

# OIKOS

AUSTRALIA

AUTUMN 2022

Vol. 31 No. 2



*When You Gather Bring the*

***FIRE***

Roger Thoman

The TABLE of the LORD Phil Walters

**UNDERSTANDING the TIMES** Phil Brown

An URBAN OASIS Martin Spratt





## UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

*Men (and women) of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel should do (1 Chron 12:32) ...*

Firstly a few observations on our times and the context in which we live and minister in. It's hard not to notice how changeable and unstable our world has become. I'm noticing a surrealness to life at the moment. On one hand life goes on almost as usual. Over the Easter Weekend where we live, people were holidaying and picnicking in the sun, some with beautiful new boats and vehicles. The "good life" goes on...

Today I also drove though the main street and notice a gathering of people around the rotunda with various uniforms of clothing displayed, showing the work and occupations they were involved with - people protesting the mandates and not being able to work.

The 6 o'clock news shows crowded airports and people travelling again. Normality on one level - the continued loss of freedoms on another.



Jesus said, "as in the days of Noah so shall it be in the coming of the son of man. People will be eating and drinking and marrying until the flood came and took them." (Matt 25:37-38). Jesus also spoke of men's hearts failing them for fear of what is coming on the earth. (Luke 21:26)

I detect a mixture of hope and of uncertainty and fear amongst people. Usually trouble was "over there" "somewhere else", but now it's impacting western countries and there is more to come. There are growing reports of food shortages in many countries. I even notice some bare shelves in our supermarket....

One thing I've learned is not to accept uncritically and trust the meta narrative of the mainstream media. I have found them repeatedly to be untruthful and misleading.

Ignoring reality that they don't want to hear and feeding people a narrative of fear and misinformation. We would do well to take a long "fast from the media" or at least from uncritically believing the propaganda and everything they tell us.

As followers of Jesus, we are marching to the beat of a different drum and swimming against the tide. We need to be seeking God for direction - not just following the crowd....

There is a growing "shaking" where everything that can be shaken is being shaken! Sadly, some key high profile Christians leaders are resigning under a cloud. We must be focused on Christ our only saviour and leader and not on following people. Our faith is and will be further tested and now is the time to learn to trust Jesus with our life and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis and as we make life decisions.

**Preparation:** This is a time for God's people to prepare and be ready - firstly spiritually to be like the 5 wise virgins with oil in their lamps (connection to the Holy Spirit) and not be found destitute of the oil with our lamps out. We are called to "keep watch" (Matt 25). The times we live in call for real trust in God as the source of our provision. He is the only one we can trust unreservedly.

It is also not a lack of faith to make some practical sensible preparations. Jesus told the parable of the unjust steward who made preparation for his future and was commended for it. (Luke 16:1-9). *(Continued on page 16)*

## OIKOS Australia

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

**DIRECTOR:** Phil Brown

**EDITOR:** Phillip Walters

**SUB EDITOR:** Phil Brown

**MAIL:**

OIKOS Australia  
90 Jones Road  
Eagle Point VIC 3878

**EMAIL:**

philbrown@oikos.org.au  
magazine@oikos.org.au

**WEBSITE:**

www.oikos.org.au

**MOBILE:**

0409 137 988 (Phil Brown)  
0435 322 303 (Phil Walters)

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

To subscribe to OIKOS Magazine please go to the Website or contact us.

**COPYRIGHT:** The articles and graphics, except where noted, are copyright to OIKOS Australia Inc. If you wish to reprint articles please contact us. Permission is not generally refused, except where it is not ours to grant.

**DISCLAIMER:** OIKOS Magazine is not affiliated with or connected to any other magazine of the same name

**NEXT EDITION:** The WINTER edition of OIKOS Magazine will appear in JULY. Suggestions and news are welcome. Please send them in by JUNE 1st.

# The TABLE of the LORD



**Y**ears ago, as part of setting up a new church in Yeppoon, I agreed to take a new couple through **Christianity Explained**, a popular study of **Mark's Gospel**. She was a believer and he was tagging along. As we sat around their table with our Bibles open the husband asked, "Shall we open a bottle of red?" This took me back for a moment. Was it acceptable to have a glass of red as we studied the Bible together? I realised however that this would set him at rest and help him to join in. And so, even though I would have preferred a glass of white, we proceeded to open both Mark's Gospel and a bottle of red for the first of a number of really enjoyable and fruitful evenings together.

For Jesus however the suggestion might not have even been questioned. When we look at the ministry of Jesus we constantly find him around a meal table and on one occasion even supplying the glass of red.

Because for Jesus, the table was the most common meeting place of family and friends and the place where people were most relaxed and engageable. And so we find him again and again teaching and demonstrating the life of the Kingdom over food (and drink).

Whether it is with Zacchaeus or with Matthew's friends or Peter's mother-in-law or at the wedding at Cana or Mary and Martha or Simon the leper or Simon the Pharisee or on the hillside or with the Emmaus disciples or at the Last Supper or preparing breakfast on the beach, Jesus was often more comfortable teaching at the meal table than from the pulpit.

And so it is not strange that Jesus took the normal elements of the meal and used them to demonstrate his forever presence among his people, so that from here on, whenever they sat at table, whether as a church or just as a family, the food and drink on the table would be an ingenious reminder for them, not just that he was among them, but of what he had done to be so.

And indeed that was how the early Christians celebrated communion, simply as the breaking of bread at every meal, "... whenever you eat and drink".

It is also therefore not strange that it was around the common meal table that the early church was born. The most common gathering in the home, the place of conversation and instruction (Moses – "when you sit..." Deut 6:7), took over from the Temple as the place where worship and communion with God would now be centred.

Jesus, of course, had already demonstrated this and taught it to his disciples. Sending out the seventy-two he had instructed them to find a person of peace and demonstrate the Kingdom from their home (Luke 10). And so, on the day of Pentecost, it would have blessed the apostles, faced with 3000 plus new converts, to see hands going up left, right and centre, people of peace, natural leaders in their families, keen to open their tables and their homes as gathering places for the fledgling church.

And for perhaps the next 300 years that is how the church met, how it grew and where Jesus was celebrated, around the same humble tables where Jesus had sat with Zacchaeus, and Mary and Martha, and Matthew's friends.

*Phillip Walters – Oikos Magazine editor, Yeppoon,*

# RETHINKING

## THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH



*The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.*  
– Alvin Toffler

*Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.* – David Bosch

### THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF GOD

When we think of the attributes of God, we often think of characteristics such as holiness, sovereignty, wisdom, justice, or love. Rarely do we think of God’s missionary nature. But Scripture teaches that God is a missionary God—a sending God.

The missionary nature of God is framed in two primary ways. The first involves the grand narrative of Scripture. When we consider the meta-narrative of Scripture, we discover it is about God’s redemptive purposes. All the great sections of Scripture, all the great stories of the Bible and all the great doctrines of the biblical faith connect around God’s grand plan and purpose for the whole of creation.

Mission is the central theme describing God’s activity throughout all of history to restore creation. The mission of God is what unifies the Bible from creation to new creation.

A second way to recognize God’s missionary nature is to examine the “sending language” throughout the Bible. From God’s sending of Abram in Genesis 12 to the sending of His angel in Revelation 22, hundreds of examples of sending language portray God as a missionary-sending God. In the Old Testament, God is presented as the sovereign Lord who sends in order to express and complete His mission of redemption. The Hebrew verb “to send”, *shelach*, is found nearly 800 times in the Bible. While it is most often used in a variety of non-theological sayings and phrases, it is employed more than 200 times with God as the subject of the verb. In other words, it is God who commissions and it is God who sends.

In the book of Exodus, there is a fascinating dialogue surrounding God’s prompting of Moses to confront Pharaoh. God is sending Moses to convince the king of Egypt to release the Israelites from bondage. There are five references to sending in these six verses. The Lord says:

Brad  
Brisco

So now, go I am **sending** you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have **sent** you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.' Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has **sent** me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I am has **sent** me to you.' God also said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has **sent** me to you'— Exodus 3:10-15

The prominence of sending language is not only seen in the books of Genesis and Exodus, but throughout all of the historical books, God is a sending God. Throughout the poetic books, God is a sending God. Throughout the prophetic books, God is a sending God. Moreover, when you consider the books of prophecy in the Old Testament, it is easy to see that the prophets were first and foremost people sent by God to participate in His redemptive purposes.

Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of sending in the Old Testament is found in Isaiah 6. In this passage, we catch a glimpse of God's sending nature in its Trinitarian fullness: Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom Shall I send? And who will go for us? To this Isaiah responds, "Here am I! Send me (Isaiah 6:8).

Later in the book of Isaiah, there is a fascinating passage where the prophet recognizes that God's Spirit has anointed him to "proclaim good news to the poor" and that he is sent to "bind up the brokenhearted" (61:1). In the larger passage of Isaiah 61:1-3, it is interesting to note that there are no fewer than six acts of redemption that proceed from, or are dependent upon, the Hebrew verb "sent" or the phrase "he has sent me." To emphasize how central the sending theme is, the passage could be rendered this way:

*He has sent me, to bind up the brokenhearted,  
He has sent me, to proclaim freedom for the captives,  
He has sent me, to release from darkness for the prisoners,  
He has sent me, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,  
He has sent me, to comfort all who mourn,  
He has sent me, to provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
He has sent me, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. — Isaiah 61:1-3*

It is this passage that Jesus applies to His own ministry in Luke 4:18-19 as He claims to be the human fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2. This passage becomes, in a sense, the closest thing to a personal mission statement for Jesus.

Further, in the prophetic books, it is interesting to note that the Old Testament ends with God promising, through the words of the prophet Malachi, to send a special messenger as the fore-runner of the Messiah: "I will send my messenger" (Malachi 3:1). Then the New Testament begins with the arrival of that messenger in the person of John the Baptist, described in the Gospels as a man sent by God (John 1:6).

In the New Testament, sending language is not only found in the Gospels, but also throughout the book of Acts and each of the Epistles. The most comprehensive collection of sending language, however, is found in the Gospel of John, where the word send or sent is used nearly 60 times. The majority of these uses refer to the title of God as "one who sends" and of Jesus as the "one who is sent." All the way through John's Gospel, we see God the Father sending the Son. God the Father and the Son sending the

Spirit. And God the Father, Son and Spirit sending the church. In the final climactic-sending passage in John's Gospel, Jesus makes clear that He is not only sent by the Father, but now He is the sender, as He sends the disciples: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

With this sentence, Jesus is doing much more than drawing a vague parallel between His mission and ours. Deliberately and precisely, He is making His mission the model for ours. Our understanding of the church's mission must flow from our understanding of Jesus' mission as revealed in the Gospels.

### THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH

But why does it matter that we recognize God's mission as the grand narrative of Scripture? Why is it important to see the "sending language" throughout every book of the Bible? Here is why: The nature and essence of the church, is rooted in the missionary nature of God.

In other words, if God is a missionary God (and He is!), then we as His people are missionary people. Therefore, the church doesn't just send missionaries; the church is the missionary. Individually and collectively as the body of Christ,

we are a sent, missionary church. We should be sending the people in the church out among the people of the world rather than attempting to attract the people of the world in among the people of the church.

The reason we start with this crucial distinction as the first paradigm shifts because the vast majority of people in the church today do not think of their congregation in a sending, missionary manner.

### 'REFORMATION HERITAGE' VIEW

People today understand church in two prominent ways. The first view is what some call the "Reformation heritage" perspective. The point with this understanding of the church is that Protestants have inherited a particular view of church from the Reformers,

*The nature of the church — rooted in the very nature of God — is missionary. Rather than seeing ourselves primarily as a sending body, we must see ourselves as a body that is sent.*

which emphasizes the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the ordinances, and the proper exercise of church discipline. Historically these have been referred to as the “marks” of the church.

While each of the three marks is an important aspect of church life, this view has left us with an understanding of the church as a place where certain things happen. In other words, a person goes to church to hear the Bible taught “correctly,” to participate in the Lord’s Supper and baptism and, in some cases, to experience church discipline. Once again, all very good things, but is that the way we want to define the church? Does a place-where-certain-things-happen understanding speak to the real essence and nature of the church?

**‘CONTEMPORARY VARIATION’ VIEW**

The second view is a slight variation on the Reformation heritage definition. This “contemporary variation” view is perhaps the most prevalent way people understand the church today — that it is a vendor of religious goods and services. From this perspective, members are viewed as customers, for whom religious goods and services are produced. Churchgoers expect the church to provide a wide range of religious services, such as great worship music, preaching, children’s programs, small groups, parenting seminars, and so on.

One of the major issues with both of these views of defining the church is that the church is seen as an institution that exists for the benefit of its members. The alternative vision of the church is to see it as a people called and sent by God to participate in His redemptive mission for the world.

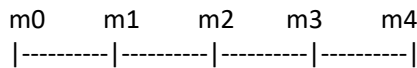
The nature of the church — rooted in the very nature of God — is missionary. Rather than seeing ourselves primarily as a sending body, we must see ourselves as a body that is sent.

Of course, the church still gathers, but the difference is that we don’t simply gather for our own sake; instead for the sake of others or, better yet, for the sake of God’s mission. We come together as a collective body of followers of Jesus to be equipped through prayer, worship, and study and then to be sent out into

the world. The church is to be a gathered and scattered people. Missionary Lesslie Newbigin stated it this way: “The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God .... It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God’s kingship.”

**WHY THIS ALL MATTERS**

To grasp the importance of understanding the church as missionary, consider the idea of cultural distance. This is a simple missionary tool to help discern just how far a person or a people group is from a meaningful engagement with the gospel. In order to determine this, we can see it on a scale like this:



Each numeral with the prefix m indicates a significant cultural barrier to the meaningful communication of the gospel. Barriers include such things as language, race, history, worldview, traditions, beliefs, political affiliation, etc. The greater the number of cultural barriers there are, the increased complexity there will be in communicating with another person.

In the book *The Forgotten Ways*, author Alan Hirsch offers a description of how each section of the scale might look in a local church context:

**m0–m1** Those with some understanding of Christianity who speak the same language, have similar interests, probably the same nationality, and are from a similar class grouping as you or your church. Most of your friends would probably fit into this bracket.

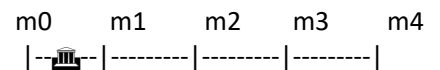
**m1–m2** Here we would include the average non-Christian in our context: A person who has little real awareness of, or interest in, Christianity and is somewhat suspicious of the church. This category might also include those previously offended by a bad experience of church or Christians.

**m2–m3** People in this group have absolutely no idea about Christianity. Or they might be part of some ethnic group

with different religious impulses or some subculture. This category might include people marginalized by Evangelical Christianity, for example, the LGBT community. But this group will definitely include people actively antagonistic toward Christianity as they understand or have experienced it.

**m3–m4** This group might be inhabited by ethnic and religious groupings such as Jews or Muslims. The fact that they are in the West might alleviate some of the distance, but just about everything else gets in the way of a meaningful conversation. They are highly resistant to the gospel.

The reason this discussion is important for this particular chapter is because the church in the U.S. operates *almost exclusively* in the sphere of m0–m1, as shown in the following illustration.



In other words, too many churches in North America function in a sort of Christian bubble where there are little or no cultural barriers. This is a significant problem because as we have stated previously in this chapter, it is we who are the called, sent missionary people of God, which will sometimes mean we must go to where people are. If we fail to go to the people, then to encounter the gospel meaningfully, they must come to us. This is the inbuilt assumption of the attractional (vendor of religious goods and services) church, and it requires that the nonbeliever do the cross-cultural work to find Jesus, and not us! And make no mistake, for many people coming to a church service involves some serious cross-cultural work. When we ask them to come to us, we are in essence asking *them* to be the missionaries!

Instead we must see that we are missionary people, sent to participate with a missionary God, who desires to reconcile all of creation to Himself, for His glory. We, the church, are a chosen people to bless and reach the nations.



The above article is reprinted from *RETHINK* by **BRAD BRISCO**, a challenging e-book that can be downloaded free from [sendinstitute.org](http://sendinstitute.org)



# LIVING in the Relational Church Part 2

Wayne Jacobsen

Photo:tao-heftiba-unsplash

*“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 10:24-25)*

**I don't know of another Scripture that has suffered more abuse than this one. It is often quoted as the reason people must file into a religious institution on Sunday morning, sit in rows and submit to a music performance and a lecture that others have put together for their benefit.**

For many, that is the only standard that determines whether someone belongs to God's church or whether they are regarded as independent and rebellious. It has become so enshrined in our religious psyche that nothing else matters.

