

Oikos AUSTRALIA

Making disciples who make disciples...



ORGANIC LEADERSHIP ...not as the Gentiles

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Sports Chaplaincy



DIRECTIONS

MISSIONAL. NOT JUST HOUSE CHURCH.

Since its inception with founder Bessie Pereira, Oikos has championed house church/ simple church. There is significant support from the New Testament, history and the current explosive growth of missional movements in many countries that support this expression of church.

I believe that God has been restoring to his people the understanding and expressions of faith communities that are simple, relational, participative and easily reproducible. However this is not the endpoint.

God's purpose is to save the world and usher in his kingdom, both now and when Christ returns. His heart is that not any should perish but all should come to eternal life through relationship with his Son Jesus Christ.

This is the missional vision that drives His activity in this world. For this reason the order of God's process is Kingdom & gospel, leading to disciple making, leading then to Church formation. It's to see the Gospel of the Kingdom demonstrated in tangible ways and proclaimed, leading to the making of disciples, which then leads to the formation of the missional faith communities or churches, not the reverse order.

One of the problems is that many Christians are so focused on church, that they make the first priority and goal to form a church (and usually in the expression that they like best) and then try to reach out and share the Gospel and do discipleship.

We need to align our hearts with the heartbeat of Jesus that throbs with passion, vision and focus on the harvest. Speaking to his disciples after his encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, he urged "Do not say 'four months and then the harvest'. I tell you open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so the sower and the reaper may be glad together" (John 4:35, 36).

Our focus must be first on the harvest and disciple making and then on how disciples gather in faith communities. Faith communities must have a kingdom focus that sees the harvest with an urgency that intentionally gets us out into the harvesting process.

With this vision and heart, we then need simple effective ways to make disciples and a focus on raising up and releasing leaders to replicate the process.

bless you, Phil Brown

OIKOS Australia

Multiplying missional communities by making disciples who make disciples

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MEETING TOGETHER

WHAT'S MISSING?



CHIP BROGDEN (schoolofchrist.org) does a reality check on the way we meet.

I once met regularly with some people in a house church that had adopted the philosophy of “no leaders.” Everyone just came together once a week and talked about whatever occurred to them. Supposedly this was what it meant to be “led by the Spirit.” After a few weeks of this I noticed that the “Spirit” always seemed to “lead” them to talk about sports, or wine, or the churches they came out of. Nothing of any spiritual consequence ever happened.

That all changed one evening when I was able to steer the conversation around towards something of spiritual significance. I was able to ask some questions and generate interest in a particular topic. Then, when I was asked, I opened my Bible, threw caution to the wind, ignored their

unwritten rules about having “no leadership,” and taught without interruption for forty-five minutes. They listened in rapt attention. When the meeting concluded, someone commented how good the meeting was – that they felt like we had actually fulfilled some purpose and learned something that would help us grow, as compared to previous meetings where nothing seemed to happen.

Did it occur to anyone that I had simply exercised spiritual leadership? Not by lording over, or pushing them somewhere they didn’t want to go, or using a title or gift in order to bend them to my will. I only shared my heart and gently guided the discussion towards a particular goal: that Christ would be increased, and the people would be brought one step closer to spiritual maturity.

Anyone could have done that. The point is that no one else did. And so I did. The act

of providing some leadership in this situation did not put me in charge. It did not make me their pastor. It did not give me any special privileges or say-so. It was a simple expression of the heart of God for His people to make some progress towards a worthy goal of spiritual maturity. And when it was presented to them in this manner, they naturally and eagerly responded to it without even realizing I had broken their rules.

I know that this group is not unusual, but is typical of many meetings and many groups I have experienced. Without a purpose – and without leadership to keep people aligned to that purpose – home fellowships are as spiritually unsatisfying as the institutional church services they aspire to break free from.

(Continued on page 11)

THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLESHIP

OBEYING CHRIST'S DISTURBING CALL



Disciple making involves a journey that starts with the wooing of our heart and minds by the Holy Spirit, leading a person to repentance, to the turning over of his/her life to Christ, and their growing experience as followers of Jesus.

We often focus on the “decision” and probably not enough on how to support that person in their new found walk with the Lord. Many churches or even missional communities lack a strategic, intentional, clear and comprehensive discipling process aimed at life transformation. The goal is to grow in the likeness of Christ and to participate in extending His Kingdom. God’s plan is “to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one Head, even Christ.” Eph 1:10

Discipleship isn’t about some form of perfection reserved for a class of elite Christians, but rather the everyday life practices that grow deep, mature and loving followers of Jesus as they travel the path of life. Practices like daily reading a chapter of God’s word, or looking for opportunities to share my faith each week, or making extra efforts to disciple my children or to treasure my wife are integral to discipleship. True discipleship is a shared journey with other believers, led the Holy Spirit and shaped by God’s word.

