

# OIKOS

AUSTRALIA

SPRING 2022  
Vol. 30 No. 4

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A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS  
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## OIKOS Australia

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

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

Front photo: jo-unsplash  
Eureka Printing Pty Ltd, Glen Waverley, Victoria

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# DIRECTIONS

## Going underground - and being able to survive in hostile environments....

Some animals who survive in hostile environments are incredible. For example, the wolf spider lives at elevations as high as 22,000 feet which means being able to survive on very little oxygen and relying for food on small insects which are blown up by wind. There are other creatures which can survive extreme cold or heat or radiation or dehydration such as the microscopic "water bear." It can survive even out in space or in a dehydrated state even for decades. It revives when placed in water again! <sup>1</sup>

Well, I guess we don't face those kinds of challenges! However, it seems to me that we are living in end times - how much more time we have God only knows.

It is important to understand the huge changes that are taking place in our culture and nation. On one hand we are better off financially than most people in the world - highly privileged, yet spiritually impoverished and lacking.

I sense that even in laid back Australia, there are forces out to suppress Christian faith and that things are going to get more difficult.

The recent disgraceful forced resignation of Andrew Thorburn from his position as the CEO of the Essendon Football Club, essentially because he was a Christian and the despicable attack and attempt to smear his name by the Victorian Premier are just the more recent examples of a trend driven by the woke mob and cultural marxists who look for every opportunity to attack Christians and Christian faith - and indeed anyone who questions their meta narrative. Even J K Rowling, author of Harry Potter fame (hardly a Christian) is facing growing attacks for daring to disagree with the trans activists.

However, while being aware of the trend and who is driving it is important, the much more important focus is the priority to be intentional on disciple making and pointing people to God's kingdom. The urgency of this priority is growing.

And so, it's an exciting time of opportunities both to prepare and to share. The growing conviction I have is that this is the **preparation time** for Christians and our gatherings, which will need to go "underground", not because of any wrongdoing, or any sinister or devious intent, but as a way of operating when opposition and persecution increases in Australia and other Western countries. In fact, in many places around the world this is an everyday reality now.

In fact, these gatherings of followers of Jesus around the world in hostile environments typically do go "underground" - meeting in homes or less conspicuous places as simple church/home churches.

Recently, when praying for the Melbourne Oikos Regional gathering, Kate and I felt the Lord impress us with the words be "be courageous and speak boldly" and that "Jesus called his followers to follow him and immediately taught them to be "fishers of men."

My sense is that God is calling us to be aware, and alert, and to be more focused on the task he has given us. This is not just a task or "work" to perform but grows from the intimacy we have with him each day. It's a passion that can't be ignored!

I also believe that the Lord wants us to be full of his joy and to be life giving and "fun to be around". He doesn't need us to be full of gloom and doom! People rarely are inspired by negative people! Like Peter and John "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" Acts 4:20. We have experienced the grace and presence of the Holy Spirit touching our lives, helping us through the tough times, bringing joy and hope

*(Continued on page 19)*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.toptenz.net/10-organisms-can-survive-extreme-conditions.php>



ROGER THOMAN

# Out of the Boat to Follow Jesus

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**S**imple/house church has been one of the great opportunities for me to step out of the boat at the word of Jesus in order to follow him with greater abandon.

God spoke clearly to me at the beginning of this journey, "I will not give you a blueprint to follow." His meaning was clear. He was bringing me to a new dependency on him that would require listening and following daily often without knowing where it would lead.

As [Monte Dugger](#) writes: "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Follow me.' To where? He did not elaborate. But this was actually the point. The life-journey of a disciple is less about what will happen, where we will travel to, and how we will meet our end, but more importantly about who it is that we are following."

The house church journey has been a lot of simple re-discovery of what God's word says about life, church (ekklesia), and ministry along with a willingness to walk out these Scriptures with fresh eyes. This often meant leaving the boat of the traditions and religious culture I was comfortable with. This often meant walking in ways that did not make sense from a worldly point of view. But always, always God met me in these times of faith and risk-taking confirming the truth and power of his word.

I received this email recently from someone stepping out of her boat that describes this well:

*We have stepped away now from what we've lived so long.....the American Church Christianity culture... Our hearts are being fed and the Holy Spirit is keeping us in peace and with expectation of what lays just ahead. We know the outpouring of the Spirit in these last of the last days will empower us and all the remnant in all our lack. We are waiting and dependent, for apart from Him, we can do nothing of any lasting value.*

I am challenged to continue to walk each day with this kind of dependency on God and not settle into new ways of remaining in the boat.

I try to continually encourage myself:

1. Listen afresh to God's word every time I read and meditate on it
2. Allow his Spirit to speak and impress upon me what he is saying without any preconceived notions
3. Converse with God and respond with a 'yes,' as an intention to put into practice or step out at his word
4. Trust, rest, and enjoy his leading and presence

When we follow him in such a way is there uncertainty at times? Yes. Are we fearful at times? Yes. But do we discover the joy of the spiritual journey and the faithful intimate connection with Jesus? Always.

”

**Jesus said to his disciples, Follow me. To where? He did not elaborate. But this was actually the point. The life-journey of a disciple is less about what will happen, where we will travel to, and how we will meet our end, but more importantly about who it is that we are following. For Jesus declared Himself as the way, the truth, and the reality. When the magnitude of who Jesus is, is realized by us, we won't demand answers to our many questions because we will have discovered that Christ Himself, above all, is the answer.**

**Monte Dugger**



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# What is Simple Church?

**T**o be honest, the first time I heard the term *simple church* I recoiled from it as though one were suggesting we turn God's idea of *His ecclesia* into something more "simplistic" to satisfy our own ends. However, this is not the intent at all.

If I spoke of simplifying my life, I would be referring to a desire to get back to basics or, better yet, a resolve to return to a more holistic, authentic lifestyle. I would be suggesting that I have unnecessarily complicated my life in some way and want to rid myself of the superfluous clutter I've somehow accumulated.

It is in this way that I use the phrase "simple church". Yes, it is an expression with limitations; as is any term we place in front of the word "church". However, it is helpful in capturing our desire to return to the simplicity and purity of the organic, relational, missional church we read about in the New Testament.

And thus, it also implies the need to shed the complexities and clutter we've added to the concept of church;

acknowledging that there are more than a few sacred cows that need to be turned into juicy hamburgers.

Continue reading as we unpack this thought further, offer a working definition for the phrase "simple church", suggest some valid synonyms and explain why "simple church" captures our desire to return to a Biblical, Kingdom way of life.

## **So, what is simple church?**

This is a very good question since adding a descriptive word before the word "church" has serious limitations. Definitions that help us now may hinder us later. Why? By nature, we tend to box things or settle for helpful formulae. The problem is, of course, that somewhere along the way we start to put our focus on the formula rather than on God. And often we only realise that we've crossed the line when it's too late. (Of course, it's never too late in the mercy of God.

However, the time and energy spent in breaking old forms and the insidious dependencies they foment is exhausting

and often leaves casualties along the way).

Having mentioned this caution, I concede that definitions are important and unavoidable. The wisdom writer declared, "*the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day*" (*Proverbs 4:18*). We can dream of a time when one day "church" means to everyone what it ought to, but until that day we'll have to reluctantly use some workable definitions. And by workable, I mean definitions that we hold lightly enough so that we keep the dialogue open as we pursue a deeper understanding of God's intention for His ecclesia. (Please see the article entitled, *What does ecclesia mean?*).

For this reason, we use the following terms interchangeably in the hope that we avoid the box: simple church, organic church, missional church, relational church, redeemed communities, Kingdom communities, home church, house church, etc. (Do you want to add a few of your own?) None of these terms by themselves are sufficient and all of them

have their limitations. However, together they're helpful and workable ... for now.

### Again, the question is: *what is simple church?*

Perhaps the best place to start then in answering this question is to clarify that we are *not* referring to a new methodology or structure.