If you frequent one of these religious establishments with some regularity (every few weeks will do) others consider you to be a healthy believer. If not, however, they raise an eyebrow of caution. Just going validates someone's faith even when nothing else about their lives would indicate that they know who he is. Some of the most arrogant and independent people I know sit through a

weekly religious event and still go out and live life on their own terms. Pressed on the point, many will admit that Sunday morning attendance isn't going to earn their way into heaven or secure a life-transforming relationship with the Living God. But while they concede it may not work for everyone, they consider those who do not attend to be in grave danger.

How tragic! When we fail to view the church as God does, and unthinkingly embrace what 2,000 years of religious tradition says it is, we miss out on some of the simplest and best truths of God's Word. For the writer of Hebrews is talking about something far more vital than where someone sits on a weekend morning.

### **Encourage One Another**

The above passage from Hebrews was never intended to be a proof-text to demand people sit through a programmed 'service' every week. But please don't misunderstand me here. If your relationships with other believers revolve around such a meeting and you are growing to experience all that God has for you in the midst of it, stay with it! But I think we make a critical error if we assume that's all the writer had in mind. I

see five reasons why he must have been talking about something more: **First**, the early church did not have anything like what we call 'church services' today. Yes, they got together—mostly in homes, and only occasionally in larger settings to hear one of the apostles or a distant teacher help them discover who God is and how to walk with him. These gatherings, however, didn't look at all like most programmed gatherings today which are often designed more to entertain than to equip.

**Second**, the writer specifically focuses on an environment where each believer is actively involved in encouraging the others—stimulating them to love and good deeds. Where does that happen in most Sunday morning events today? People only look at the back of other people's heads while all the 'ministry' flows from talented musicians and orators up front. This Scripture paints a far different picture of face-to-face dialogue and personal engagement.

**Third**, he tells them to do it daily. How can that be fulfilled in a weekly or twice-weekly event? If he meant such gatherings they would have to meet every day. Obviously he's not talking

about organized meetings, but spontaneous connections between believers learning to live together in God and finding occasion to cross each other's lives daily.

**Fourth**, he specifically says the main reason for getting together is to encourage each other. Most people talk about attending our religious institutions today because of the need for accountability, not encouragement. That can have some painful, if unintentional results. Philip Yancey tells about a prostitute who was looking for help and was encouraged to go to church. She responded, "Why would I ever go there, I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse." Surprisingly, no Scripture assigns believers or leaders to provide accountability for each other. That is reserved for God alone. We are told to encourage each other and though that means at times we might have to confront or admonish, it does not mean we hold each other accountable.

**Finally**, he envisions believers connecting with each other all over the community. While claiming to be essential gatherings for believers, our Sunday morning events do more to fragment the body of Christ in any locality. Rather than connecting us with a wide-diversity of his people, we end up meeting with people who are just like us and who believe the same things we do.

### **Two or Three Together**

The writer of Hebrews was encouraging a relational connection between believers that goes far deeper than any religious service can offer. He was talking about the entire network of relationships God builds between believers and how important it is for us to let others into our lives. Don't go it alone, when we can be so helpful to each other.

Paul gives us some insight as to why in Ephesians. He said that the fullness of God is revealed in the whole of the body, not in the individual believer. We won't know enough on our own nor have enough strength. But how do we live that out? By being a spectator in a large gathering, or by sharing our lives with fellow travelers who are coming to know his life?

Even Jesus himself made it clear that the most powerful moments of body life happen in twos and threes, not in groups of hundreds. It's where people can be known for who they are, loved through their most desperate pain, and discover God's presence with others.

The most powerful example of that in this century happened in Red China during the communist regime. As people were forced underground by persecution they discovered the joy of caring for one another, the focus of being excluded from the mainstream, and freedom from religions traditions, one-man leadership, and those who were not completely sold-out to God. How God's life grew among them is the stuff of legend. But are we listening to the lessons they learned during that time? No! We're too busy smuggling in our Christian programs so they can be more like us.

Circumstances forced them to embrace what the New Testament speaks so clearly.

True body life cannot be embraced institutionally, it is the result of people who are passionately loving Father and learning how to live as a family with other brothers and sisters. Sadly, many believers have never tasted of that kind of body life—holding no greater view of the 'church' life than to file in on Sunday, enjoy the performance and go back to their lives. However, when crisis hits and they need friendships to speak the life of God into their circumstances, no one is there for them. They will soon find that sitting through the performance has not adequately prepared them to face the darkest days of their lives.

### **Finding the Family**

Knowing God as Father leads to an engagement of his people as family. Do you sense that hunger stirring in you? It's

happening to people all over the world. Weary of the political games used to manipulate institutional power, or bored with the passive environment fostered in worship "services," people are dropping out of organized religion in ever-greater numbers.

I know many of them have sadly given up on God, but many others hunger to share an authentic body life with other believers that allows Jesus to truly be at the center as we learn how to live in the full freedom of his life. Like many on the cutting edge of hunger, they may not know what they are really searching for. Since most of us have been steeped in religion most of our lives, we're not sure where else to look. So we keep looking for an event, a group of people or a mentor to help us find a way, and often come away disappointed in the search.

As I said in the last issue, institutional dynamics will only produce a shadow of what family life really is. It cannot provide the reality. If relationship is what we hunger for, then we might want to think relationally. God's kind of community isn't produced by man's ingenuity or program. It springs up organically among people who are learning to follow Jesus and see themselves as part of something larger than themselves.

Thus, finding Father's family begins with Father, not with others. If he is not the object of your whole-hearted pursuit, you will miss so much that he has for you. Don't begin with a program. Begin with him. Don't let any expression of body life be a substitute for cultivating your own relationship with him. That's how we often get it confused. We seek to relate to God by relating to others. The exact opposite is true. We learn to relate to others, but loving God first and foremost. Then you'll be able to see how he is placing you in the family around you. Look at that in the whole of your locality, not just in a single group. God has people everywhere. Discovering how he wants to place you in it is a process



that may encompass the following stages:

**1. Spontaneous Fellowship:** Getting connected in this family often begins with spontaneous fellowship. What hungry believers has God placed around you? These might be people you know that you invite over for an evening of fellowship, or share lunch together once and a while. It also happens in more serendipitous moments when you just happen to be standing in line at the store and find out the person next to you also loves the Lord.

God has many ways to bring his family together. Get to know the family that just moved into the neighborhood; invite the new employee home from work, or volunteer in your community and see who God brings near you. I'll guarantee you'll never look at people around you quite the same way again. They might be believers with whom you can share God's life, or people who don't know him at all whom you can love in his name.

Either way, this is where fellowship begins. People who meet, find a bit out about each other and find that they hold the life of God in common. In my travels I have met people in every corner of the world who hunger to know the Living God, and find just a meal together, or staying over in the home of someone I've never met before begins a life-long relationship sharing our passion for Jesus.

Spontaneous fellowship can be fairly fluid. They may only last a few moments, or days, but sometimes they may go on to become far more significant. Look around you. The believers God wants you to experience body life with may be closer to you than you think.

**2. Developing Friendships:** Out of these spontaneous encounters, you will find people with whom you seem to have a deeper connection. It is if the Holy Spirit is drawing you together to help each other in the journey.

Friendships develop because people make an effort to get together. They are in touch with each other every few days; look for things to do together and find themselves encouraged every time they come away from each other.

Friends don't place expectations on each other, or use people for their own self-needs. Friends are those who can share their journey together under Father. They don't seek to control each other, or toss another aside when they no longer meet their needs. Godly friendships look to share a journey together with ever-deepening honesty and vulnerability, always freeing the other person to be absolutely genuine.

Often friendships develop between people who help each other through difficult times. What often starts out merely as a compassionate act of ministry can easily become a close friendship. That's why it is important to engage people in need around us, offering to support them and give what help you can to get them through a crisis. Every true friendship we have with someone in Father's family is an incredible treasure. They are worth every bit of time we give to cultivate them. The real ones last forever, even though time and circumstances may not make it possible to be together with great regularity. But when you do connect you can pick up right where you left off.

**3. Intentional Community:** As friendships develop, sometimes people find themselves wanting more. God made us for community, remember, and though we are linked by the cross to every other believer on the planet, one of the most valuable ways to experience his life is to explicitly share the journey with a group of friends.