OBEYING

Discipleship must engage the followers of Jesus in loving God with all their heart, soul mind and strength and also with loving their neighbour as themselves (Matt 22:37, 38). They are also passionately involved in making disciples and in the mission of Jesus to see his Kingdom extended in the lives of people, communities and nations, bringing, peace, love, justice, compassion, healing and blessings. The kingdom agenda is their agenda! Jesus said “follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). He spoke repeatedly of the kingdom of God and what it looked like, and commanded his followers to go into all the world and make disciples (Matt 28:19). Christ’s method centered on disciple-making that involved each disciple in making other disciples, who make further disciples in all the relational streams with which they connect. As believers gather they form missional faith communities, which demonstrate the nature of his kingdom. A Disciple is always hungry to see people connect to Jesus, and is actively involved in supporting this process on a regular basis. Followers of Jesus need to be praying for and speaking to people every week, looking for opportunities to connect people to Jesus. When this occurs I find it builds my faith, as I share the joy, excitement and enthusiasm of new believers.

As soon as a person has crossed the line of faith they should be encouraged to immediately share their story with their family and friends. Teaching a new disciple how to share their story is a key part of being disciplined. Following this they need to be taught the basics of the Christian faith from the Bible and how to share this with their friends. Many people are using Discovery Bible study to help people

PHIL BROWN continues his exploration of Jesus’ command to “go - make disciples - teach them”.

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read the Bible with their friends and to ask a few questions to help apply what they read to their lives. It is obedience and life focused. -

GATHERING

Meeting regularly with mentors and other Christians for accountability, support, fellowship and worship is important. These Gatherings (church) include different sized groups from small to larger, which meet differing needs.

I found that meeting with 2 other godly men for accountability and encouragement was really helpful and challenged my Christian life. If I am going to be asked questions and held accountable it motivated me to make sure I was doing those things that result in character formation. The principles of the kingdom need to be put into practice in my life, and inviting friends to speak into our lives takes courage but results in real growth. "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses (Prov 27:6). Midsized gatherings serve needs for teaching and fellow-ship, and larger gatherings for inspiration and worship.

LISTENING

Further practices which I (and other Christians) have found helpful in my journey as a disciple of Jesus include, but are not limited, to the following. Probably the most important "tool" in being a disciple of Jesus is learning to listen to the Holy Spirits promptings and voice in prayer. I have noticed that the most spiritually "alive" followers of Jesus whom I have met regularly hear from God, which transforms their lives and ministry and touches others' lives. The Apostle Paul prayed that the eyes of believers' hearts "may be enlightened" (Eph 1:18). I yearn to hear God's voice more clearly and be a "just say the word" follower who obeys the directives of the Holy Spirit.

Daily reading scripture and asking for the Spirit's guidance and revelation is a core discipling practice. Personal revelation must always be subject to and fit within the frame of Scripture. It is important to saturate our minds and

lives with scripture. At the same time I seek to focus on how it relates to my life and how I can obey and put it into practice. I have observed that too much knowledge-based Bible study, without a corresponding obedience focus, can lead to pride, a judgmental and critical spirit, and a lack of balance in life. I have listened to plenty of talking and even preaching by people whose marriage and home life are a mess. "If a man does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim 3:5).

Bible study must emphasize not only knowledge but obedience. Frequently discipleship course are offered which usually are a series of Bible studies or lessons on particular topics from the Bible.

APPLYING

As a younger person I thought that being a follower of Jesus was all about "knowing the bible" and so I studied it relentlessly. As I have grown older I have come to see that it's not just knowledge that is important but rather how it is used in our lives. I find myself often saying to believers, "The Christian faith must work in every area of our lives. If it's not working in your marriage or at home then there is something missing".

Personally, I'm less impressed with ones understanding of theology or some passage of scripture, if it isn't working in one's life such as in marriage or parenting and raising one's kids, or impacting one's budget or personal finances. I seek out application based teaching that relates to key areas of life such as relationships, marriage, parenting, sexuality, finance, debt and budgeting, living a healthy life spiritually, emotionally and physically.

Many Christians use a journal to reflect and focus on their times with God. Recently I reviewed in my prayer journal the leadings and words God had given me over several months. It was such a rich and exciting journey to see God's hand in our family's life. It was also challenging as I repented for my tardiness in following God's repeated instruction in a couple of areas.

These Christian disciplines or practices have been used over the centuries by Christians to grow deeper in their relationship with God. Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of*

Discipline (1989) details these practices that Christians have used to grow deeper with God. These involve both individual spirituality and the disciplines of being part of a faith community with its communal aspects. Learning to love and submit to each other is part of the maturing journey of discipleship. Foster includes meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration. I have found these practices enrich my walk with God. Some are quite challenging and take practice. For example I find fasting difficult, but have noticed that answers and spiritual break-throughs have followed these times in my experience.

SERVING

Finally missional living is building into life activities and rhythms involving contact with people in serving and mission. For example, our family has recently been involved in prayer-walking a neighborhood, serving at the local community house and mission trips both within Australia and overseas. There are so many practical ways to express the Kingdom of God such as compassion, justice and healing. One leader and his team have faithfully served the people in a local caravan park on the Gold Coast and touched many lives. Others feed the homeless in the CBD of Perth. Locally one family, runs a shop that sells goods produced by women rescued from sex trafficking in Thailand and Cambodia, who now have an alternative source for their livelihood.