We're *not* talking about re-arranging the furniture of the church—and I mean this both metaphorically and literally. Some seem to feel we've gone far enough by bringing some innovation into our church experience ... so in come comfortable couches, multimedia presentations and interactive sermons. While any change is refreshing, we're convinced more is required. We're looking for transformation not just innovation, even though innovation can often be the first steps towards transformation.

Thus, simple church is not a new way of doing small groups; it's not merely an adaptation of the cell group model or an improvement of the G12 strategy. We're referring to a *new way of life*, not a hip new method. We're pursuing a *communal, missional lifestyle*, not a revamped schedule of meetings. Then what is it? Come on, spit it out... By simple church we refer to a *values-based approach to being a Kingdom-shaped church*; viewing church essentially as *organic, relational, missional and fluid* rather than *institutional, hierarchical, attractional and rigid*; a *Kingdom family* rather than a business enterprise or religious organisation. And thus, while every simple church certainly won't look the same, we're all whistling the same tune.

For us the main thing is the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)); that is, being about our Father's Kingdom business, and doing so in a no-nonsense commitment to the Great Commandment ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)). Fuelled and informed by the love of God, our hearts desire is to *make disciple-makers*; followers of Christ who in turn make disciple-makers (who in turn make disciple-makers who...), multiplying the life of God. In other words, simple church communities are *alive, in love and on mission together*.

And there's no better Biblical passage that captures the heart behind simple church than Paul's passionate plea in [2 Corinthians 11:3](#): But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

And we're convinced that God's chosen "vehicle" through which His life multiplies is a reproducible missional community; a spiritual family that finds its covenant and communal life revolving around their homes and places of influence. As we demonstrate the Gospel of the Kingdom—alive, in love and on mission, cooperating with the Lord of the Harvest—our communal life becomes the launch pad for Kingdom exploits: whether this is into a specific neighbourhood, niche of society or another nation of the world.

We're often asked if we're the "house church" people. The honest answer is ... *no!*

While we're fully persuaded that communal life 24/7 week-in-week-out is the meat and potatoes of a Biblical church experience, we're certainly not saying

that transferring a weekly meeting from a building on the street corner to a lounge room somewhere is the whole ballgame. This is not a case of "Honey, I shrunk the church".

Shrink wrapping "big church" into "small church" will not change the world and, in our experience, can easily lead either to an ingrown group of "us-four-and-no-more" or, when hurting people leave "big church" to find salvation in "small church", many eventually settle for "no church". To be clear, the answer is not found in bringing all the problems of "big church" to a living room near you. Yet true community is the result of believers who fan their passion for the King and His Kingdom come into full flame. Engaged with Christ and His mission, fellowship is the wonderful by-product of a community in love with their God and one another, and who are thrilled to be a part of His work in their world. Discipleship becomes a vital ingredient in the recipe and releasing one another to begin new Kingdom communities is not only expected but celebrated.

### If we're not the "house church" people, then what are we?

I'd like to think that we're simply "followers of Jesus" or Kingdom people ... or as the early believers were called, those "of the Way" ([Acts 9:2](#)). The first century believers had found a new Way to live centred on Christ and His mission. We're pressing out for no less than this.

Do we really need any other designation than that?



**STARFISH OZ** *Starfish Oz is a group of simple churches that operates out of South Australia. Catch up with them at [StarfishOz.com.au](http://StarfishOz.com.au)*

## OIKOS MELBOURNE REGIONAL GATHERING

**R**ecently around 50 people, which included men, women, youth and children, gathered together for the day at the Yarra Edge Community Space at Docklands. There were people from Melbourne, Geelong, county Victoria, and even from interstate - SA and QLD! The day included learning together, stories, gathering as a simple church, group discussion, praying, sharing and eating together. New relationships were forged, and old ones renewed. One man met his first pastor after decades apart.

It's amazing how God leads people on different paths but ending up at a similar destination. We also enjoyed worship in different forms, including a psalm put to music especially for the occasion! The gathering was made of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and so it was great to see parts of the Body of Christ together. A big thanks you to Karitas and his team who organised the venue and the nuts and bolts! Amazingly in the end we were given the venue for a very small cost. Thank you

Lord!  
Thank you to everyone who made the effort to be part of this



Gathering. I believe all were blessed and encouraged and better equipped for our mission. We need more regionals and get togethers all across Australia on a regular basis!



# FROM PET PARROTS to EAGLES

STUART GRAMENZ

***There have been many Christians inspired and yet intrigued by the following scripture. But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31***

As a result there have been books written about how Christians are to be eagles and countless sermons exhorting us to soar. Many believers have been taught only one aspect of waiting upon the Lord. They have prayed to receive this supernatural lift. They waited...and waited...and waited...with little to no results. After all the prayer, they are still weary, and they feel their strength is not renewed. Soaring like an eagle seems to be achieved by only a handful of believers with the majority flapping about, seemingly grounded. If we know it's God's will for us to be eagles, why is it that we are not taking off?

In this scripture, the word "wait" means to become one with the Lord. Jesus said *I and My Father are one. John 10:30* This does not necessarily involve a "touchy feely" presence. We become one with Him when we become of one mind. How then is this achieved?

## **JESUS THE EAGLE**

Jesus of course is our model of how we are to achieve an eagle lifestyle. He didn't continually pray and wait for God to do everything for Him. He wasn't waiting for the Father to inject Him with some extra supernatural energy. He had already received the power of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of His ministry. Potential power wasn't the issue...unlocking and releasing that power was.

What happened with Jesus when He waited upon the Lord?

In a restaurant, a waiter waits! They wait for an order from the person they are serving. Without the order they are ineffective and are unable to do their job. Once the order is given to them, they are empowered to carry out the request. Jesus waited upon the Lord and listened for His orders. Knowing what was in His Father's mind, He became one with Him.

*"For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. So whatever I say is just what the Father told me to say." John 12:49-50 NIV*

*"...I tell you in truth, the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does..." John 5:19 NIV*

Faith comes by hearing a "rhema" or a live word from the Lord. When God spoke direct rhema words to Jesus, it empowered Him with the authority and faith to carry out the orders given. Day by day, or moment by moment

He would be seeded by God to rise up and preach the gospel, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons. Each faith order enabled Him to renew or exchange His strength for God's, or, in other words, to release the power of the Spirit. He was revitalized, relying on God's seed words for strength as He soared from one person to the next. His vision was to carryout the will of the Father. He didn't know what He was doing from one day to the next and was totally dependent on the Lord for His instructions. James 4:13,14. The Spirit of the Lord became the wind beneath His wings.

*The Message says in John 3:8 "You know well enough how the wind blows this*

*way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone born from above by the wind of God, the Spirit of God."*

Everyone born from above...' Every believer can be led and lifted just as Jesus was. Those who desire to be eagles will need to have the confidence and/or trust that Jesus wants them to do what He did. His prayer was that all believers could reach this level of maturity whereby *they may be one just as We are one*. The purpose of this oneness was more far-reaching more than simply being made righteous ....*that the world may believe that You sent Me."* John 17:21,22. Being of one mind and the ongoing powerful effects of it would grab the world's attention.

## **WHAT ABOUT US?**

The early church realized they were destined to become one with Him, be lifted by the wind of the Holy Spirit and fly just as Jesus did. They simply believed what He had told them. *"Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in the works that I do will he do also and greater works than these will he do."* John 14:12. They imitated Him, waited upon the Lord and were so empowered through His instructions they turned the world upside down.

However, throughout the Dark Ages the church was plucked. Feather by feather of truth was removed until the church became totally grounded. Eventually the idea that leaders, let alone followers, could duplicate the works of Jesus was considered as feasible as flying to the moon.

Restoration began with the likes of Martin Luther, and then the truths of water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit were added. Many other quills of truth

have emerged and today we can say the church is covered with many theological feathers. But even with all this new plumage of restored knowledge, many believers have not been able to soar.

### PET PARROTS

As a result some church goers have felt more like pet parrots than eagles. As we know, the owners of pet parrots gain great pleasure out of hand feeding them and showing them to others. As a result of being caged, they are confined in their activities and, because they can't enjoy the natural pleasure of flying, other things are placed in the cage to keep them amused. They are also trained to talk but can only repeat what their owner teaches them to say.