Intentional community happens when an individual or family decides to join with others in sharing their journey. Realizing that Father has called them to walk together for a time which could range from a few months to a number of years, they choose to share their journeys together, both by gathering regularly for sharing, worship, prayer and study of the Word, and by staying in touch with each other through the week.

Listening to God together, guarding each other's freedom in Christ, caring for each other in moments of need and being mindful of how God wants to use them to extend his kingdom seem to be some of the significant objectives of this kind of community.



**WAYNE JACOBSEN** is an American author of a number of books including *So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore*. He was a pastor for 20 years and has authored numerous articles on spiritual formation, relational community and engagement of culture. [www.lifestream.org](http://www.lifestream.org)

The forms it takes, however, can vary greatly. House churches can look this way as do more loosely affiliated groups that often spring up within institutions. These are not held together by covenants or creeds, but by the choice people make to love deeply enough to stay with each other through the ups and downs of life, and to live their lives openly before each other. Though it probably demands an entire article some day, children fit into this environment with incredible ease and nothing will better prepare them to live a life-long adventure in Father's family. Initiative Required

Why are such groups sometimes difficult to find? Because they require a level of individual initiative that more programmed structures have robbed from God's people. Either because they prefer everything to be spoon-fed to them, or because they've been taught to think they are incompetent to follow God without an 'ordained' leader handy, many believers have little time or energy to discover the fullness of living in Christ's body that Father intended.

There are far easier ways to get together with Christians, but to discover the depth of what it means to live in Father's family we cannot sit back and wait for someone else's program. Instead we can choose to engage the lives of people God has placed around us looking for ways his life in us can bless others. As we recognize people God's calling us to walk with we can combine our resources with those of other brothers and sisters and find ourselves far more equipped to stand in these increasingly-darker days.

That's what the writer of Hebrews wanted you to know.

That's what God is rebuilding in these days. Ask him to teach you how to see his church as he does, and live in the joy, power and freedom of that reality.

# THE ORIGINAL DISCIPLESHIP MODEL

Josh Daffern

A prism is a transparent solid object used for breaking up light into a spectrum of colors. Depending on where we were sitting, we both could be looking through the same prism, but you might see blue while I might see green. For the vast majority of my Christian life, I saw the prism of discipleship through one particular angle. Several life events forced me to change angles, and the biblical truth of Acts 2:42 is the life-changing discovery that shines as bright as the sun from this new angle. I didn't go looking for Acts 2:42 as the discipleship model of the earliest church; it came looking for me as the Spirit illuminated the clear and simple power of this verse in a transforming way.

The following is why I have the deep conviction that Acts 2:42 represents the discipleship model of the earliest church. When you have time, read the entire chapter of Acts 2, but here are the highlights:

In Acts 2, the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem, waiting for the promised (Acts 1:4) Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:1-3, the Spirit comes with the sound of a violent blowing wind and descends as tongues of fire, resting on each of them. The first noticeable sign is that the disciples are able to speak in other languages of the Roman Empire previously unknown to them (Acts 2:4). Because the Feast of Pentecost was happening at that moment, Jews from all around the Roman Empire had gathered in Jerusalem, and they were absolutely stunned that these backwoods Galilean fishermen could suddenly speak in so many different languages (Acts 2:5-12). Looking for an explanation, the crowd listens as Peter preaches the first sermon of the church (Acts 2:14-36), where he ties this miraculous sign of languages to an Old Testament prophecy they would have been familiar to from the prophet Joel. He uses that as a springboard to preach the good news of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and Lord, referring back twice to the revered Israelite King David to show that the fulfillment of the ages had come through the death and resurrection of Jesus. His sermon is eloquent and powerful. The result is that conviction fell upon the crowd when confronted with the gospel and they asked what they should do:

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39)*

The response was seismic:

*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:40-41)*

For those who think that all megachurches are bad, the church immediately started off as a megachurch as 3000 new believers came to faith and joined this movement we call 'the church' on the very first day (and) the apostles are overwhelmed with 3000 new believers flooding into their faith community. Most churches get excited when they see one new face walking through the door. Most churches would be absolutely overwhelmed if 100 new guests showed up on the same day. Where would they sit? Where would they park? Do you have enough volunteers to watch their kids? Most churches aren't equipped to handle a mass infusion of new people, and we've had two thousand years of church history to prepare. Think of the conversations the apostles must have had when 3000 new people all joined in one day (Acts 2:41). The apostles had seen crowds

like this before in Jesus' ministry, but now they were the ones in charge, and the church was less than a day old!

**So what do you do with 3000 new believers?** Churches today might have new member's classes or new believer's classes, but even today's largest churches couldn't handle a new believer's class of 3000, especially with only 12 trained volunteers. How did the apostles disciple and mature this instant megachurch? They would have remembered Jesus' final command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). God just brought the nations to them and gave them a massive kickstart of 3000 new believers. How were these new believers disciplined? That's what Luke records next in Acts 2:42 - *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* - which, (in my humble conviction) represents the earliest discipleship model of the church.

Acts 2:42-47 (however) appears like a puzzle, a jumble of practices and devotions that defined the earliest church. Above I have singled out the four practices of Acts 2:42. The transcendent epiphany below came when I saw how the rest of the passage supports and expands on these exact same four practices. The entire passage, Acts 2:42-47, represent four primary practices of the earliest church. They are listed explicitly in verse 42, and then expanded upon in verses 43-47. At first, I couldn't see how verses 43-47 were connected to verse 42. The best way (I would argue) to interpret this passage is to see verses 43-47 simply as underlining, emphasizing, and expanding upon the four practices of Acts 2:42.

To make this case I'm going to put together some puzzle pieces, and we'll start with them all jumbled up:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to*

*anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47*

Let's see if we can identify the pieces.

First, we have the four practices:

1. Apostles' teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of bread
4. Prayer

Next, we have different statements that follow in verses 43-47. I clump them together into four additional pieces:

- *"Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles."*
- *"All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."*
- *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts."*
- *"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."*

From the beginning, I saw a connection between the breaking of bread (v. 42) and "they broke bread in their homes" (v. 46). But it wasn't until I was researching how the word "fellowship" is used elsewhere in the New Testament that the other pieces began to fall into place. As we'll discover later on, our idea of fellowship and how Luke and Paul defined fellowship are two very different things. When Paul used the word "fellowship," he used it in the context of sharing, giving and suffering. Fellowship was much more sacrificial than the convenience we associate with it today. That connected with selling property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Luke was detailing the fellowship of the earliest church in verse 46. After that, the other two pieces fell into place, and I'll present them out of order, because it was a pretty cool reveal at the end. So, here's how I believe this passage lines

up textually, the best way (I would argue) to interpret Acts 2:42-47 as a whole.

- **Breaking of Bread** (v. 42) - *"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."* (v. 46-47)

The textual link here is the strongest. The same two Greek words for "break" and "bread" are used in both verse 42 and 46. In fact, these two verses are two of only three times in the entire Greek New Testament that this exact phrase is used. The third time? Also used by Luke in his gospel: "Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread" (Luke 24:35). The connection between Acts 2:42 and 46 is plain to see as well as its connection to Jesus and the Lord's Supper. What is Luke trying to emphasize with this explanation in verse 46? Simply that the partaking of the Lord's Supper, the primary form of worship (even more than preaching or singing) in the earliest church took place within the homes of the believers, not in the temple courts. As I've written earlier, this makes sense on many practical levels. This is however very different than how we typically partake of the Lord's Supper today.

- **Apostles' Teaching** (v. 42) - *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts."* (v. 46)

The implication from verse 46 is that when the believers continued to meet together in the temple courts, it was to hear teaching from the apostles. (Fun fact: the verb "they continued to meet together" in verse 46 is the exact same Greek verb translated as "they devoted themselves" in verse 42.) So the use of the same Greek verb connects the apostles' teaching in verse 42 and this descriptive statement in verse 46. More than that, several other

times the phrase “temple courts” is used in the book of Acts (especially Acts 5), it refers to the apostles and their teaching. The apostles were instructed by an angel in Acts 5:20 to go and teach in the temple courts. Their obedience to that command is recorded in Acts 5:21, 25 and 42. The apostles taught in the temple courts, even in the face of increasing persecution. The believers gathered there daily to hear these teachings, even though it marked them all for persecution.