Jesus' training method involved taking his disciples into differing mission contexts - such as homes, with religious people, and in non-jewish settings, outdoor crowds, in prayer on the mountain, confronting demonic forces in spiritual warfare, healing and teaching people by word and by example. These are core discipling practices, but there are others. The most important focus is the mission of Jesus and his Kingdom. The Holy Spirit will guide and empower on this journey.

PHIL BROWN

References: Foster, R *Celebration of Discipline*, 1989.

Views from THE SUMMIT



To tell the truth I was not looking forward to a National Missional Summit in Melbourne in winter. Raised in Geelong I remembered the cold and doubted the stories of the sun coming out south of the Queensland border.

But shine it did! Both physically and metaphysically! And how I'm going to capture it in a few pages I don't know. But here goes.

THE STORIES

One of the highlights of the Summit for most attendees has to be the stories. Ordinary people caught up in extraordinary adventures by God, as a result of their simple - and sometimes reluctant - obedience to the promptings of the Spirit.

Like **Peter Hobbs**, a Salvation Army church planter on the Victorian Bellarine Peninsular, whose efforts to restore an old Holden, donated to the Salvos as a gift, led him to an unexpected man of peace - a local restorer - and the beginnings of a new faith community.

Or **Cam Butler** of

Sports Chaplaincy Australia, and his astonishment when the head of the NSW AFL asked if he could supply an urgent need for 300 chaplains for their network of clubs. (See page 8)



PHIL BROWN

Then there was **Scott Crowley** (Praxeis) coming back from mission work in western China to the western suburbs of Melbourne, where a Spirit-led connection to an 86 year old English teacher resulted in a fruitful ministry into the Moslem community.

And **Scott Hawkins** (Compassion) and his "Basketball Church", springing out of a call for help in coaching some Iranians, keen on forming a basketball team. Little did he know that they not only had never played the game and couldn't speak English but that his involvement with them would open up into an extra weekly coffee shop meeting with them where they could discuss all the other things going on in their lives.

Story after story, encouraging us to step out of our comfort zones and get our own story.

THE CHALLENGE

The theme of the Summit was, of course, "Mission" - how to move out of our comfort zones and engage in Jesus' commission to "go ... make disciples ... and teach them to obey ..."

And to help us explore the commission a team of speakers from a number of ministries outside of OIKOS Australia had gathered - who not only had a proven track record but who, out of a place of humility, were able communicators of their calling.

Starting with ...

PHIL BROWN (OIKOS AUSTRALIA) who set the stage with an overview of God's plan, reminding us that within the Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the very attributes to which He calls all of His creation - mutual relationship, honour, submission and community. Faith communities are in fact an expression of the Godhead on earth. The disciples were sent out to create faith communities that represented the life that existed in Heaven. It was God's intention that through those communities He might reveal Himself to all of creation.

Including all of Australia. And for that to happen Phil estimated - using the latest census statistics - that a minimum of 2000 new faith communities (based on 1 per 1000 Australians) needed to be created across the nation.

What will it take? Well it will take 1) a work of the Spirit, 2) much prayer, 3) some intentionality, 4) a simple discipling method, and 5) a lot of sacrifice.

Phil was followed by ...

DAVID LAWTON (PRAXEIS - meaning "ACTS"), who shared some of his journey via working in India and YWAM, and then as Missions Pastor for Gateway Baptist (Melbourne), then into a new model of church planting, based on making disciples.

According to David the western model of **PLANTING A CHURCH** followed by **GATHERING DISCIPLES**

followed by PREACHING THE GOSPEL is flawed, able to produce “successful” churches but usually made up of transferees rather than new Christians. A better model is the reverse - SHARE THE GOSPEL > MAKE DISCIPLES > GATHER INTO COMMUNITY, the model used by Jesus and the early church.

The “gospel” is simply Jesus, and sowing the gospel means simply living out “Jesus is Lord”. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus with the understanding that he will make them “fishers of men”, with reproduction built into the calling. And undergirding the process of finding and making disciples? - the kind of “white hot” prayer that permeates the Book of Acts.

TIM SCHEUER (MOVE) shared on his work among Sydney university students and introduced us to the concept of Obedience Based Discipleship (T4T), based on the idea that discipleship is not about absorbing information but about doing what the master does. In a lifetime, according to Tim, you cannot teach all there is to know about Jesus, but it only takes a couple of months to teach a pattern or habit of obedience.

How do you train for obedience?

1. Every time you gather you cast the vision, spurring people toward the harvest.
2. Practise “one-anothering”. Ask “How are you going following Jesus? Fishing for people?”
3. Learn how to do a Discovery Bible Study, providing the disciple with challenges and goals rather than academic knowledge.
4. Practise retelling Bible stories and a brief testimony.
5. Set goals for the coming week.
6. Pray.

And finally **BILL HODGSON (CAMPUS CRUSADE FOR CHRIST)**, who suggested that the establishment of a “missional mindset” sets a person up for a life of mission. He spoke of the mission of Jesus involving

1. INCARNATION. The Word became FLESH and dwelt AMONG us. Jesus did not establish himself in a temple for people to come to Him. Rather as God he came ... and kept on coming. To the temple, to Nazareth, to the demoniac, to India, to the western suburbs of Melbourne and the gay bars of Perth. Let us not draw a circle, Bill

encouraged us, defining who is in and who is out. That’s the job of Jesus.