Those believers who feel like pet parrots are usually provided with all the care and counseling they need. They are hand fed with well prepared, spiritual food every week. As a result they know their bible, can repeat scriptures, but still can't fly and soar. They are occupied with weekly meetings, instead of meeting with the Lord and meeting the needs of others.

In some cases their captivity is not a physical but a mental mindset. They have been convinced that, basically, as long as they attend every week, don't peck at the others and come along for the ongoing hand feeding program, they are fulfilling their role. However, even with all the counseling, care and bible knowledge, they become dissatisfied. They go out for altar calls...but nothing alters. In their hearts they know that something is missing. For many, that frustration finally leads to a sense of pessimism. Their only hope of soaring is on the day they die, when they will get their heavenly wings and fly to that great aviary in the sky.

### THE ONE-WINGED PARROT

There is a second group of believers who, although they feel partially released, still sense they fit in the parrot category. Some pet owners keep their parrots permanently caged, but others, realizing the birds need greater freedom, allow them out.

Complete liberty is, however, not an option and to stop them from leaving the house, the owners continually clip the feathers on one wing. This allows a degree of freedom but, as the bird attempts to fly, it can only flutter around in circles.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom. 2 Cor. 3:17 NLT*

There have been some believers who have been equipped for the work of their ministry to some degree. They have been trained to move in the gifts of the Spirit, pray for the sick, but are basically confined to "in house" programs. Even with the restoration of home churches, most of the ministry takes place in the meeting. Those who sense they have a limited element of freedom will gain a degree of satisfaction. Finally, after ministering "in house" year after year, they can feel they are going around in circles and end up dizzy and exhausted.

Jesus, our eagle model, did not confine His ministry to a weekly meeting. His gifts and power were released as He went about doing good and healing all.

### TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP VISION

Because they purchased them, parrot owners have control over the future of their pet. Some spiritual leaders have seen believers as "their people" and have a planned vision for them to help build the leader's church. God has paid a high price for all believers. He is the only owner and He has a specific purpose for each one. The Lord has given a vision to all leaders...to equip believers to become Jesus' imitators and to be led by Him. Eph. 4:11-13.

This will need the impartation of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, not just the one leader struggling to fully equip believers. Having an equipping team will also help remove the old traditional "my people" syndrome. Unfortunately, in the past, some in traditional church leadership have concentrated on their vision of "in house" ministry and have not received the revelation of the present eagle truths. Reaching the lost is advocated but having as many people as possible attend services or home church meetings has been the basic intention.

### EAGLE CHURCHES

In the emerging eagle church, having a huge aviary is not the goal. The future leaders who truly want to imitate Jesus just want to see their fledglings soar. How do they do this?

In the natural, eagles provide two essential chick-rearing principles.

First of all, they do provide an initial environment of protection and care. They also provide fresh food (for a period of time) until the eaglets are ready to fly. 2 Tim. 3:16,17.

Secondly, they are examples of what it is to be an eagle. The babies learn through observation of their parents what their future holds for them. They have no doubt that they are destined to soar, search for their own food and provide for their own family one day.

Jesus was the ultimate example of the eagle parent. He fed his fledglings fresh spiritual food daily. He demonstrated how to wait upon the Lord, which enabled Him then to rise to the occasion. He told them that they were expected to do what He did. John 14:12. After modeling and feeding for some time, He gave them an opportunity to practice, using both specific and general orders. As He was walking on water, He demonstrated that Peter also could imitate Him by obeying a specific order, "Come!"

He also sent them out on practice flights with a general command to preach the gospel. They were so excited with this short, uplifting trip they said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." Luke 10:17.

Feeding, modeling and practice, however, was only for a season. For Jesus it was three years. For the apostle Paul it varied from several months to two to three years. Eagle leaders are Jesus imitators. They give fresh food to their young but are also to be examples of a Spirit led life. They are able to receive words of faith as they wait upon the Lord and are to be models of this high-flying kind of living.

The previous model of leadership in some cases has been the "in house" concept, with preaching and teaching being perceived as the mark of a great man or woman of God.

Obviously equipping is vital but, unless the Spirit led life is modeled, believers may gain the impression that "real" ministry is predominantly about imparting bible knowledge. Their wings remain clipped because they are not taught nor given a Jesus kind of



Photo:lyssa-sutta-unsplash

model of a relationship whereby they rely on direct leading of the Lord. The Lord is presently ruffling some feathers and stirring up an emerging group of leaders to go to greater heights and demonstrate the Spirit led life.

*For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 1 Cor. 4:20*

### OUT OF THE NEST

In the natural, if a mature eaglet is unsure about taking a leap of faith and beginning to fly, the parents lovingly remove all the soft lining in the nest. They also refuse to feed it anymore and make staying in the nest an uncomfortable option.

Isn't this what Jesus did with His young? When He told them that He was going to leave them to fly by themselves, they thought of themselves as being abandoned orphans. John 14:18. He removed the comfort of depending directly on Him, stopped His feeding program and told them that it was to their advantage to be on their own because the Holy Spirit would come. John 16:17. They now had to take a leap of faith and depend on the word from Spirit being the wind beneath their wings. They had to feed themselves with seeds of faith from the Holy Spirit.

The same detachment process had to happen to the first disciples of the apostles. After learning the apostles doctrine, which was basically the teachings in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the disciples were forced out of their comfort zone. *At the time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Acts. 8:1,4.*

By today's standards, these would be considered baby Christians. However, after they were scattered they found their wings. They had obviously learned from the disciples to fly by being led by the Spirit. Having been forced out of the nest with no apostles to turn to, they looked to the Lord and, as a result, became part of the church that turned the world upside down.

Is this emptying of the nest principle applied in our equipping mindsets today? Could this be a major reason we are not seeing a move of the Spirit in most western countries?

In the past, pet parrot churches, with little understanding of releasing, do the opposite. Many seem to make their church more and more comfortable, to encourage their followers to keep coming back. Returning to the nest each week is considered a vital part of a believer's

ministry. The perception gained is that they still need to receive more and more prepared hand feeding...for the rest of their lives.

Mature eagles don't need basic, hand fed, weekly messages till the cows come home. They now are strengthened by being able to get their own spiritual food by the leading of the Spirit from their bibles, other eagles, or through hearing directly from the Lord. Spiritual eagles are satisfied not by the milk but by meat. Jesus said, *"My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me"*. KJV

The eagles no longer have to take non-believers to meetings but have been equipped to lead them to the Lord themselves and minister to them. As a result they fulfill the words of Isaiah, renewing their strength and not fainting or growing weary.

### BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Some may be concerned at the freedom and perceived independence we are encouraging here. They would remind us of the need for the Body of Christ to come together. Heb. 10:25

Relationships are extremely vital in this high-flying life. Jesus modeled the eagle church perfectly for us. He gathered His disciples for equipping. After being a good spiritual parent, He released His church of disciples to go out in pairs (as eagles do) and start their own spiritual families.

He also reminded us that eagles do congregate. *"Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."* Luke 17:37. When food is available natural eagles gather together for a feed. In the Old Testament God's people came together for great feasts. In the New Testament they gathered together as a Body for both natural and spiritual food. They met in the Temple (initially) to receive the basic truths and then had love feasts in their homes where relationships were built over meals. *So continuing daily in one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. Acts 2:46*

There are so many scriptures that refer to the ministry to 'one another'. Any believer will realize the need to 'feed off' one another. This is part of their eagle ministry. After we receive initial milk teaching we need the meat of exhorting, comforting and stirring one another to sustain an eagle lifestyle. *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another... Heb. 10:24,25.*

However, spiritual eagles flock together because they realize they have a need to give and receive from "one another" ...not just hearing from the same one every week. What's the old saying? Birds of a feather, flock together!

### THE DOWNSIDE

As the believer's baby down grows into full feathers, there will be problems as these new truths are restored. The negative side is that there will be basically three groups of believers who will not be able to extend their wings.

