laborers sent, churches planted, powerful prayer gatherings, sickness healed, the lame walking, the blind seeing and the dead raised!

In my own living room, I have personally seen people surrender their life to Christ, receive answers to prayer, be emotionally healed, physically healed, baptized in the Spirit, activated into ministry and transformed.

It has been my experience that when I invite others into my space for the kingdom, I'm also welcoming Jesus into our midst with all of His power and glory.

As I have said, biblical hospitality is a readiness to welcome people into our home who don't ordinarily live there. It's a practice that releases Christ's love in our hearts towards others. God moved through hospitality throughout the Old and New

Testaments and wants to move through hospitality in our own lives too. Why?

A while back, I spent some time thinking and praying on this question. I was pondering dimensions on biblical hospitality beyond the frames of reference we've already covered. I was asking the Lord for insight into the spiritual dynamics of hospitality, and I felt like He led me to a passage in John 14...

There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. – John 14:2-3, NLT

These are a portion of Jesus' last words with His disciples before He was going to be crucified. He is speaking of His role as a forerunner, to go before them into Heaven and prepare the way for their own eventual entrance. He anchors their context of eternity with the metaphor of a home. Not just any home though; His Father's home in Heaven. He explains that is He going to arrange accommodations for his disciples (thus extending to all believers) in His Father's house.

Jesus, the Son of God, is giving us divine revelation about the nature of Heaven. It's a sneak peek. Insider information. A description of a place we've never been to or experienced.

Jesus reveals that Heaven is a divine offering of *God the Father's eternal hospitality*. For all of eternity God is offering to share with us His glorious residence as our own resting place. In Heaven, God will open His home up to us.

This is one of the reasons why hospitality is so powerful! *Every time you demonstrate an act of hospitality, you release a measure of Heaven down to earth. Every time you welcome someone into your home who doesn't ordinarily live there, you are giving that person a taste of what God the Father wants to do for their soul in Heaven.*

In saying that, I want you to know there can be varying degrees of biblical hospitality. If the idea of opening your

home up is intimidating or stressful, try to begin crawling before you walk or run with hospitality.

Here are 7 Displays of Biblical Hospitality...

1. Invite Others to your Home for a Meal. If you're not accustomed to having people over regularly, invite a fellow believer and/or couple over for a simple meal. Make it a replenishing time of nourishment and encouragement. I've talked about the power of the table in a previous article, "Overcoming Offense at the Table."

2. Have a Designated Space in Your Home for Guest Lodging. Whether you have a large residence or a small one, I believe we can designate a space for a future guest to lodge if the need arises. It can be a spare bedroom or a spare couch. This is a way to prepare our home and offer it to the Lord for an unforeseen circumstance.

3. Invite Others to your Home for a Time of Prayer. Invite 2-3 friends over one time for a small prayer gathering. It can be a short time of prayer or extended time of prayer. Let your own house be filled with faith and God's Spirit (Matt. 18:19-20).

4. Offer Your Home to Your Small Group for One Gathering. If you're currently in a small group, let your group host know that your house is available, if there is a desire to rotate the location for one week. This is a user-friendly way to begin exercising hospitality muscles. At the time I'm writing this, my wife and I recently gave birth to our third son. Our neighbors graciously offered to open their home for our small group for a few weeks while we adjusted to having an infant once again. It's been a blessing to us personally and to our group.

5. Offer Your Home for Short Term Lodging. Is there a person or traveler in need of a spot for a few days? Open your doors and designated guest space for them. My wife and I have hosted missionaries and college students in our home for short term lodging many times over the years. As a pastor, I've also been a

beneficiary of hospitality, as friends and strangers have opened their doors to me for a night or a few weeks during unique ministry opportunities.

6. Begin Hosting a Small Group in Your Home Regularly. Want to develop a ministry of hospitality? Grab a few people you know, a Bible study to grow and invite them over to your home! Turn your heart and home into a base of regular kingdom operation. For years, my wife and I have practiced this *Book of Acts lifestyle* and we have no regrets or plans to retire. Like attending church on Sunday, it's just a part of who we are and what we do.

7. Offer Your Home for Long Term Lodging. There can be varying degrees to this act of hospitality as well. I've taken two teenage brothers into my care for six months until they could return to their family who was navigating some adversity. I have friends who have provided care for foster kids and/or adopted orphans. It's a big commitment, but it can make a big difference in a person's life at a critical moment in their journey.

With all of these displays, it's important to approach each situation with wisdom, discernment and responsible decision-making. As a husband and father of three, I have to take into consideration every person in our home each time we open it up to those who don't ordinarily live there. Jesus said, *"Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16)."* Of course, there have been moments and seasons where we have had limitations and thus, had to constrain the openness of our home to others temporarily. That has been the exception though, not the rule. For the most part, biblical hospitality has been a kingdom adventure in sharing the love of Christ with others.