2. RESTORATION. All of humanity longs for restoration. Jesus comes with a plum line, not to judge and tear down but to build up.

3. MULTIPLICATION. Bill compared the multiplication rate of elephants and mice, reminding us that over the period that it takes to bring about an elephant, eight times its weight in mice can be produced. Mega churches have their place but the task of fulfilling Jesus’ mission will come about through disciples who make disciples who make disciples

BUT THERE’S MORE ...

Which brings me back to the stories. Back to the gay bars in Perth where **Andrew Beel** meets with his ID (imago dei - image of God) groups (see OIKOS magazine Spring 2013 edition www.oikos.org.au).

And **Carl Musch** and his work with the Indigenous faith communities across Northern Territory and North Queensland (see same edition).

Then there was **Peter Fowler’s** men’s groups, also in Perth, gatherings of Christians and not-yet-Christians exploring God’s plan for men (story next edition)

And north of Perth **Geoff Westlake** and the Cheers Neighbours Network, engaging with the struggling community of Banksia Grove to make it a better place to live, the kind of community that Jesus would want. (Story on page 10)

And what about **the kids and the youth?** How wonderful was it to have them share their own videoed God stories, a glimpse into the next generation and all the latent possibilities yet to emerge from among them.

And finally the story of **Zac**, the young, radically transformed disciple of Jesus who was taken by a shark near Port Macquarie last year, leaving a testimony that has had such a profound effect on so many. (Youth for Christ Australia - Youtube)

And yes, there were more ... but unfortunately their stories will have to wait till the next magazine.



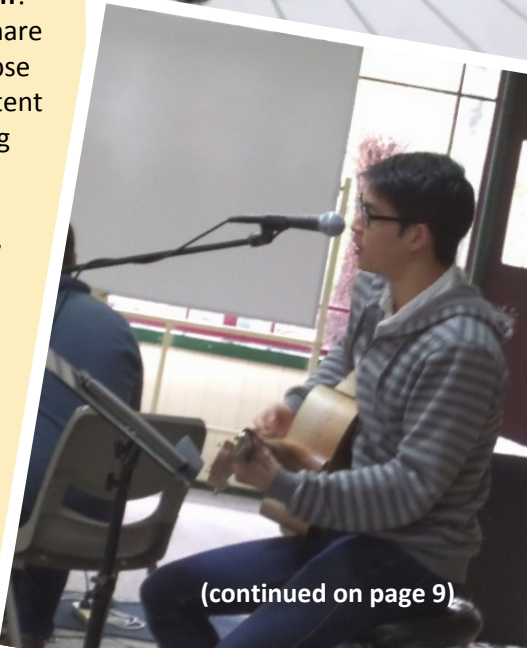
DAVID LAWTON



BILL HODGSON



TIM SCHEUER



(continued on page 9)

The Emerging Australian Reformation



Cameron Butler

*One of the presenters at The National Missional Summit was **Cameron Butler**, representing Sports Chaplaincy Australia. The following is an updated version of a challenging and fascinating report that he gave to a Parliamentary Breakfast in Canberra in 2010*

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you could see what I see. I hope in the next few moments you may get a glimpse. Today, Australia stands on the verge of the greatest and most sustainable reformation of Christian influence in our nation. Not through theology, or modernisation, nor through technology, or savvy marketing, but rather, through SPORT. A reformation not based on the "priesthood of all believers," although valid, but rather on an emerging model, the "*pastorhood* of all believers." This reformation calls God's people to pastor their community, not just their churches. As with the reformation, this small but significant paradigm shift of seeing the community (not just the church) as the 'flock', 'gone astray', will impact our Australian way of life for many generations. Today, there are no less than 4000 current opportunities to 'pastor' sports

clubs in sports like Aussie Rules, Rugby League, Motor Sports, and other sports as diverse as Surf Lifesaving and Australia's most deadly sport, the sport of... 'Lawn Bowls'.

Just 4 years ago I was invited to a meeting at the MCG by the CEO of Australia's largest sporting league (the VCFL) and was invited to appoint chaplains to their 880 clubs throughout country Victoria. Most of these clubs have joint partnerships with local netball clubs also needing chaplains. Imagine the impact of the Gospel!

At the social heart of every country town is the local footy club. Life is done, business takes place, values are set and partners are made. And, today, in 2014 the sports industry is saying to God's people... "We need chaplains." Or, to you and me, pastors, pastoral carers who can bring the reality of the Kingdom, God's grace and mercy, to over 75% of Australians. Imagine the impact of the Gospel with 1800 men and women serving Christ in clubs throughout country Victoria.