1. Those with a caged mentality.
2. Those with an isolation mindset.
3. Those who form independent small groups.

### CAGED MENTALITY

If a pet parrot has been confined for some time and is dependent on its owner's care and hand feeding, it has become institutionalized. If you take the bird out of the security of its cage, it becomes fearful and will instinctively want to go back to its former confinement into what it considers a safe environment. Some church leaders have done so much for believers in caring for and organizing them, they have become dependent on what the church organization provides. They see the Sunday congregation as the centre of their Christian life.

Unwittingly some have become spiritually institutionalized and the freedom of living the Spirit led, eagle life, of being released as the early church was, can be considered too radical and frightening. As a result, the eagle truths can be too confronting and it is easier and safer to return to the confinement to which they have grown accustomed.

### ESCAPING PARROTS

At the moment there are many Christians who are considered by some to have "left the church" because they no longer attend a regular traditional church meeting. There are really two lines of thought here. Those who attend regularly may consider them as backsliders or rebellious. Those leaving may consider themselves as breaking free from captivity.

George Barna, a Christian statistician in the U.S.A. and author of the book "Revolution" has spoken about the millions that are leaving the established church in that country. Initially he questioned the motive of those departing but now he considers it a move of God.

The fruit of rebellion and backsliding people is that there is no longer a need for God in their lives. However, there are those who remain dependent on the Lord, desire



to please Him and simply want to soar as eagles. For those, there are some additional issues to consider.

### ISOLATION

If a pet parrot does escape and gets outside the house, it faces immediate dangers. Because it has always been handled it has little idea of how to feed or protect itself and certainly is not totally proficient in flying.

This is a danger for some Christians who have released themselves from traditional fellowship. They have biblical theory, but in practical terms do not have an intimate relationship with the Lord and are not led by the Spirit in ministering to others. After some time they will find their spiritual energy or enthusiasm draining.

Some of these 'escapees' have been so hurt or disappointed by their former confinement or control that they are not willing to meet with other believers. They remain alone and as yet, because of their former experiences, are not willing to submit to others. These need to be encouraged and prayed for, because they still do need the help of others to be able to accomplish their real potential.

### INDEPENDENT SMALL GROUPS

There are others who do realize the need for the support of "one another" and who meet together in small groups in homes. However, because of their mistrust caused by their former experiences, they are wary of other parts of the Body and even other house churches. They remain independent but alive, feeding on God's word but, in many cases, they have not been equipped to hear from the Lord or to win the lost without the help of a "minister". Many realize something is still missing because they are unable to rise up to the potential they know is there.

Those who want to fulfil their greatest potential will understand the need to network with others so that the equippers, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, can bring them and any future baby believers to full maturity. Eph. 4:11-13. Otherwise, like those in home groups in traditional churches, they will find themselves seemingly going around in circles. They may be free from a system of control but not truly released to fill their God given destiny.

### LIBERTY OR LEGALISM.

The apostle Paul also wrote to the Galatians, whom he had considered had gone back into captivity. Anything less than a Spirit led life was considered by him to be a form of bondage. *But if you are led by the*

*Spirit you are not under law. Gal. 5:18. If you put it around the other way it says, But if you are not led by the Spirit you are under law.*

God wants to release every believer to be totally free to be led by Him. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has set us free, and do not be entangled with the yoke of bondage. Gal. 5:1*

### GREATER MOTIVATION

To help some who need to overcome their previous disappointments, hurts and suspicions, which in some cases has led to apathy, there needs to be a biblical motivation. *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18*

First of all, we must understand that the Lord purchased us and He is now our owner. His purpose for paying that high price of His death was to enable us to grow to be imitators of His Son. His prayer "that they may be one just as We are one" is ongoing. Anything less than fulfilling the destiny He planned for us would only bring our Father disappointment.

Secondly, we must realize that, through our relationship with Him, we can release His love and power and change the lives of others. We can turn our cities upside down and lead exciting lives.

Thirdly, surely none of us wants to stay bored or unfulfilled. We can stay within the confines of "the house", whether it is a large church, a church in the house or in our own home. Even though it may be relatively comfortable, it will never be totally satisfying. A desire to be filled with His continuous peace and joy can be a final motivating force.

### THE COST

Sometimes eagles grow disorderly feathers which impede their flying ability. Naturally they pluck them out. Believers who have grown feathers of erroneous thinking because of misguided teaching will find their momentum hampered. These entrenched mindsets will need to be discarded and new truth allowed to grow in their place. *...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Rom 12:2 NLT*

Secondly, flying, of course, does take some exertion. It is much easier to sit on a perch than take off. Before you can get the wind beneath your wings and soar you



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need to put in some time and effort. This does not mean you are to get into a flap and attend more meetings, but spend more of your week meeting with Him, just as Jesus did. *The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He awakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear like one who is being taught. The sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious, I have not drawn back. Isaiah. 50.4,5 NIV*

The Lord has told us that every believer is capable of hearing His personal voice and following His instructions. John 10:3,4. Like Him we can learn to do this. Morning by morning we can be a student being taught what to say to the weary.

Let's not draw back into a previous caged or confined mentality but, instead, learn how to have an "instructed tongue" which will release us into the full, potent eagle ministry He has destined for us.

*And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free...Therefore if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed. John 8:32,36*

If you would like to know more about church traditions that can keep you grounded, we suggest you read through our series "Killing Sacred Cows" and "Cutting Through the Bull" in our book section.



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# A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS



**H**i. Yesterday as I was praying, I sensed the Lord reminding me of Galatians 6:9. I felt so encouraged by it as I wrote it into my prayer journal. “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Only two weeks ago I had left the (gay) bar quite saddened by my interactions with everyone I had opportunity to talk to. I caught up with DE the Cambodian transsexual who I had prayed with a week or so before and who had been so full of distress and heartache. Now he was full of his own wisdom and pop psychology chasing after the same pleasures that had thrown him into such disarray previously, somehow believing that things would turn out differently. KR, the aboriginal artist who is one of the most self-obsessed and foolish people I have come across, then told me that he had noticed me watching him (I wasn't) and after some contemplation told me that he was convinced that I was being drawn to him because I somehow wanted to gain some of the wisdom that he had. AN was his usual angry self-interrupting any decent conversation I was having to demand that I listen to his rantings about how he wants to blow everybody up and teach them all a lesson. Finally, the one decent conversation I was having with IV about the challenge of the Gospel was completely interrupted and dominated by another loudly opinionated black American lady who decided to add her thoughts, which never ended, and that was that.

Thankfully I put my phone on silent at night as KR attempted ringing me at midnight on Thursday in order to seek my intervention to deal with his increasingly drunk partner BA who had brought home a homeless man he had met in the pub. The next day was dominated by phone calls from both men desiring my help in sorting out the other. I could go on about the madness that sometimes seems to surround me.

So, what is the positive side in all this?

JY has been coming regularly to Bible studies and even house church as he seeks out sane company. He is increasingly unhappy with his escort work and his inability to stay away from drugs and booze. His father pays his rent, he gets a pension, and he regularly makes hundreds of dollars from his escort services and yet

he will visit simply for a decent meal, he never has food in his house, and inevitably he will ask for \$2 to pay for his train fare home. No wonder this man who turned 48 last week is increasingly disillusioned at the trajectory of his life. We often talk about spiritual stuff and I try and challenge his bizarre new age notions, that bear little evidence of working in his life.

When I turned up at our Bible study group in the pub on Sunday, I had many misgivings wondering whether there would be anyone there. As it turned out, there were extras including the homeless man living with BA and KR and another young man, two years clean from drug addiction, who had been invited by one of our regulars. Andrew Brennan shared a thought provoking meditation on being human that he had prepared for his church which reflected on how Jesus Christ was the only one who could enable us to be truly and fully human. This provoked a lot of good and thoughtful discussion. BA then wanted us to read the passage from Matthew's Gospel describing the be-heading of John the Baptist. This also provoked more thoughtful discussion. Our homeless friend expressed sincere thanks for the opportunity to be there and both he and the other new fellow really participated well expressing recognition of their spiritual neediness. We finished with a good time of prayer and everybody left feeling as if something worthwhile was taking place. It reminded me again how important having our meeting in a pub is. The sorts of guys that not only turned up, but who also felt able to contribute, obviously are not the sort that tend to show up or feel comfortable in a church setting.