- **Fellowship** (v. 42) - *“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”* (v. 44-45)

This was the connection that was not apparent at first. Our modern idea of fellowship is that of friendship and enjoying each other’s company. When Paul uses this Greek word, especially when writing to the Corinthians, it is translated as “sharing” or “participation.” In Romans 15:26 it’s translated as “contribution.” There’s a financial component that will be explored further, but for the moment know that Luke details what fellowship looked like for the earliest church by their togetherness and commonality, as well as by their selling of possessions and their generous giving to anyone in need. This descriptive statement actually helps tremendously in unpacking what biblical fellowship looked like for the earliest church. For an additional textual link, it’s worth noting that the word for “fellowship” (*koinonia*) in verse 42 is closely related to the word for “in common” in verse 44 (*koina*).

- **Prayer** (v. 42) - *“Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.”* (v. 44)

That leaves prayer and signs and wonders to be the last two puzzle pieces to match up. On the surface it doesn’t seem like much of a connection, until you read Acts 4:30-31. When you look at the history of the earliest church in Acts, you’re struck by just how many times Luke mentions that they prayed, prayer appearing in almost every chapter. Yet for all the instances of Luke recording how much they prayed, we only have one time where Luke records *what* they actually prayed. That comes in Acts 4, after persecution began to heat up against the church. In the middle of their prayer, which we’ll walk through in detail later, notice a phrase that

*They knew that the key to spiritual growth wasn’t just learning more or behaving better, it was remaining in Jesus. If they could help others do that, Jesus had already promised he would do the transforming, starting with the heart.*

sounds familiar: *“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus”* (Acts 4:30). The believers specifically prayed for signs and wonders, and I don’t believe this was the only time they did so, as attested by the fact that Luke records that the earliest church prayed

continually and signs and wonders occurred (Acts 2:41-42). The link between prayer and signs and wonders is a connection modern Christians need to take time to understand, but for now we can see a visible link between the practice of prayer listed in verse 42 and an immediate explanation in the following verse.

All of this should emphasize, underline and underscore the importance Luke is trying to place on the primacy of these four practices. Luke is literally giving us the playbook of the original church, the

four practices that shaped them and some early examples of how those practices played out. If we can sift through thousands of years of church traditions, the tribalism of denominational camps, the allure of the latest and greatest church business model and if we can pierce through the thick wall of our own presuppositions, Luke is pointing the ancient way forward for the church today, if we have the eyes to see and the courage to change.

This leads to one last question: how did the disciples land on the four practices of Acts 2:42? Where did they come up with those particular four? Why those and not others? Again, most churches would not put the breaking of bread as an integral part of their discipleship strategy. So why did the apostles land those particular practices? Luke doesn’t record that, but if we go back a few weeks in their timeline, we can actually make a strong educated guess from the clues left by the apostles themselves.

#### **WHY DID THE EARLIEST CHURCH CHOOSE THE FOUR PRACTICES OF ACTS 2:42?**

If you’ve ever been a part of a powerful or transcendent experience, there is a natural inclination to want to linger in that experience long after it has passed. If you’re a sports fan, you love watching your favorite sports team with others. You’ll see strangers in the street and strike up a conversation if they’re wearing your team’s gear. If you’re a big fan of a movie, you want to watch the movie with others in the theater and linger afterwards to enjoy the ambiance. For the apostles, there was nothing more transcendent than their experience with Jesus. Remember that when the events of Acts 2:42 took place, there was no instruction manual. Matthew and Peter (whose gospel account was recorded through Mark) and John had not yet written down their eyewitness accounts of Jesus, and Luke was decades away from conversion and recording his own account from his interviews with eyewitnesses.

So when the apostles were faced with discipling 3000 new believers all at once, it was a seemingly insurmountable challenge that actually had an incredibly clear-cut solution.

That solution didn't come from a staff retreat or a Christian conference or an all-day whiteboarding session where they all threw out their ideas and went with the best four. The apostles would have naturally drawn from their conversations and experiences with Jesus, which at this moment were merely weeks and months old. Specifically, they would have naturally drawn from the last extended time of teaching they received from Jesus. Several times after his resurrection Jesus interacted with the disciples to prove beyond doubt his resurrection from the dead, but the last time of extended teaching was on the last night of his life. This evening was so vital to their time with Jesus and to the foundation of the church that all four Gospel accounts record snippets of the conversation Jesus had on their last night together before his crucifixion. The Gospel accounts vary in length (with Mark's account being the shortest at fourteen verses while John easily writes the longest account at five full chapters), but all recognized the significance of what Jesus told the disciples on that final night.

So what did Jesus speak to his disciples about on the final night of his life? Many things actually, but among them was teaching that would blossom into the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. That's why the apostles' landed on the four practices of Acts 2:42. They were simply doing what Jesus told them to do on his last night with them. Their experience with him was so transcendent and now his spirit was living within them, why wouldn't they naturally want to linger and remain in Jesus? Here are some examples:

#### **Apostles' Teaching:**

*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. John 15:7-10*

#### **Fellowship:**

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35*

#### **Breaking of Bread:**

*And [Jesus] said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Luke 22:15-20*

#### **Prayer:**

*And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. John 14:13-14*

If we interviewed the apostles at the time of Acts 2:42 and asked why they chose those four practices to help grow and mature these new believers, I believe they would have quickly pointed back to their last extended time of teaching with Jesus and said that they were simply doing the last things that Jesus told them to do. I also believe they might have used another term in addition to 'discipleship'. We correctly use that term because Jesus gave us the command to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19). But in the context of John's recording of Jesus' final teaching (John 13-17), Jesus didn't use the word 'discipleship'. I suspect the apostles would have viewed the four practices of Acts 2:42 as the way to 'remain' in Jesus, a term Jesus used sixteen times on that final night. Here are just a few:

*Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:4-7*

So how did the earliest church 'remain' in Jesus? The same way we 'remain' in the sports team or the hobby or in the relationship we love, by continually immersing ourselves in knowledge about it, by hanging out with others with the same devotion, by experiencing the thing or person that we love and by communicating with it or them.

To wrap up this article and to try and put a nice bow on it all, the four practices of Acts 2:42 were not random ideas workshopped in an offsite retreat after Jesus' ascension. They were simply doing the last things Jesus told them to do. The purpose of it all was to help these new believers remain in Jesus, because they knew that the key to spiritual growth wasn't just learning more or behaving better, it was remaining in Jesus. If they could help others do that, Jesus had already promised he would do the transforming, starting with the heart.

Although we might now be familiar with the general concept of the four Acts 2:42 practices, a deeper examination will reveal that our roots need to sink much deeper into these practices if our churches are to experience the life and growth we see in the book of Acts. That's the subject of another blog.



**JOSH DAFFERN**, lives in northern Virginia with his wife Robin, and his 4 children. Involved in full-time ministry for over twenty years Josh stepped out of traditional ministry to follow a new revelation of what the church is meant to be. Catch him at [www.a242.church](http://www.a242.church)

# AUSTRALIA

## AN URBAN SPIRITUAL OASIS In Metro Melbourne *by Martin and Cher Spratt*



Lime Box Cafe

### MELBOURNE

#### **A** “Spiritual Oasis” is born from the Covid mess

Covid has really shaken up our world, including our church life. We operate a café in Pakenham which is an outer eastern metro suburb in Melbourne, Australia and Covid caused us to close our doors several times during government instructed lockdowns. We have met hundreds of people who have lost jobs, lost income, lost family members and often lost their purpose or hope. We decided to do something a little different and invite people for meals and social gatherings at no charge, just to encourage and connect with people on a deeper level. We just wanted to bless them somehow. This decision has grown into a new adventure that has really blessed us deeply. This article tries to paint a picture of our adventure so far of planting an urban mission in the heart of the marketplace, which we call an “Oasis”.

#### Some early successes and failures

By way of background, Cher and I have been married for 28 years and have four grown up children. I got radically saved in a large church in Melbourne in 1992 and had no working understanding of Jesus other than a semi-fictional hero. Since that time, we have studied and implemented our faith as best as we could. This journey has included planting a House Church in Brisbane in 1995, meeting Stuart and Mary Gramenz that year and getting practical “simple church” help which influenced us heavily.

We moved to USA in 1996 and planted our own café church in a roller-skating rink in Iowa and travelled extensively preaching and teaching via translators in Hispanic communities. Since then, we have planted several groups of different

sizes and supported others in planting other gospel work in USA, Hong Kong and Australia. Our biggest influences that have shaped our thinking in terms of fellowship structure and execution have been Stuart Gramenz, Frank Viola and in recent times, Francis Chan. We had many successes and bright moments, and many spectacular failures but we never gave up.