This story can be replicated in NSW, with AFLNSW requesting chaplains in all 300 clubs, SA and WA. And not just in Aussie Rules but in many other sports! The world surfing body (the ASP), after a years trial of chaplaincy, agreed that they needed over 250 chaplains for their international regions. The Pony Clubs of NSW 40 regional managers unanimously agreed that they would encourage chaplains to their 280 clubs. And the list goes on. At this point, may I suggest that Australians want

to be 'pastored'. Not that they would describe it that way. But they are asking for quality people who are skilled to help them navigate through life's dark valleys.

Sport captures the Aussie imagination. Some have said our very soul as a young nation has been defined, not by the Battlefields of War but rather by the exploits at Lords. DH Lawrence said, 'Australians play sport like their lives depend on it.' Sport is intrinsic to 'what we do' (as Australians), 'who we are' (as Australians), and, today, 'how' we do life (as Australians). And because of the emergence of this pressure to get life right in sports and sporting communities, and the associated social responsibilities, clubs aren't coping. They are looking for help. They are looking for leadership.

Eight years ago I was invited to speak at the National Sports and Mental Health Conference with other significant guests including Dawn Fraser and Hawthorn Football Club's beloved President Mr Jeff Kennett. A State Sports Administrator Ken Gannon stood and declared, "We are in crisis in our sport at the moment. Coaches are leaving by the bus load." He explained, "10 years ago coaches were expected to simply coach the technical side of football. But, today, coaches (the mums & dads) are not only expected to coach but be counsellors for their kids. Many of whom are dumping life's ills on them."

May I suggest at this point that the closest thing to a pastor for most young Australians is their local club coach. The closest thing to a church, or refuge from life's ills, for most Australians, is not the church, but rather their local sports club.



Sport is influential at so many levels. In 2004 the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that 6.4 million Australians, or near on 30% of all Australians are involved in weekly organised sports, with a caveat, stating, "Most twice weekly!" In contrast, in recent Australian Church Life Surveys rate regular church attendance (once monthly) at 7-8%. A stark contrast!

So where do Australian do life? Most likely in a sports club; at the gym or on the track. In fact, if every sports club in Australia had a chaplain God' grace and mercy would reach around 75% of all Australians. Strategically this is significant. No other demographic has the power to reach people like sport. So if we, as God's people are to genuinely influence our generation, here in Australia, we must be prepared to change. Change our approach. Change our perspective. And respond to the need. As one State Sports Administrator (who is not a Christian) said recently, "It makes real sense that Christianity can be seen around our clubs. After all that's what it's all about isn't it?" further stating, "Maybe they can even run a meeting at the club."

When I was a lad growing up in church I heard the message that God wasn't interested in sport. Now, as a man, I have discovered that actually the opposite is true. God is vitally interested in sport. Because where people are God is interested.

My challenge to us here today is to pray and act.

- Pray for workers in the harvest field - become a pastor/shepherd to our community.
- For those with gifts in business, government and leadership to strategically empower this God-given opportunity
- For church leadership to release their pastoral staff and lay leaders as models to serve in their community at least 1 day a week

My prayer, as God's people, His church, is that we may truly become influential. Influencing those who are influential, and influencing the uninfluenced: the 93% of Australians who have never experienced Christ's remarkable love for their lives — and yet

are desperate for someone to help them when life goes pear-shaped.

So, the Pastorhood of all Believers'? Are we all called to be shepherds in our community? I deeply think so. I hope that we might respond like Peter in John 21 when Christ challenged him to "Follow my example!" What was that example? "Feed my sheep." "Tend my lambs." "Care for my flock." Who was the flock? Christ showed us it was his community (Mark 6:30). As Aussies we have a divine opportunity to respond to the need in our nation and dream in our hearts by being bold, courageous and innovative.

May I conclude with a quote from Emerson, "Do not go where the path may lead, instead go where there is no path... and leave a trail." Thank you.



CAMERON BUTLER is the Chaplain of the Melbourne Football Club (AFL) and National Director of Sports Chaplaincy Australia, the leading recognised body providing chaplains to high-performance, development and local sports throughout Australia. He serves as the Australian representative on the International Sports Coalition Serving the People of Sport Council.

(VIEWS FROM THE SUMMIT cont. from p7)

Let me just finish with the questions that David Lawton left us with.

Questions for ourselves and for the faith communities that we returned to.

- What is God's vision for us?
- What has He raised us up for?
- What is He trying to birth in our town?
- What is our current reality?
- What blind spots do we need to deal with?
- And what courageous steps do we need to take?

THANK YOU LORD for a great gathering. Thank you for the sunshine and the new friendships formed. Thank you for stirring our hearts with a great vision. Thank you for Jesus, through whom we can do all things. And for your Spirit who empowers us for the task.

To go and make disciples.



Luke and Amanda Reurich



Destiny and Ailsa Matesic



The Next Generation

Snapshots of Community

CHEERS NEIGHBOURS NETWORK - PERTH

As mentioned, one of the stories from the Missional Summit was that of Geoff Westlake (SU) and the Cheers Neighbours Network in the Perth northern suburb of Banksia Grove.

According to Geoff, "Cheers came about as local friends and neighbours came together and dreamed about the kind of community they wanted to live in. Someone said, "Let's encourage more of the good things that are already happening around here." Someone else said, "Yeah, we can Cheer for them." And we grabbed our drinks and said, "Cheers!" That's where Cheers started."