On Monday I received a phone call from WA's partner letting me know that WA had been in intensive care at RPH after a complete respiratory failure. He was now out of ICU and improving. WA's partner has met me but shown little interest in spiritual issues and has tended to be very dismissive of WA's own interest. I sensed God at work in the phone call

on a number of fronts. Firstly, I have been very concerned about WA's health over the last two to three months and have watched him losing what little weight he has and become increasingly haggard in his appearance. Secondly only days before I had found myself praying quite strongly for WA, and in particular praying against the spirit of death over his life. It seems that my prayers were both inspired by the Spirit and directly impacting on WA in hospital hovering on the edge of death itself. Finally, I had been trying to contact WA, and with no response even more concerned – so to hear from the partner was itself an answer to prayer. WA is one of the people I have formed a deep connection with and I want nothing more than to see him find the peace and joy that Jesus alone can bring, especially before his life is taken from him.

Finally, whilst it might seem an insignificant matter, I have found myself reconsidering a time of fasting I had felt called to do last year. At the time God had spoken to me in a dream about undertaking what I considered to be a very lengthy fast. After a second dream I began and somehow with God's help I managed to complete my fast having lost a lot of weight but none the worse. During the time of fasting I received no deep insights or unusual sense of God's presence. In some ways I felt a little disappointed as in previous fasts, there has usually been some evidence or blessing that can be directly attributed to the spiritual discipline. During the time of fasting, my wife had an unusual number of very strong words from God regarding her own work and calling amongst women in the sex industry. Now over a year later as my wife starts to bring together her vision for a place of healing and rehabilitation for both foreign and Aussie women wanting out of prostitution I am starting to understand the reason and impact of my time of fasting. Interestingly enough one of my prayers has been that God will enable me to give myself more fully for his Kingdom to come in and through the visions and calling of others, that somehow I might glory in his work through whoever. This has not

always been easy for me as I can get so focused in my own calling and its importance that I have failed to truly rejoice when others are blessed and especially those even more blessed than me. Thankfully I am now feeling deeply grateful that some small price I have paid is being outworked in God's providence through my wife and that even if my own ministry remains small and struggling as long as God is being glorified and obeyed it is enough.

And one more finally: As I was going through my emails today the young 15-year-old living with us began to talk with me, initially about the difficulty of living with his mum. I put aside my emails as he thanked me for being willing to let him live with us. He told me of how much he was amazed when he first came and stayed with us and saw a family that genuinely love each other, even when we have fights. He shared of how the anger that used to overwhelm him was dissipating. He even told me of how much he appreciated being expected to help out with household chores and even doing the garden with my wife yesterday made him feel like a real part of the family. In his own home he never was expected to contribute and he initially feared submitting to some form of discipline when he moved in. Finally, he asked if he might be able to help out with the rehab when it gets going. I was amazed at both the honesty and wisdom coming from this young man as he expressed his appreciation for what had been offered to him. As with his older brother, he is no longer drinking or smoking, and really appreciative that he doesn't have to anymore.

It is conversations like this that make our ministry deeply satisfying. With someone, like this young man, we have simply offered him a bed in my study and a place in the family. We have sought to treat him with respect and we expect the same discipline of him as of our own children. God is so good!



**ANDREW BEEL** and his wife, Sharon, come from Perth, WA, where they serve in mission to the more marginalised subculture life of the city.



ANDREW MASON

# REDISCOVERING HOSPITALITY

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**In the article, *Rediscovering the Power of Hospitality*, (OIKOS Magazine Spring 2021) I discussed how hospitality is an act that mirrors and releases Heaven into the earth. I**

believe these NT examples reinforce this idea. 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.

I believe biblical hospitality is a forgotten treasure, hidden behind walls of individualism and event-driven church culture. Within this neglected spiritual muscle, is untapped potential for kingdom life that is transformational and flourishing. Like Indian Jones in *The* 12 ■ OIKOS Australia

*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, I want to go on a journey through a series of articles to rediscover it and mine the gold from this ancient Christ-like disposition.

Merriam-Webster defines **hospitable** as “given to generous and cordial reception of guests; promising or suggesting generous and friendly welcome; offering a pleasant or sustaining environment.”

This definition creates a broad spectrum for practicing hospitality towards others including (but not limited to) for-profit industries. In the world of church events and weekend services, we often emphasize the practice of hospitable expressions in the way we greet attendees and welcome new guests. These are not only appropriate expressions of hospitality that God blesses, they are also foundational to building a culture of warmth, friendliness and trust in our corporate church gatherings.

However, as we dig into biblical hospitality there is a frame of reference for the practice that seems to create a unique, scriptural culture to the word. This scriptural culture to hospitality brings a distinction when compared to the technical, modern definition of the word.

**Let's begin with a few New Testament exhortations about Hospitality...**

**Hebrews 13:1-2, NLT:**

*Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!*

The unknown writer of Hebrews is speaking to all Christian believers when he writes this. He connects this expression of hospitality with the idea of offering it to strangers. Strangers can mean believers that one may not know or may not be acquainted with. The

context of the verse is the practical application of God's love in a believer's life (Heb 13:1).

He then suggests that Heaven likes to give us a pop quiz in the form of opportunities to be hospitable towards strangers. He states that there are people who thought they were being hospitable to strangers, but they were actually entertaining angels. Obviously, angelic beings don't need hospitality for their own survival. This demonstrates that hospitality isn't just for the guest, rather, it's also for the host. Heaven is provoking us to exercise hospitality muscles because it's actually for our own benefit too.

Theologians note this verse instructs us to show hospitality to strangers *"as did Abraham in Genesis 18."* What we know about Genesis 18:1-10 is that Abraham demonstrated hospitality to three strangers by welcoming them into his residence. What we don't know is the identity or origin of the three strangers, but they clearly have special knowledge of Abraham and Sarah. Eventually, the strangers predict a fantastic outcome for them with specific timing that is ultimately fulfilled. Many theologians connect this passage to Hebrews 13:2 because they believe Abraham was entertaining angels by using his home to show hospitality... *"The ancient Near eastern custom of hospitality is clear here, for it was an offense not to offer food and shelter to the stranger. The Hebrew text provokes mystery by alternating singular and plural references to the guests after introducing the section with God's appearance in the same language of Genesis 17:1... Messenger and angel is the same word in Hebrew (mal'ak)." So, Abraham inviting these mysterious men to stop by his residence to temporarily rest, get refreshed and eat, is a biblical illustration of Hebrews 13:2 in action.*

If we only offer hospitality to those we know, we will never be hospitable to a stranger. If we are never hospitable to a stranger, we will have little-to-no opportunity to unknowingly entertain an angel and pass Heaven's Hospitality Test.

**Let's look at another verse...**

**1 Peter 4:8-9, NLT:**

*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.*

In the New King James Version, it says it like this... *And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:8-9, NKJV*

When the Apostle Peter was writing this verse, his intended audience was also all Christians. That means this wasn't a special requirement for church leaders only. As we can begin to see, it was Christianity 101 at the time. The context is hospitality being presented as a practical expression of how we can "have fervent love for one another." Notice the connection with sharing your home and principle of hospitality between the translations.

**One more verse...**

**Romans 12:13, NLT:**

*When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

This particular verse is now coming from the Apostle Paul who, like the two previous examples, is speaking to all Christian believers. The context is presenting hospitality as a practical expression associated with the theme of loving and honoring each other (see Romans 12:9-10).