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DISCIPLEMAKING MOVEMENTS

Then and Now

Two thousand years ago, as Jesus walked along the shores of Galilee, he started a movement which continues to grow today. His first command to his disciples "Follow me" (Mark 1: 16) was simple and compelling. Today many people identify as followers of Jesus. His next instruction, however, was harder to grapple with. What does it mean to "become fishers of men"? How many people have you ever met who would identify as "fishers of men"?

Over the next three years of his ministry the Gospel story takes us on the journey with those initial twelve disciples as Jesus teaches them and sends them out. This is not armchair discipleship. It is not a distance-learning theology course. Rather it is practical, hands on training. Healing the sick. Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Matt 10: 7-8). Feeding the hungry. (Matt 14: 16). His final command does nothing to let them or us off the hook. Go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, baptise them and teach them to obey everything he commanded (Matt 28: 19). Being a

fan of Jesus is easy. Discipleship is a completely different ballgame.

Down the years the church has wrestled with the question of what it means to make disciples. Many Christians have been content to leave it in the hands of professional Pastors, Evangelists and Teachers. But what if Jesus never meant it to be that way? In recent years discipleship has become something of a buzzword in the West. Increasingly people are waking up to the reality of a call that is for all believers.

Meanwhile, over the last thirty years Disciple Making Movements have been growing around the globe, often in unlikely places and from small beginnings. Groups of ordinary Christians committed to prayer and making disciples who make disciples. Many of these movements use obedience-based Bible studies as their primary means of discipleship. A study of Scripture that asks: what does this tell me about God and people? What will I do to obey it? And who else will I tell?

Discovery Bible Studies are

becoming more well known as a discipleship tool for churches – but that is not their original purpose. Around the world they are being used to disciple a new generation of seekers to faith. Groups that are founded in Discovery often go on to multiply because obedience, sharing the Gospel, and making disciples are all built-in from the outset.

The **Discover App** is a great tool for exploring Discovery Bible Studies, with believers and non Christians alike. It is currently available in ten different languages with more on the way. It is already being used to disciple people around the world. For

many of us we no longer need to travel to reach the nations. The nations are on our doorsteps as international students, immigrant families, refugees flock to the cities.

Not everyone will respond but those who do may go on to seed movements.

Taking the Gospel into places and to people that we may never be able to reach ourselves. If we invite a person to our church we maybe grow the kingdom by one. If we teach a person to make disciples wherever they are and with whoever they meet, it may never stop growing.

Are you ready to be a fisher of men? Perhaps the Discovery Bible Studies can help you make disciples who make disciples. Let's keep the movement rolling...

The **Discover App** is a free Discovery Bible Study App for Apple and Android. It is currently available in English, Arabic, Somali, Dari, Pashto, Indonesian, Turkish and Uyghur. It will soon be released in Swahili, Urdu and Spanish.

Vergenetwork.org

Speaking of Apps, George Funk from Perth, WA writes:

Things in the West are ticking away. There must be about 10 home churches that I know of and they all do their own thing and many have done the 4 FIELDS discipleship multiplication training like I have.

Personally, we have 4 groups that we helped start and continue to encourage. We have some great plans for 2022 when our **Apple and Android app** for multiplication training will be available and we advertise our Saturday discipleship training and much more as we cast the net wide and help multiply disciples and small groups everywhere. Not claiming people but helping release people into their space and place of access.



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UNCHAINED (Continued from page 2)
people-groups not reached before. So surely God hasn't yet finished with the Western countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA, Europe etc.

In fact, recently I heard a missional leader talk of how there are movements amongst the Roma people - the gypsy peoples in Europe. Another spoke of how churches in New Zealand are looking for new ways to move forward as they experience loss of members and decline of the old ways and were open to training in disciple-making and multiplication.

We need to take the opportunity to recapture being a Christian as an agent of change and the church being a disciple-making movement, not an institution.

Each time, era and place has had its challenges. The faith communities (established churches and simple churches) in Australia are being forced to deal with whether to exclude people from gatherings on the basis of directives of the state and the medical/health choices people are making. How do we honour the unity of the body of Christ in these situations?

We must honour each other in the choices we have to make, with much prayer, and not allow differences in these matters to divide us. We need to support and pray for those who are losing jobs in the community - especially in Victoria, but also in other states.

Are we committed to faithfulness to Christ and his Word above all other pressures? Is our life already dead and hidden with Christ?

"Whatever it takes" is an attitude I have seen in leaders of disciple making movements. One man I was talking with even gave up his job, in seeking the next step of God's leading, as he focused on growing new movements in Tasmania. According to author Wolfgang Simpson, currently worldwide there are at least 22.6 million house churches with some 300 million members. He sees a realistic growth rate of 20% per year giving a membership of 4 billion within the next 15 years. (See "Did you know" - Oikos winter edition 2021, p10).