#### “Headless” Leadership Style and the end of hierarchy

Families have hierarchy on paper like a family tree, but healthy families do not function in hierarchy or impose hierarchy. My wife and kids are not subordinates to me. No, we are not bashers of institutional churches. I got saved in one of those, so I am eternally grateful. However, our personal growth and healing has found new dimensions when we chose to become open and transparent with the gorgeous group we belong to, and they speak healing into our life. This experience has given way to a critical rethink of our leadership style. I can honestly say I cannot wait until I can

fellowship with our trusted group so we can speak about Kingdom matters, the character of Jesus and our own personal weaknesses (including my own) to be mastered. I wanted to belong to a group where we are all submitted to each other, and Jesus is the leader, not me.

This concept is anchored in this scripture *“...All of you be subject one to another and be clothed in humility, for God resists the proud and give grace to the humble”*. 1 Peter 5:5 (KJV)

Yes, we have leadership and we are leaders, but we only lead “in context”. I call this “headless leadership”. This means I shift my faulty, domineering, earthly leadership style out of the way, and let Jesus lead us. This can sound cliché but is a very difficult concept to understand and administer, especially coming out of traditional church leadership paradigms. It takes time, and a lot of humility (which I struggle with).

Yes, we are temporary overseers in “a brief moment of context”, but as soon as we are able, we step out of the way and let Jesus minister to us all in a flat structure. Each person has equal and unfettered access to the Lord, and all contribute. It is a liberating and heavenly experience which I have found that small groups are able to express. We point the group to Jesus, not ourselves.

#### What is an “Oasis”?

Our café has tropical and resort-style themes in it. During one Covid lockdown we purchased a huge plastic palm tree with lights all over it. We erected the tree in the café and permanently turned all the lights on. It reminded me of the scripture where Jesus is riding a donkey into Jerusalem, and the people threw palm branches in his path to honour him as “soon to be” King of all humanity.

Palm trees speak of shade in the desert heat, and usually a sign in a barren land



# stories

what's happening around the nation

## BUNDABERG, QUEENSLAND

Peter MacSween

of a secret spring or oasis. We knew God had a plan for the café that was bigger than serving coffee and would serve a greater purpose. The concept of a spiritual oasis is a safe place to hide, a place to nourish and place to draw from.

The name "Oasis" was born and anchored on several scriptures. One of my favourites is this one... *Come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your OASIS.*" *Matt 11:28 (TPT)*

We defined the qualities of how an Oasis group functions and we use all these biblical themes to shape what we do together with Dignity, Respect, Honour, Discretion, Safety, Non-Judgmental, Non-Religious, Kind, Safe and Gentle.

Over a 12-month period we witnessed to hundreds of people at the café (using coffee and a very simple and scalable process we have documented) and established a genuine social group of about 40 adults, but within this group we discovered 14 adults who were actively seeking deeper engagement with others on spiritual growth, and a genuine passion to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus. Voilà! Our precious little group was formed and is still in its forming stage. If and when we get large enough to multiply, we will seek advice from others with experience to "send" new groups. We have never multiplied successfully in the past so that is something new that awaits us.

### Some basic Oasis concepts

Oasis is a simple Jesus community of likeminded believers who focus on three main themes of a) Love God, b) Love People and c) make reproductive disciple-makers. We have made a conscious decision to abandon buildings, staff, programs and budgets. We don't have a bank account and don't accept money from anyone. We figured that heaven has no money, and no time... so we will mirror heaven-on-earth and live out of attitude of giving, generosity and sharing.

We encourage our group to give to gospel missions of their choosing.

People join in from various denominations and worldviews, but quickly orientate themselves into a safe and accepting place where they can grow and mature in Jesus. We encourage the group to relationship build with each other which has been a joy to observe. We intentionally remove undue pressure so people can work out in their own timing how much energy, focus and commitment they want to contribute to the group. There is no pressure via programs or agendas. The sincere relationships come first.

### Simple Steps

We are reading Francis Chan's book "Letters to the Church" and using that book, and Chan's personal journey of growth as a discussion piece, as we work through a chapter at a time, and discuss the themes that Chan draws out such as Humility, Togetherness, Unity, Inclusion, Listening to Others, praying together, reading scripture together to name a few. Chan quotes a lot of scripture, so it forces us to continually look into scripture and unpack topics as a group. We allow time and space for everyone to contribute.

When we meet there is usually food, laughter and catching up conversations. The meetings are a little noisy and messy a bit like a family meal, but we aim to do three (3) essential things. **Firstly**, we want to touch, read or share scripture. **Secondly**, we want to take communion and renew the covenant together. **Finally**, we aim to pray for each other's needs.

I have found that I am being healed by the prayers and sincere insight the others bring, and at the same time the Lord is able to give Cher and I words of care and encouragement at the right time. It may appear less organised than a traditional church meeting, but the power, peace



and presence of the Holy Spirit is tangible every time we meet. It's simply gorgeous.

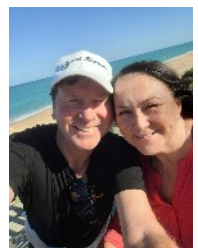
### What's Ahead?

When Covid first hit I warned many who would listen that Covid in nothing compared to the trials ahead which now include global threats not seen since World War II. Stripping away church distractions to focus on essentials appears to me to be a way forward to build resiliency in ourselves and our faith, no matter what lies ahead. I don't know what our group will look like when we finish Francis Chan's book, but one thing is certain... I am a radically changed person for the journey so far, and I know a few of the people have shared with me how transformative and refreshing our simple Oasis gatherings are. That makes it worth the effort.

### Oasis member quotes

"I love the Oasis format. Everybody sincerely helps each other to grow in Jesus". Cher Spratt

Martin & Cher Spratt  
[TheLimeBoxCafe.com.au](http://TheLimeBoxCafe.com.au)



## BUNDABERG

**A**bout 6 years ago a group of around 8 people started meeting on a Wednesday evening in our home in Bundaberg for a bible study. At this time we would pray and open the word for an in depth study of a set passage or sometimes a course of prepared study material. For a long time we would also engage in a general knowledge bible quiz



which appeared popular for a time and was eventually discontinued. These evenings would conclude with the traditional coffee and cakes. Sometimes it was 11.30 pm before the door latch was pulled. Fellowship was integral in our meeting.

One of the studies we undertook for 17 weeks was a study of the book of Revelation written by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum. This was well attended and it has been suggested that it may now be time to revisit this study as a refresher.

The group changed little over the next 4 years until winter of 2019 emerged and some of our more “mature” attendees

### **DIRECTIONS** (Continued from page 2)

The somewhat humorous toilet paper emergency showed us all how supermarkets can be emptied very quickly. The same is true of food and other essentials. If we have some provision in store we can help those caught out in times of emergencies.

We could talk much further about these and many other issues but what about disciple making and multiplying home churches? God is calling out people to be in simple relational ministry and to reach out and disciple people. We need **spiritual hubs** all across this nation with people who are passionately living and reaching out to others with love and the message of the Gospel. We need to call Australia back to its Christian roots.

### **What’s working?**

Here are a few observations.

**Passion:** As I listen to people’s stories I’ve noticed that people who make the most impact are passionate and open about their faith and looking for opportunities to share with people. As I asked someone today about their Easter they shared that

were feeling the effects of the cold and coming out at night. A decision was made by unanimous agreement that we move our meeting time from a Wednesday evening to a Sunday at 11am. Since the change in meeting time we have added a few new faces and lost a couple. On any Sunday now, there are 9 or 10 people meeting regularly and our meetings are held in a different home each week.

Since effecting the change and face of our meetings, this group has now developed into a full blown “Organic Church”. People start arriving around 10 and the coffee pot is on, everyone has arrived by at least 10.45 and our meeting gets going well by 11. The meeting starts with a song, we have the bible reading, based on the study for the day, Prayer, more singing and we even bought a portable keyboard to transport from home to home. Someone will then lead in a short time of communion, followed by the study which is presented by a change in leadership on a rotating basis. During our study all have the opportunity to contribute or ask questions and generally very robust discussion evolves.

they had mostly worked. When they ask me about my Easter I said it was great - I celebrated the resurrection of Jesus and I also caught up with family and friends, went out on the lake etc. I am trying to be open and natural about all areas of life including the spiritual.