Theologian **Matthew Henry** comments that this command in Romans 12:13 was given to *"those who have houses of their own..."*

**John Piper** writes, *"Literally it says, "Pursue hospitality." And the verb implies continuous action.*

*So, the command in Romans 12:13 is that hospitality not just be a once a year thing at Thanksgiving or Christmas, but a constant attitude and practice. Our homes and apartments should stand constantly ready for strategic hospitality—a readiness to welcome people who don't ordinarily live there."*



**There are 3 Observations I have in looking at these New Testament passages...**

- 1. Hospitality was a point of emphasis by New Testament Church Leaders.** Apostles and Bible authors made it a priority to underscore the importance of being hospitable in relationship to the love of Christ flowing through a believer's life. Though it may not be a common sermon topic or preaching point in our modern era, it was often taught in the 1st century church.
- 2. Hospitality was a baseline standard for every Christian.** In the early days of the church this was simply Christianity 101. This wasn't a special call-to-action for elite Christian leaders, rather, it was the least one could do as a follower of Christ. Even widows had this expectation... *No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds 1 Timothy 5:10, NIV*
- 3. Biblical Hospitality was associated with a person's home.** I've often said that, *"One of the greatest lost assets of the American church is the believer's home."* Why? Throughout the biblical narrative, the home of a believing Hebrew and Christian is a reoccurring setting, as well as a marker of spiritual vitality in the life of the homeowner. We must refuse (not refuse) the idea of hospitality and the believer's home back together again.

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CRAIG MISCHIEWSKI

# Youth Perspectives on the Church

## From those that don't attend

**I**t was Sunday after church, and I dropped around to a share house where I met with six folk in their twenties to chew the fat and ask a few questions about religion and the church. None of them went to church—two had been involved with the church in their younger years, two had been exposed to the Christian message through Sunday school and family members, and two had no real experience of church.

So we gathered around beers and BBQ and began to chat. I asked them a series of questions about the role of religion in society, specifically if they thought religion had a part to play in society. The answers were thoughtful and insightful. One bloke said that religion provided a cohesive framework for morality, a kind of agreement that held society together; most agreed and thought that religion was important for a healthy society.

The point was raised then about the difference between healthy religion and unhealthy religion. The consensus was that religion that is powerful and controlling tended to be unhealthy and given to abuse, but religion that served

the needs of the people were good and made a positive contribution to society.

At this point, one of the women there offered up an insight: she said she had explored different beliefs, notably Buddhism, and the beliefs she formed played a part in her well-being, but it was when those beliefs became faith that they became most transformational. Through faith, she had a sense of connectivity to the divine, the entire cosmos, and all creation, in that she found a framework deal with life and all its complexities.

We then spoke more specifically about the church and the Christian message. Most agreed that the church has and does play a positive role in society through its community service and teaching the message of Jesus. There are exceptions to this, though, and they were around the abuses that the church had perpetuated sexual abuse, but one issue that was raised was church power and wealth. There was a collective agreement that the church should not be a business with the apparent aim of generating wealth and gaining power, and some said that they couldn't see how a wealthy church could be promoting the message of Jesus. It was

apparent at that point that they had an understanding of the message of Jesus, and it had nothing to do with power, wealth or privilege. So we started talking about the churches' message, they raised, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", "Forgive your enemies", among a few, so I got the impression that they did have some understanding of the message.

It was then that I asked if they were interested in hearing the message, and they said they were. So I explained simply that our message was that our past and present life don't have to define us. Through an intimate and experiential relationship with God, we can have a partnership with God and write our destiny. I explained who Jesus is and that Jesus has completely identified with our humanity, taken our pain, sadness, and failings, and dealt with them. Through this relationship with Jesus, we can know liberation. I explained that the church was a collective of folk who had had this experience and are committed to sharing this message with the world and working together so others could experience that liberty.

I then asked for feedback about the message, and there was an agreement that it was a good and essential message; then, one person made a crucial point: the message should be descriptive, not prescriptive. I asked what she meant by this. She said that part of her understanding of the church is that it was prescriptive. That is, it was focused on telling people how to live, who's right and who was wrong, who was in and who was out; she couldn't see how that had anything to do with the message.

She went on to say that the message was descriptive; it described a relationship, not a set of rules. Others then offered up some thoughts about this—they said that they thought that there should be freedom from rules so that people could explore that relationship, and the role of the church was to facilitate that process, not to direct it. Some were saying that the church has been way too rule-based and, in so doing, had isolated folk from the experience of faith.

I asked them how the church might best position itself to share the message. There was agreement that the church needs many doors into its life—services at 9 am Sunday as the primary point of engagement just don't cut it. They thought that the church should find creative points of engagement, and there was some talk about how this happens through programs like Red Frogs and other outreaches. I got the impression that they were talking about the church doing more than acts of service; it sounded like they were talking about ways to share the message of Jesus teaching. During the conversation, something was confirmed to me. These folk, those we call millennials, were not ambivalent to the church's message at all; they saw it as valuable and essential to social well-being. But, and an important "but", I felt they were clear in saying that they believed that other messages of hope and purpose were valuable as well, and this included other religious belief systems.

I hope that I haven't given the impression that for this group of adults, the Christian message held an exclusive right to truth and life because I don't believe this is the case; I think it would be accurate to say

that for most present the message of the church is great, but it is a great message among other great messages. There certainly was agreement that it had to coexist with science and current learning and understanding whatever the message was. They said that any belief system ignorant of the sciences was out of step with what they thought a healthy belief system should look like.

*These young adults were in no way opposed to religion or the church's message, and they could make a clear distinction between a message that described their relationship with God rather than a message that prescribed a set of rules to live by.*

At the end of the discussion, I thanked them for their honest, frank and insightful dialogue, and I promised them I would write the conversation up and give it to them to read. I jumped in my troop carrier, and as I sat there waiting for the air conditioning to cool the car, I had a distinct impression that I had just had a deep faith conversation. These young adults were in no way opposed to religion or the church's message, and they

could make a clear distinction between a message that described their relationship with God rather than a message that prescribed a set of rules to live by. They had shared with me that they knew the difference between mere belief and deep-seated faith and told me that they believed faith was important.

So why are we not seeing more of these young people in our churches? They answered that for me, they don't want to be locked into an institution with its rules and regulations. What they want is something much more organic and relational, porous at the sides, multi-faceted and has many creative points in which to engage. They want ecclesia, a gathering of folk on a journey of exploration where together they can discern what it means to have these intimate, experiential relationship with God and see whether the teaching of Jesus can play into in their lives and the world around them. They want a church that encourages them to pick up beliefs, explore them and see if it turns into faith. I think they want a church that doesn't freak out when they try new things and new understandings on their journey to faith.

For those of us formed in the institutional model, this is very scary; how will they know what to believe and how will they know how to act? Second Corinthians 3:17 says this: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Jesus' first sermon was about liberty, about freedom and John teaches that the Spirit will come to guide us to the truth. Given that these themes are throughout the Scriptures, why should we be worried about creating a space for people to explore belief and faith that is descriptive rather than prescriptive? Indeed the Spirit of God can work with open hearts and open minds to lead them to heavenly insight and understanding; it may not look like our insight and understanding, but if it produces the fruit of the Spirit, love, kindness and faithfulness [etc.] then it must be a good thing. History has shown us that when champions of the faith supported by a radical minority create these spaces, then the church's message grows exponentially. I also know from history that this model allows for a kind of chaos of belief and action, but that's the story of the church, finding meaning and purpose during the chaos and growing despite it.

As I reflect on this encounter, I remember the last question I asked, "Why were they willing to engage in this conversation with me?" One young woman said it was because she felt I had no agenda, I wasn't trying to convert them, it is evident to her that I was there to listen, learn and share, that there was respect and mutuality about the conversation. This gave me hope - I hope we can talk more and explore more together; I hope that our conversation will add a little to their exploration and journey, and I hope what I learned from them can be helpful for the rest of the church. So I would encourage you to go to those who don't identify with the church, be curious, and engage them respectfully, opening up mutual sharing together.