We began working toward the dream that everyone seems to share: a community that is friendly, safe, caring, and empowered. We simply asked, "What can you do to help make that dream come true?" We cheer for anything good that's already happening in the neighborhood, pray about the bad stuff, and act to help out where we can.

The Neighbours' Network actually involves lots of people who wouldn't call themselves Christians – but they like Cheers' ethos, action, and spirit. It's a network of friends in the neighbourhood. Cheers has no institution, no hierarchy, no staff, no buildings. It's not trying to 'get people in' to something separate, but rather to 'get people out' towards each other, to encourage one another. However, according to Geoff, this may be a legitimate substitute for church. Technically, Cheers is an 'ecclesia' – an old Greek socio-political term for when locals gathered to consider how to make their whole community a better place.

The community development ethos of Cheers does however come from a Christian basis, which is inclusive: anyone can be involved. We're up front about Cheers' basis, but every community group has some basis or another. As an

inspiration and a foundation for holistic community development, it's hard to beat the life of Jesus – his way with people, his Spirit, his concerns, his notion of

community life... is pretty much everyone's dream. Plus, if God's real then we need to pay attention to that! Besides, why not a Christian basis: you don't have to be a "Christian" to want to emulate Christ.

Currently, at the collaboration level, Cheers is a network of over 150 people across Banksia Grove, many of whom don't know each other. At another level, over 70 people would identify themselves as part of Cheers in some way. At Cheers 24 (Family Time) there'd be over 20 regulars. At Cheers 13 (prayer & action-plans) just a handful. Special interest and steering meetings are attended by whoever is most affected by the decisions.

Cheers mainly works on making good friends. The best things are achieved through trust, not programs. Most importantly, trust and friendship happens over time and tables. But other more tangible actions include: Roundtable, BGRA (amenities, groups, safety, economy, education, environment), family camps, sponsorships, playgroups, clean-ups, emergency help, Carols, parenting courses, www.banksiagrove.com, BG e-list, work for justice beyond BG (e.g. West Timor, Philippines, Uganda.)

Find more at Geoff's blog site geoffwestlake.com/church/suno/cheers/ Or join their email list at cheers@banksiagrove.com

THE 'CARAVAN OF COURAGE' - QUEENSLAND

The "Caravan of Courage", headed up by Ron and Paula Turner (Praxeis Australia), is a mission committed to seeing a movement of God throughout the outer regions of Queensland. Earlier this year Ron and Paula partnered with Jesus to prayer walk the towns of Central Queensland, sharing the gospel and finding people of peace. Joined by Steve and Mel Behrens from Townsville, their first trip took them from their home base in Blackwater, CQ, through 18 towns in Central Queensland,

covering over 3000 kms. June 1 saw them heading off on their second trip, starting at Goondiwindi, a border town on the banks of the McIntyre River on the Qld/NSW border, about 400 km south west of Brisbane.



RON AND PAULA TURNER

Ron reports: "The purpose of these tours is twofold; to prepare soil through prayer and to plant seeds of truth that one day will bear fruit. So our primary focus is to connect with people in the harvest but not to the exclusion of people who are already followers of Christ. From Goondiwindi we headed off to St George, population 1200, 200 km west of Goondiwindi. Then to visit a group that meets in Surat, which is 100 km north of St George, and now (June 11) we are in Cunnamulla. Cunnamulla has a population of just under a 1000 people. It also has a large indigenous population settled here. During this time we will connect with Paul and Nicky Webster and spend time encouraging them and the small group they have, as well as doing practical stuff to help out in the town where needed. We have been able to pray for quite a few people and share our God story with them. We have met with various groups in all these towns, both in the harvest and people who are thinking missionally. We have met with people in homes, shops and on properties, sharing and teaching people to be disciples who multiply in their network of relationships. We are presently spending a couple of weeks in Cunnamulla and seeing God open up doors of opportunities. From Cunnamulla we will travel to Thargomindah, population 200, and Quilpie, population 500. Many of these towns are experiencing drought conditions and we hope to help out practically were we can if doors open up. From Quilpie we head east 200 km to Charleville, population 3000. This town is a regional centre for the South West of Queensland. We plan to spend a few days in this town with a desire to find a person and train someone who would eventually be the key leader (Continued on page 13)



CHEERS NEIGHBOURS NETWORK

MEETING TOGETHER

What's missing? (From page 3)

FELLOWSHIP, OR COMPANIONSHIP?

"Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?" (Amos 3:3, NLT)

To walk together, we have to agree on what the goal is. Before we discuss how to meet, where to meet, who to meet with, or what to do when meeting, we must answer the question of why meet at all? What is the purpose? What is the reason? For many, the reason is fellowship. This sounds like a spiritual motivation but it is largely self-seeking. What we really want, need, and crave is companionship with others. We call it fellowship because it sounds spiritual and not as self-centered. But there is a world of difference between fellowship and companionship.