**Connection:** People who are making an impact are connected with their communities - some are providing food banks which regularly puts them in touch with many people. Others are facilitating connection and belonging. In men’s groups, women’s groups or being chaplains in schools or sports clubs. Another couple I have recently been contacted by are running a social enterprise cafe which is connecting to about 40 people or so. It seems easier to share faith when there are natural avenues of connection.

### **Friendly, warm, hospitality and care.**

People are drawn towards warm and hospitable people and families who open their lives and homes to others. Many people are experiencing loneliness and looking for connection and support for crises in their lives. It’s amazing how getting a cold or flu is a now a big deal and to be avoided at all costs. It can get

Our group is well aware of the example of the first century church and try to adhere to the principles clearly outlined in Acts chapter 2. The worship and study part of our meeting concludes around 12.15 followed by more tea and coffee, then the high point of our fellowship – a sumptuous lunch provided by the host for the day. Most people are starting to depart by 3.00 pm but quite often the last to leave can be about 5.00.

Fellowship is very evidently enjoyed by the church and a great spirit of love for one another exists. The group has plans for mission outreach in this coming year and already, commitment to a couple of needs is being met. We also arrange day trips together and last year the group had 4 wonderful days away in the Bunya Mountains sharing in prayer, teaching and fellowship. In late March we are joining together for a 2 week adventure into western Queensland. We would welcome anyone reaching out for a home church in Bundaberg to join us.



**Peter MacSween** - Bundaberg, QLD

your shunned and isolated, but sudden unexpected loss of loved ones is impacting more and more people, and this is becoming “normal.” We need to be there for people in their loss and in their needs.

The presence of the **supernatural** and God doing “stuff” is what I am also hearing. God is bringing people who can understand a particular language to help another person to find Christ in a home church or bringing healing to people who are prayed for, or drawing avowed atheists to home church and to becoming Christ followers

**Challenges and opportunities.** Someone observed that Jesus promised his followers that they would “be irrationally joyful - and get into trouble!” A friend of mine recently said - It’s such an exciting time to be alive! I agree! There are amazing opportunities for the kingdom of God.

I am challenged to be aware of what is happening in the world, but also to “keep watch” as Jesus told us to do and to focus on the joyful life in the practical everyday.





Photo: michael-tuszynski-unsplash

Brad Watson

# ALL THINGS MADE NEW

## The Gospel isn't a Cul-De-Sac

**The cul-de-sac was a phenomenal invention for the suburbs.**

It created a safe and peaceful place for families to raise children.

No one passed through. In fact, the only time strangers can appear is after a wrong turn and they find themselves at the dead end. The design made it simple for those who don't belong to quickly turn around.

It also kept everyone who belonged there in one place. Once you came in, you didn't have to leave. You could remain the rest of your days with likeminded folks, playing games in your asphalt sanctuary.

The cul-de-sac is the epitome of the suburban life and values. However, the gospel is not a cul-de-sac. **It isn't a safe sanctuary that separates you from the dangers of the world—it throws you into the world.** It isn't your private enclave to secure your values and doctrines. It ushers you into a hospitality for the other—the not like you. The gospel is doctrinal, changing what we believe. It also is personal, changing who we are. But it is more than that.

**The Gospel is Mission: It Changes Where and How We Live**

If we just focus on the doctrinal and personal aspect of the gospel, we will neglect its missional aspect. If the doctrinal gospel changes what we believe, and the personal gospel changes who we are, then the missional gospel changes where we live and what we say. It is the hopeful announcement that God is making all things new in Christ Jesus! **The gospel ushers us into a new kingdom and new world.** We no longer live in a world dominated by death and deconstruction but one of life and re-creation!

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim*

*good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*  
Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61

**The Gospel Changes Everything**

The gospel changes everything. It is not only good news for us, but also for our neighbors, the poor, our city, and the world. It affects the social, cultural, and physical fabric of the universe. In Luke 4, Jesus preached the gospel to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. It is good news for them because through his death and resurrection he has defeated sin, death, and evil (1 Jn. 2:13; 3:8). The gospel announces the in-breaking reign of Jesus, which is in the process of reversing the order of things. The poor become rich, the captives are freed, and the old become new.

**The Gospel Sends Us on Mission**

Those who follow Jesus join his mission by making disciples of all ethnic groups by going, teaching, and baptizing (Matt. 28:18-20). We are sent to teach, speak, counsel, discuss, and proclaim the gospel to others so that they might be baptized into God's new creation and join his mission of making all things new. We are called "ambassadors of reconciliation" and given the privilege of sharing in Jesus' ministry of reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:17-20). Those who have been changed by the gospel share its life-changing power with others. We should announce and embody the good news by caring for the poor and rebuilding cities (Is. 61:4). In fact, the future for the people of God is an entirely new city in a new creation (Rev. 21). **The church should be a movie trailer of this grand, coming attraction, when all things will be made new!**

**Remember, This Is Who You Are**

The result of the church—you, us—being sent is that we live as a community of disciples—not only devoted to Jesus and to one another—but devoted to our neighbors and our city, too. **When we come to Christ, we are all sent on his mission.**

We are new and have a new purpose. Christ reconciled us to himself and we are a new creation. Our old way of finding identity and our broken ways of finding meaning are over. We are reconciled and ushered into a vibrant and living relationship with God. This is the gospel, that Christ has reconciled us to God through his death and resurrection and is making all things new—even us. **We are recipients of the gospel, messengers of the gospel, servants of the gospel, and are representatives of the gospel's work.**

See, you cannot separate our identity in Christ from our purpose in Christ. That identity and purpose requires some sort of expression of gospel-focused community on mission:

- We live on mission because we have received the gospel.
- We live on mission because we are messengers of the gospel. He is making his appeal to the world through us.
- We live on mission because we are ministers of reconciliation—servants of the gospel.
- We live on mission because we are ambassadors—representatives of the gospel.

**BRAD WATSON** serves as an equipping leader at Soma Culver City in Los Angeles where he develops and teaches leaders to form communities that love God and serve the city. He is the author of multiple books including *Send Together: How the Gospel Sends Leaders to Start Missional Communities*. [Saturatetheworld.com](http://Saturatetheworld.com)



Bring the  
**FIRE**  
 With You When You Gather

Photo:mike-erskine-unsplash

**W**hen you gather as a church at home, bring the fire with you.

In other words, don't "come to church" in order to experience God and rely on whatever takes place during the time of the gathering to create the fire. Recognize that when we gather, it's the bringing together of embers that are already lit and hot that allows the gathering to become something truly mystical, dynamic, and powerful.

Another way to say it is this: Solitude and Mission Precedes Community.

In other words, it's the experience of God in us, individually, that we experience alone with Him, that allows us to gather with others in a way that produces community that is alive and vibrant. If we come empty, then we are looking to others to bring something of God that will fill us. If a room full of people gather in this condition then what do we have: one empty, dry gathering.

On the other hand, as was expressed in one church this week, if we will each ask God to fill us during the week, hear

from Him, walk with Him, go into the world with Him on mission, and then gather with others doing the same, we will experience a super-charged synergism. How powerful it is when several people get together who are living the "with-Jesus" life!

**Bring the fire with you when you gather in your church at home.**

**"Bring the fire with you."**

The result will be a gathering in which there is more being poured out than anyone can receive.

**"Bring the fire with you."**

We will stop showing up at gatherings like beggars, hoping that someone else will have the food that will sustain us. We will begin to learn that each of us has the ability to look to *God* (not special people or events) for the spiritual life that we need and want. We discover that each of us truly has the Holy Spirit in us and that He is the **ONLY ONE** who can lead us into the deep intimacy with Christ that we long

for. We go to *Him* for the fire to be stoked. We gather with *others* to encourage what's already there.

**"Bring the fire with you."**

The result will be a community bonfire that will prepare us even more to GO OUT. We will be equipped like never before to go into a dark and needy world with even greater love and generosity of spirit, greater confidence in our calling and spiritual gifts, and a clearer story to tell.

**"Bring the fire with you."**

This may be the one key that could transform the church from a hidden way-station that people "go" to, to becoming the fully-alive, go-everywhere, people-filled-with-God movement that literally fills the earth with God's glory and light.