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Jeff Vanderstelt

# Bringing the Gospel to Our Lips

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**If you and others around you are going to grow in gospel fluency, you need consistent immersion in a gospel-speaking community.**

This needs to be much more than a weekly gathering of the church where the gospel is preached (though it should include this). It also should be more than a weekly Bible study, small-group gathering, or missional-community meeting (though I also recommend these). **Growth in gospel fluency requires regularly being with others who know and love Jesus, speak about Him often, and commit together to regularly remind one another of the gospel when they forget.**

From the very beginning of the story, the act of eating has played a very significant role in the worship and remembrance of who God is, what He has done, and who we are. God provided a great place for Adam and Eve to live, with all the food they needed. They regularly had the opportunity to remember God, His word, and His work, as well as who they were and what they were called to do. **For them, every meal was a time to remember God's abundant provision and express their worship of Him alone.**

When we eat, we see that our food looks good. Some meals look like a painting by Monet, others look like a Picasso, but they are all works of art. We can smell our food. Just think of all the wonderful aromas of the best meals you've had. Don't you love them?! And as you put

your food in your mouth, there's an explosion of sensations—sweet, sour, bitter, salty. It's like a party in your mouth! And you don't just taste your food, you feel it as well. There are so many textures to experience. And then you hear it as it crunches, or sloshes, or slurps its way into your body (some people are annoyed at this part of eating). Through all of this, you are nourished and replenished, strengthened and rebuilt. God wants us to eat and remember—enjoy and worship Him—and, at the same time, have our needs met by Him.

Remember what He said to Adam and Eve: *"Eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of that tree, you will surely die"* (see Gen. 2:16–17). Every meal was an opportunity to remember, trust, and obey. Every meal was meant to be an act of remembrance and worship. But they didn't remember, trust, and obey. They ate unto themselves. God designed them to trust in His ability to provide for them. Something outside of them was meant to take care of a deep need inside of them—and He would provide that something. **They were not to look outside of His provision.**

All of this was meant to point us toward God's ultimate provision in Jesus. Eventually, Jesus came to be God's ultimate provision for us. He is the Bread of life that meets our deepest needs and

satisfies our greatest longings. **Every meal is meant to cause us to remember and worship Jesus.**

What if you took time at every meal—even very simple ones—to give thanks to God, praying not just at the beginning, but throughout the meal? Our family is trying to use our evening mealtimes more intentionally. We are presently rehearsing the Ten Commandments and going through the gospel with each one of them. We also have given each night a theme to guide what we do together at the meal.

There is one Meal specifically given by Jesus, to remember and proclaim the gospel. But for now, consider our normal, everyday meals: what if your friends, your family, your small group, or your missional community made it a point to make every single meal a remembrance and worship experience? **What if you slowed down enough to remember Jesus at every meal?** What if you savored every moment as an opportunity to praise God?



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# LIVING DANGEROUSLY

TRAVIS KOLDER

*[Editor's Note: The story you are about to read is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent.]*

**F**or the last several years I've been focusing most of my time and attention in the inner city neighborhood I live in. I've also been pretty direct about working with people that don't darken the doors of a church building.

To be clear, there are plenty of hard-working, decent people where I live. However, there is also a fair number of people with lives that are a mess. The homeless, the drug-addict, the sex-addict, the attention-addict. The list goes on. These are the people Jesus would hang out with. But they are also not the safest people in the world to minister to.

And for the last several years, I've also been fairly forward about calling people to live their lives down here with us. Coming into the neighborhood, dropping the Gospel, and then leaving wasn't going to work. Come, be a part of the neighborhood. Learn how to interact with people who have no interest in your church. Come share the Gospel here. Come make disciples here. Come live here. Give your lives.

This week we had our first real brush with danger. We probably should have expected it but things like this, however, when it came it came unexpectedly. My wife and her friend Jamie have been meeting for the past couple of months as a two and three. They could meet in our kitchen or at the Panera across town. But Christy and Jamie have chosen to meet at the McDonald's because that's where people in our neighborhood gather. This night went much like any other. As they left, they were approached by a man walking towards the door they were exiting. This man walked straight up to Jamie, punched her right above her right eye knocking her down to the ground, and kept right on walking. As if this situation wasn't bad enough, Jamie was 9 months pregnant. The assaulter has not been found.

Now, for the most part, this situation has worked out as best as it could have.

Jamie, aside from some bruising is physically okay. I say she was nine months pregnant because yesterday she gave birth to a very healthy baby boy. But I would be lying if I didn't say that it didn't rattle all of us. It rattled Jamie. It rattled her husband Mark who had to face the helplessness of not being there to defend his wife. It rattled Christy, who had to witness this event. It rattled me. It rattled our church.

And for me, at least right now, the thing that is most clear about this situation is that I've been the one encouraging my house church to embark on this kind of dangerous mission. Christy and Jamie wouldn't have been at that McDonald's on a weeknight in a somewhat dangerous neighborhood if I hadn't been calling people to embody the Gospel here. So in some weird sense, I feel somewhat responsible for this happening. Could I have anticipated it this week? No. Could I have stopped it? No. But have I been asking people to do something dangerous? Yes.

And all of this has made one thing very clear: Jesus did not call people to do safe things. Of the twelve apostles that existed on the day of Pentecost, only one of them (John) didn't die from persecution. And even then Domitian the Roman Emperor tried to boil him oil. Countless others have been lost over the course of the church history as they've tried to bring the Gospel to people who didn't have it. In other places in the world, becoming a follower of Jesus is a death sentence. Its only in the West we are fairly inexperienced at loosing anything for our faith.

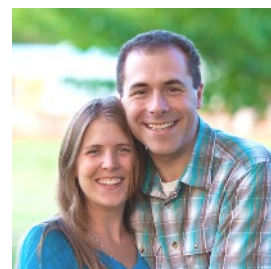
It's important to be very clear: What we do is not safe. I'm not calling people to do something that has no risk. In fact, what I'm calling people to do is something dangerous. I'm asking people to stick out their neck—to place everything they have on the line for Jesus because he placed everything He had on the line for us. I'm calling people to danger and this week the implications of that is really real.

I used to think calling people to do something dangerous was the cool thing to do. We get to do something others aren't willing to do. But this week has changed that for me. It's made it doing something dangerous real. It's put a tangible price on what could possibly happen to me and some of the people I care about the most. And while I don't like the price that it may cost, I'm willing to pay that cost to continue to follow Jesus.

Why you ask? Why would we do dangerous (but not unwise) things in order to follow Him? Well I'm glad you asked. We've become convinced that knowing Jesus is better than anything else this world has to offer—even the physical safety of ourselves and our loved ones. We love Jesus more than we love everyone around us, including ourselves. And it's this love...this love for Him born out of gratefulness for what He sacrificed for us...that compels us. We want to share everything we have with Him and be made to look like Him, even if that means some day dying like He died. We believe Jesus and His resurrection is real.

And that is why we embrace the lifestyle we do. And its why I invite others into it. Not because I don't see the dangers. I do. But I also see the great reward stored up for those who are unashamed to lay down their lives for Jesus.

*"If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it." -Mark 8:3*



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# The Humility of the Apprentice

Tobie van der Westhuizen

*But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. Isaiah 66:2:*

## What do you think of when you hear the word “disciple”?

If you are like most people the word will conjure up an ideal standard of Christian commitment. There are normal Christians, and then there are... disciples.

The conventional wisdom goes something like this: A disciple is one who has distinguished him or herself as wholly dedicated to the Lord. To become a disciple is the goal of Christianity, and discipleship is the means to get people there. We need to make disciples, not just converts. Once a person has attained to the status of a disciple he or she has fulfilled the intention of the great commission. A disciple is distinguished from a mere believer as the finished house is distinguished from its blueprint.

Does some of this sound familiar? Are you more or less in agreement with these statements? If so, you may have missed one of the central and most vital messages of the New Testament. By giving some special status to the term “disciple” you may very well have robbed yourself of the very thing that is intended by the word.