The distinction is important, because if companionship is the goal, it is very unlikely that spiritual growth will occur. Companionship is often mistaken for fellowship, and fellowship is often mistaken for spirituality. That is a very deceptive notion. If mere companionship was the goal, and spiritual growth was the end result of meeting together, then let us meet together as often as we can: let us stack the meetings one right after the other; and let us look to those who meet the most as being the most spiritually mature!

But in actual practice, we know that there is no correlation at all between the number of meetings attended and the spiritual maturity of the attendees. It seems instead that the spiritually immature are the ones most in need of a meeting, and the quickest to fall away when the meetings are not available. People will gather, and people will meet, and people will seek out the company of other people. This is the human condition; it is not a spiritual requirement, and the meeting itself will not lead to anything of spiritual value, unless we decide and agree with one another, from the very beginning, as to why we gather.

Why do we meet? What is the purpose? What is the goal? Without establishing this from the beginning, the meeting meanders. Nothing of any spiritual consequence takes place, and the meeting itself is usually dominated by whoever is the loudest, or the most talkative, or the most needy.

So why should we gather? The real purpose for meeting together should be to grow spiritually; and as we grow spiritually together, true spiritual fellowship with one another is the inevitable outcome.

ONLY CARNAL CHRISTIANS REJECT SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us" (3 John 9).

How interesting that those who reject all forms of leadership will also say that it is best to gather with no agenda, with no purpose, with no plan, with no goal, apart from a general notion of "fellowship," trusting that the Spirit will simply lead and direct the meeting. Again, this sounds so noble and spiritual! But in the real world, these heady ideas simply fall apart. Why? Because it assumes that everyone who gathers is "in the Spirit." It assumes that everyone attending the meeting is able to be led by the Spirit. Actually, most people who attend a meeting are carnal. They are not in the Spirit when they gather, they are in the flesh. They are not spiritually mature, they are spiritually immature. That is not a statement of condemnation, it is just reality. But that reality must be recognized and acknowledged before anyone can grow beyond it. That is one reason why both the carnal and the spiritual must meet together – to grow, to learn, to be encouraged, to receive something that will help them in their journey.

But the carnal must cooperate with the spiritual. Without spiritually mature people to assist and facilitate spiritual growth, the carnal simply remain carnal. The meeting is an exercise in futility – the blind leading the blind. Or refusing to be led at all, believing that "Jesus is our leader," and not understanding that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and those who are in the flesh cannot be led by the Spirit.

The carnal shun leadership, thinking this will somehow make them more spiritual than more organized believers. Or, thinking that anything smacking of leadership must mean an institutional hierarchy. While rightly rejecting the hierarchy, they go to the opposite extreme of having "no leaders" – as if leadership itself is evil. This reflects a lack of experience with what real spiritual leadership is all about. It is understandable, given all the poor examples of leadership and all the abuses that have come from carnal religious leaders. But the solution is not to disavow the principle of leadership, but rather, to understand what true spiritual leadership is.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? HOW SHOULD IT FUNCTION?

What if we could have all the benefits of spiritual leadership without any of the negatives we have come to associate with leadership? What if we could welcome those gifted by God to guide, facilitate, serve, help keep things on track and on target, and assist when problems arise – without being self-serving, arrogant, or unapproachable?

Let us pray for our eyes to be opened to those servant-leaders who are sent to us for our spiritual edification. Every meeting has an agenda, stated or not. Every group has leaders, recognized or not. Pretending there is no agenda and no leader is naïve. Far better to acknowledge the reality, and then come to a mutual understanding and

agreement as to what the agenda is going to be, and who is responsible to facilitate things and keep them on track. It is not unspiritual to decide in advance, "This is the purpose for which we are gathered; this is the goal we are working towards; this is the result we seek." Let us be in agreement about this before we come together. Then, when we come together, there is no question or difficulty about the purpose. It automatically puts

everyone on the same page. It helps to keep things from drifting, or meandering, or disintegrating into meaninglessness. And it automatically filters out the ones who have ulterior motives or different goals.

Jesus might have said "make fellowships," or "build churches," or "conduct meetings." But He said "make disciples," which is more labor-intensive than anything else He could have said. Spiritually mature disciples of Jesus will not be made without setting spiritual maturity as a goal, and then working towards the fulfillment of that goal. If we have this goal in mind when we meet, and if we welcome the assistance of true spiritual leaders, the meeting can provide something of tremendous value to the Kingdom of God and to each member of the Ekklesia.

Why do we meet? What is the purpose? What is the goal? Without establishing this from the beginning, the meeting meanders. Nothing of any spiritual consequence takes place, and the meeting itself is usually dominated by whoever is the loudest, or the most talkative, or the most needy.



CHIP BROGDEN

Author, teacher, and former pastor, Chip and his wife Karla came out of traditional church in 1999 to serve those who are following Jesus outside of Organized Religion.

Revolution

The Church as Subversive Community

Mike Bishop

*Mary, Mary, quite contrary
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty maids all in a row.*

For the past generation, one of the hottest topics among pastors and church leaders has been church growth. **"Pastor, Pastor, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?"** Theories abound and models for 'doing church' come and go like teenage fashion fads. But in the middle of all this discussion and strategy a few very practical questions remain: "How does God intend his church to grow? What are the means by which the gospel of Jesus is spread? What is the job of the average Christian? How should pastors lead in this endeavor?"