**"Bring the fire with you."**



**ROGER THOMAN** describes himself as an irreligious Jesus Follower devoted to His Kingdom through multiplying disciples and simple churches among the nations. Catch him at [simplechurchjournal.com](http://simplechurchjournal.com)

Follow us on Facebook



Keep up to date with great articles, events and comments. And also checkout our new website

[www.oikos.org.au](http://www.oikos.org.au)

for video and teaching resources

# Q&A



**Are you meeting with a few new believers/not-yet believers? Here are some suggested questions from the Discovery Bible Guide - [dbsguide.org](http://dbsguide.org) - to get you exploring.**

## **TALK**

- To begin the study, each person answers these questions:
- What are you thankful for right now?
- What is causing you stress?
- Who needs our help? How can this group help them?

## **LOOK BACK (SESSION 2+)**

- Retell the story from the previous meeting.
- What did you do differently because of this story?
- Who did you tell and what was the reaction?

## **READ & RE-TELL**

- One person reads today's Bible passage out loud, and the rest follow along.
- Someone else retells the passage by memory, if possible. Others can fill in what is missing.

## **LOOK**

- Read the passage again.
- Discuss what this passage says about God, Jesus or his plan.

## **LOOK AGAIN**

- Read the passage once more
- Discuss what this passage says about humans.

## **INSIDE ME**

- According to this study, what am I doing well?
- What do I need to change?

## **WHO ELSE?**

- Who needs to hear this story?
- How can I tell them?
- Who can I invite to study the Bible?

## **SUGGESTED BIBLE PASSAGES**

- God Creates – Genesis 1:1-25
- God Creates Man and Woman – Genesis 2:4-24
- Man and Woman Eat the Fruit – Genesis 3:1-13
- God's Curses – Genesis 3:14-24
- God Regrets His Creation – Genesis 6:5-8
- God Saves Noah and His Family – Genesis 6:9-22, 7:1-24, 8:1-14
- God's Covenant with Noah – Genesis 8:15-22, 9:1-17
- God's Covenant with Abram – Genesis 12:1-8, 15:1-6, 17:1-7
- Abraham Gives His Son as an Offering – Genesis 22:1-19
- God Spares His People – Exodus 12:1-28
- The Commands of God – Exodus 20:1-21
- The Sin Offering – Leviticus 4:1-35
- God's Righteous Servant – Isaiah 53
- Jesus is Born – Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-20
- Jesus is Baptized – Matthew 3; John 1:29-34
- Jesus is Tested – Matthew 4:1-11
- Jesus and the Religious Leader – John 3:1-21
- Jesus and the Samaritan Woman – John 4:1-26, 4:39-42
- Jesus and the Paralyzed Man – Luke 5:17-26
- Jesus Calms the Storm – Mark 4:35-41
- Jesus and the Man with Evil Spirits – Mark 5:1-20
- Jesus Raises a Man from the Dead – John 11:1-44
- Jesus Talks about His Betrayal and the Covenant – Matthew 26:17-30
- Jesus is Betrayed and Faces Trial – John 18:1-40, 19:1-16
- Jesus is Crucified – Luke 23:32-56
- Jesus is Resurrected – Luke 24:1-35
- Jesus Appears to the Disciples and Ascends to Heaven – Luke 24:36-53
- Enter into the Kingdom God – John 3:1-21

For further help, a video presentation and to download the popular DBS app, go to the [Discovery Bible Study site – dbsguide.org](http://Discovery Bible Study site – dbsguide.org)

## GOSPEL OF JOHN – GITTE, ELIZABETH AND LINDSAY

May 21, 2016 by [Disciple](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

*“Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life....many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him, because of the woman’s testimony”. – John 4: 13, 39*

Jesus gives the world eternal life. It is the most astounding offer a person could ever receive. The great unconquerable, death, is finally overcome in Christ, ‘the firstborn raised from the dead’. It took a bit of time, but when that Samaritan woman finally grasped what was on offer, she dropped everything, forgot about her appalling life, and ran off to tell someone. As you read this passage, soak in what Jesus is actually offering *you*, what is your reaction? Are you inclined to drop everything, forget about all that is wrong with your life and run to someone...either him or someone to tell. She was mesmerised.

We see the power of Jesus come alive whenever we speak of him to others. His very name lights up people’s often miserable lives. What he promises, is that one day he will do that for eternity to all who put their faith in him. I can think of nothing more profound than that promise. Nothing else in this world comes close. Last weekend, as my wife and me were about to go home after a fairly bland day on the streets, we stopped to speak to Gitte, Elizabeth and Lindsay. Between them, they shared more sickness than most; chronic stress, cancer, 2 strokes and traumatic stress disorder. Not bad for an odd little threesome on the street. We have rarely seen people welcome prayer more enthusiastically. We shared the

Gospel of Jesus equally enthusiastically with them, and they promised to remain in touch. Hopefully, they will be persons of peace and we can start a Discovery Bible Study with them when we get back. We are so genuinely excited!

We stopped to talk to them right outside a large and well-known ‘church’, where people go regularly to worship God. As Jesus said though, a time is coming when people won’t worship God either on this mountain (building) or that mountain, but in Spirit and in Truth. All the time we are told that it is different here, that Aussies don’t want to hear the Gospel, that you can’t just roll up to people and start discussing religion, especially in this area, people are too closed. Instead, we ask them to come into a culture that they don’t understand, nor wish to know about and one that doesn’t always welcome them. Honestly though, I don’t see Jesus doing that at all in the Gospels.

We emphatically believe that God put those people in front of us, because we bothered to go out looking for them, and he did so right at the end when we were about to go home. It was a source of great encouragement, quite probably for him and us. The point of telling you all this, is not to blow our trumpets – trust me, there have been many times when Sunday lunch or a Saturday surf is much more appealing than telling people the Gospel. No, the point is that anyone can do it and it needs to be done. Why? Not because we need to feel good about ourselves, although there is nothing like the feeling that comes after sharing Jesus. No, it needs to be done because Jesus commanded us, and because if not us, then who?

Jesus tells us that he offers people – all people, living water that springs up

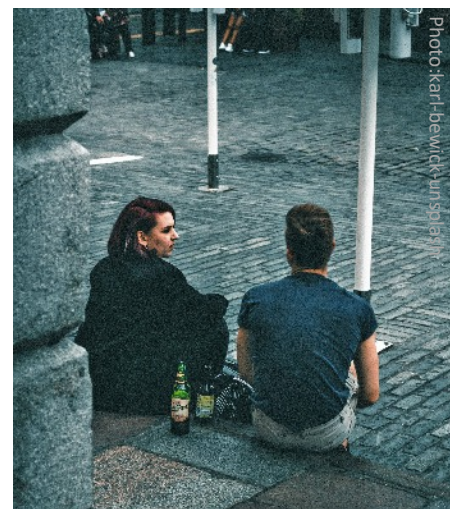


Photo: karl-benwick@unsplash.com

into eternal life. Nobody else has an offer like that to make to the world. The method by which he chooses to spread that message, is through you and me. I read this week, that in Manchester, 2 teams of 7 people, 14 in all spent a few hours on the streets. Before they went, the ‘church’ presented them with the same arguments as to why it wouldn’t work. Really? Try prayer and gospel sharing with 56 people, of which 4 people put their faith in Christ, 11 want to meet again to hear more, and many more were interested. Just in an afternoon.

Do we believe that we go out into the world empty-handed? Jesus, the Lord of all the Universe promises to be there in person, to prepare the way, and to prepare the hearts of people he wants us to meet. He does almost all the work, we simply need to pray and show up.

As believers, we have something that many in the world are desperately seeking. You are quite likely the very person God wants to use to show them the way. You can have a vote in helping someone to eternal life in Christ, so can I ask, do any of us having anything better to do this weekend? [nobrokenreed.org](http://nobrokenreed.org)

**\*GET MULTIPLE COPIES OF THE FREE “HOW TO” EDITION** Drop us an email or go to our website (below) and place an order online. Order as many as you like - the postage rates are all there. Why not become a regular subscriber at the same time?

**SUBSCRIBE TO OIKOS MAGAZINE**

If you’ve been encouraged by the Magazine then help us GET IT OUT! Introduce the rest of your friends to it by passing it around. They can subscribe by going to the OIKOS website

[www.oikos.org.au](http://www.oikos.org.au)

**OIKOS Australia Magazine,**  
14 Yeppoon Crescent  
Yeppoon QLD 4703  
0435 322 303  
[magazine@oikos.org.au](mailto:magazine@oikos.org.au)