The Kingdom of God is on the move and **God's word is not chained** - by Covid or any other restriction - so start praying for the next group of disciple-makers to be multiplied in your area.

bless you, Phil Brown
OIKOS DIRECTOR

WHERE'S WALLY (Cont. from page 5)
wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people of their taxes, I will give them back four times as much! Jesus responded, 'Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost'

Imagine the impact of that. The poor in that region received half of Zacchaeus' wealth, plus those he had cheated in that region received back 4 times the amount stolen!

Zacchaeus was certainly an *abnormal man* who made some pretty *abnormal decisions* based on his encounter with Jesus!

Notice that Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house... We may not always get an invite. We may need to do the unusual thing and invite ourselves to the abnormal person's house!

When meeting such people, after offering prayer and/or sharing the gospel we can ask these Four Questions;

- *Would You Like to Know More?*
- *Where Can We Meet You?*
- *Who Else Do You Know That Might Be Interested?*
- *What Time and Date?*

Abnormal People

So we've looked at 3 *abnormal people* in this short study

A Woman who has been married many times, but on encountering Jesus, wins an entire village

A Man who runs around naked and out of his mind, when encountering Jesus, goes and tells 10 towns

A Man who is the chief tax collector and has cheated people out of their money, returning 4 times as much so economic justice comes to a whole region.

Jesus fished for abnormal people – Jesus got them to do abnormal things – sell everything and give to the poor, spit in mud- wash in the pool- go into the deep and throw out nets – give these people something to eat – put your hand to the plough, and don't turn back...

Who Are You Searching For?

What kind of people are you searching for? Are you searching for the foolish, weak, despised people? Those who will give up everything to follow Jesus? Or are you looking for *normal people*? Perhaps you're not looking at all?

Jesus found the woman at the well, the man at the tombs and Zacchaeus up a tree. He went to the village of the woman, sent the man to his family and friends and invited himself into Zacchaeus' house

As you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit on your *search for Abnormal People*, who knows where you might end up!?

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peterjfarmer.co.uk



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A church which pitches its tents without constantly looking out for new horizons, which does not continually strike camp, is being untrue to its calling...(we must) play down our longing for certainty, accept what is risky, live by improvisation and experiment. – Hans Kung

Worship for Nobodies

nobrokenreed.org September 8, 2019

by Disciple [Leave a Comment](#)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. – Romans 12

We have a growing group of believers in a Sunday night Discovery Group, who are enthusiastic about being missional for Jesus. The hardest part is to convince them that they have the freedom and authority to do the work of the Lord. Can we heal people? Am I able to teach, to witness, proclaim, lead others to Christ and, heaven forbid, even baptise?

They come with a lifetime of learnings that, well, need to be unlearned. For so long, the teachings of Jesus appear to have been filtered through a chosen few, such that “greatness” in God escapes the ordinary believer. How tragic. We forget that Jesus took a bunch of nobodies, and painfully transformed them into world-beaters such that they accomplished more in a few years than the Jewish-hierarchy achieved in a few millenia. He’s still doing it, though I wonder if at times it’s still just as hard work.

While freeing up the shackles, such ‘nobodies’ also begin to realise something else – Scripture is full of ordinary people that called on the armies of heaven to hear their prayers and act accordingly. They realised they weren’t alone, that through prayer



Photo: Phillipoidsberry-unsplash

their will might align with God’s and that as a Gracious and Loving Father he would act on their behalf – especially, when that entailed a breakthrough in a non-believers life, exposed to Jesus for the first time. You bet our Father will move.

So it is we come to the story of a young girl, a beautiful young believer who comes from a shattered background. She lives with a mother who is a chain-smoking alcoholic, bitter, angry and so against God. We prayed, fervently that this woman might have a breakthrough on account of her daughter, that her demeanour might change from aggression to peace. Over the years, in spite of the girl’s efforts, the mother was unrepentant and unrelenting, God had no place in her life, and no she wouldn’t ‘come to church’. The hardest part was convincing the daughter that she could speak into her mother’s life, that she could sit down and share a simple Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to do the work. As a group we prayed expectantly that God would move.

How startled was she, when there was an abrupt change in her mother, that anger was replaced with tears, hostility

with repentance. How delighted was she in sharing the story, that God had opened the eyes of the mother and the daughter; that as a child of God, she has the authority to ask Jesus to do the impossible, that she needs nobody else – not tradition, or learning, or background. Just Jesus. That it is in her simple obedience, not her knowledge, in child-like trust that God will answer and move. When he does, why are we then so surprised?

Friends, believe it, receive it. We worship God when we put our trust in Him alone, recognising what he has given us. He so wants all of us to have such faith in His Son, that we come believing, expectant, receiving. He alone affirms us and gives us the authority and it is all we need. The Woman at the Well went and told an entire village about the Messiah, and the village was completely transformed on her account.

God wants you, just you. In the right circumstance, at the right time, ready and expectant to respond. Us, a living sacrifice prepared to move on his word. True worship, full of expectation that our Father will move. How wonderful.

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