In the first place, the word has absolutely nothing to do with attaining to some spiritual level. Whilst it may have overtones of commitment and discipline (many people erroneously believe that the word disciple is a derivative of the word “discipline”), these have more to

do with the actual meaning we have assigned to the word than the word itself.

The word disciple is a classic example of the confusion that arises when a Biblical word is not translated but transliterated, that is, the transcription of a word in one language into corresponding letters of another language without regard to the original meaning.

Disciple is a transliteration of the Latin “discipulus” which carries the same meaning as the Greek New Testament’s “Mathetes”, namely a “learner”, “student,” “pupil,” “apprentice,” or “adherent”. Of course none of these meanings are retained in the English word disciple.

Let us consider the implication of this for a moment. Don’t you think there is something slightly weird about a commandment to “go and make learners of all nations”? This would imply that people in a pre-evangelised state are not learners, and that the intention behind the so-called “Great Commission” is to turn them into ones.

But wait, it gets weirder. This would also imply that to become a disciple is not to live up to some level of commitment, but to be reduced to the level of one who needs guidance. It is to let go of preconceived notions and to open oneself up for receiving new information. To become a disciple is not to reach the end of the road, but to be placed at the beginning of it. It is not a destination, but a point of departure. It is

not an accomplishment, but an emptying.

## The Call to Learn

None of this should be surprising. The New Testament overflows with verses speaking about the necessity of learning:

- Repentance (metanoia in Greek, from meta and nous) means a “changing of the mind”.
- The transformation that follows repentance takes place through a “renewing of the mind” (Rom.12: 2).
- Spiritual warfare, according to Paul, has to do with breaking down strongholds, and such strongholds are defined as “arguments and opinions raised against the knowledge of God”. Paul further defines spiritual warfare as “taking thoughts captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5).
- In the same passage mentioned above, Satan is depicted as the one who leads people’s thoughts astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (11:2) and who “blinds the minds of unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4).
- The New Testament depicts unbelievers as having been given up to a “debased mind” (Rom. 1:28), as walking “in the futility of their minds” and as being “darkened in their understanding” (Eph. 4:18).

This explains why Christianity is a lifelong process of learning. The subject matter, of course, is nothing but Christ himself, in whom “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”, providing the rich resource for reaching the “riches of full assurance and

understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery" (Col. 2:2-3). We are "taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). In fact, he IS the truth, John says (John 14:6), explaining his earlier statement that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The incarnation of the Word is the objective dynamic in this equation. The process of "learning" is the subjective dynamic. The one cannot exist without the other.

And so Jesus says "learn from me" (Matt. 11:29), and Paul says "you have not so learned Christ" (Eph. 4:20). Jesus Christ is our curriculum, and he has preserved the revelation of Himself in the Scriptures outside of us, his Spirit within us and his Body around us. And so we have no excuse not to "learn him".

If you were given the knowledge above and then the assignment to formulate a "great commission" for the church (without any preconceived ideas) you may very well have written it exactly as it appears in Matthew's gospel. Clearly the first step on the narrow road leading to life is to become a "learner". This is no accomplishment or badge of distinction, but rather a painful and humbling "letting go" of personal convictions, opinions, paradigms and the like. It is to embrace the poverty of spirit prescribed in the first line of the Sermon on the Mount. It is to aspire to the education of Christ, and to say with him "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent



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(Continued from page 2) and life! We desire for others to share this amazing connection.

So, I'm asking the Lord to increase my passion for him every day, and repenting that at times I've become somewhat distracted with other things.

And I've also been praying for him to give me a heart that breaks like the heart of Jesus for the lost. I am seeking to drop in spiritual hints like prayer into everyday conversations with people to see if there is any spiritual openness. I'm also seeking where possible to spend time with extended family and others who don't personally know Jesus. God is placing on me an urge to pray for these people - and for our state and nation for people to turn back to God. We need to see a growing army of prayer intercessors praying for people and for our nation to turn to him and to be connected with disciple makers. We need growing numbers of simple faith gatherings in every region and street across Australia.

Along with mission there are **faith communities** - something we all need to be an active part of. We need each other! We should not be doing life in isolation from each other.

We need both **the small and the big** - the weekly home church sized gatherings and also the larger gatherings of simple churches - perhaps 4-8 weekly or

quarterly. We need to be part of the everyday ministry, along with some less frequent but regular larger gatherings for encouragement and to be reminded that we are not alone. We also gain ideas, warmth, inspiration and balance from each other under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

When we gather together, there is a real sense of connection and a unity of purpose. The writer of Hebrews in the Bible urged his people not to give up meeting or gathering with other as some were, but to "spur one another on towards love and good deeds" and to "encourage each other all the more as we see the day approaching" (Heb 10:25).

At the recent Oikos Melbourne Regional Gathering I sensed both a unity of purpose and also a respect for each other's ministry and uniqueness. People I had never met before seemed like instant friends. Relationships were started or renewed. It was encouraging to meet new people representing home churches around Melbourne and further afield. Some had come from country Victoria and others from interstate, South Australia and QLD. Listening to each other's stories was a real encouragement. Seeing individuals and families living out their faith in their

me" (John 17:16). It is to stop being Martha and to become Mary. It is to sit at the feet of Jesus and receive from him.

If you have not first become a learner you cannot progress any further on the path of liberation from your own dearly held convictions that have put your thought life into bondage, that determine your emotions and ultimate dictate your actions.

context was encouraging and challenging.

While reaching out to others with the Gospel is vital, caring for each other is equally important - the Great Commission and the Great Commandment are both commands the Lord has given to us. Loving Relationships are so important and should be the hallmark of every home church. Virtually everyone has a keen desire to belong and to be cared for.

Excelling in listening to each other, meeting needs for support, or even do practical things to help and bless each other is part of what loving each other means. This will be more important as times get tougher and as the 'church' goes "underground".

Yes, the media driven cultural context and "soil" in Australia may be increasingly hostile to the things of God, but we can not only survive but even thrive. Some are not open to God - we need to be realistic about this, but we pray that God will lead us to those who do have open and soft hearts.

Despite the challenges I feel excited about the opportunities and possibilities. All things are possible with God - and in the end, according to the last book of the Bible, Christ, his Kingdom and his people are the winners!

*bless you, Phil Brown*  
OIKOS DIRECTOR

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## C. H. Spurgeon on house churches

Posted by: [J. Guy Muse](#) at [4:51](#)

[PM](#) [0 comments](#)

*An excerpt from a C. H. Spurgeon message entitled, "Building the Church: Additions to the Church" April 5, 1874.*

I want you to notice this, that they were breaking bread from house to house, and ate their food with gladness and singleness of heart. They did not think that religion was meant only for Sundays, and for what men now-a-days call the House of God. Their own houses were houses of God, and their own meals were so mixed and mingled with the Lord's Supper that to this day the most cautious student of the Bible cannot tell when they stopped eating their common meals, and when they began eating the Supper of the Lord. They elevated their meals into diets for worship: they so consecrated everything with prayer and praise that all around them was holiness to the Lord. I wish our houses were, in this way, dedicated to the Lord, so that we worshipped God all day long, and made our homes temples for the living God...

Does God need a house? He who made the heavens and the earth, does he dwell in temples made with hands? What crass ignorance this is! No house beneath the sky is more holy than the place where a Christian lives, and eats, and drinks, and sleeps, and praises the Lord in all that he does, and there is no worship more heavenly than that which is presented by holy families, devoted to the fear of the Lord.

To sacrifice home worship to public



worship is a most evil course of action. Morning and evening devotion in a little home is infinitely more pleasing in the sight of God than all the cathedral pomp which delights the carnal eye and ear. Every truly Christian household is a church, and as such it is competent for the discharge of any function of divine worship, whatever it may be. Are we not all priests? Why do we need to call in others to make devotion a performance? Let every man be a priest in his own house. Are you not all kings if you love the Lord? Then make your houses palaces of joy and temples of holiness. One reason why the early church had such a blessing was because her members had such homes. When we are like them we will have "added to the church those who were being saved."

--C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

## Martin Luther on houses churches

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 (1483-1566)



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