One of Church Growth's primary tools is to coax people into a special place once a week where God is the focus of the entire event (traditionally, a service on Sunday morning). The idea is that if people will think about God for a few hours on Sunday, maybe they'll also

consider him the other 166 hours during the week. All manner of resources are expended to make those few precious hours as efficient and relevant as possible. Countless programs are concocted to try and connect people with God at other times. The amount of blood, sweat, prayer, and tears expended in this paradigm is extraordinary. As a reward for all that effort, Church Growth has been extremely successful. But ... let's assume that you've tried Church Growth and found it wanting. Or, you've simply run out of silver bells and cockle shells and pretty maids all in a row. This next paradigm I would like to describe is much less popular and remains largely untried in North America (and Australia). Again, for lack of a better name, I will call it the 'Subversive Community'.

'Subversive' is an odd word to associate with Christian ministry, but that is only because of its uses in recent world history. Webster's defines 'subvert', "to overturn or overthrow from the foundation." Its origin is Latin, "subvertere, literally, to turn from beneath."

Eugene Peterson (The Message Bible) has a great description of this paradigm's assumptions: "Three things are implicit in subversion. One, the status quo is wrong and must be overthrown if the world is going to be livable. It is so deeply wrong that repair work is futile. The world is, in the word insurance agents use to designate our wrecked cars, totaled. Two, there is another world aborning that is livable. Its reality is no chimera (illusion). It is in existence, though not visible. Its character is known. The subversive does not operate out of a utopian dream but out of a conviction of the nature of the real world. Three, the usual means by which one kingdom is thrown out and another put in its place - military force or democratic elections - are not available. If we have neither a preponderance of power nor a majority of votes, we begin searching for other ways to effect change. We discover the methods of subversion. We find and welcome allies."

The Subversive Community's mission is not to bring the kingdom of God from without; it is to release the kingdom of God from within. Subversives do not "reach outside people and encourage them to come in." Subversives live and do their work 'undercover' where the world lives and breathes. Their goal is not escapism (trying to build a Christian utopia), but to show people how they can lay hold of life as God intended, in his Kingdom.

The Subversive Community understands that the world and its ways are false. It is constantly interacting with people at work, in the grocery store, or at home who are all in the prison of this world's system. These prisoners are quite happy in their assumed reality (especially the ones who have amassed quite a kingdom of wealth). But some secretly ask the question, "Is this really all there is to life?" The Subversive Community's answer is not merely to inform them about the Kingdom, but to invite them to become participants in a whole new reality. The training program will be unique and cannot be rushed or broken down into a few 'principles' that are easy to swallow. Remember, the kingdom of God deals with every aspect of our lives. This training might just take a lifetime.

The chief aim of the Subversive Community is to train other subversives, which is really what the Great Commission was all about. So what are our tools? Where do we begin in this training? How do we train others? Again I'll reference Peterson from "The Contemplative Pastor": "Prayer and parable are the stock-in-trade tools of the subversive pastor. The quiet (or noisy) closet life of prayer enters into partnership with the Spirit that strives still with every human heart, a wrestling match in holiness. And parables are the consciousness-altering words that slip past falsifying platitude and invade the human spirit with Christ-truth."



Andrew Jones used to have on his website this tag line: "One who tells stories and throws parties." Combine that statement with Peterson's and you get the closest thing to a strategy for church planting available. I call it the "Three-Ps of Church Planting" --- Prayer, Parables, and Parties.

PRAYER

In the absence of building programs, 45-minute sermons three times a week, and an "outreach ministry," there is prayer. The "wrestling match" to which Peterson refers is not the hand-wringing sessions most prayer meetings resemble. "Oh God, our culture is *so bad*. Why are people not coming to our church service anymore? Please bless our next outreach program so we can advance your kingdom." Instead of asking God to bless our programs, we should be trying to bless His. This takes a willingness to do two things: ask and wait. Our community has grown through having times of prayer that include more *silence* than prayer. We are trying to learn corporately the ancient (and anti-Western) discipline of solitude and silence. As we've grown in our ability to hear God's voice, we've found a few simple prayers that have been helpful: "God, what have you created us to be in our community?" "How can we represent your Kingdom in our jobs, families, circles of friends, and neighborhoods?" "Make us aware of your rule and reign today in every situation." "Lead us to men and women of peace that will provide contact with the world in places where your Spirit is working." (See Luke 10)

PARABLES

The Subversive Community is a living story. Jesus understood the deeply subversive nature of stories. He used parables like ticking time bombs of truth implanted in his hearer's minds. They would sit there unprotected, challenging assumptions and coaxing the soul to establish a new foundation for life. N.T. Wright explains, "When Jesus announced the kingdom, the stories he told functioned like dramatic plays in search of actors. His hearers were invited to audition for parts in the kingdom. They had been eager for

God's drama to be staged and were waiting to find out what they would have to do when he did so. Now they were to discover. They were to become kingdom-people themselves."

The Subversive Community can use parable in many different ways. Our community has utilized the Web to tell our story on a global and local stage. The recent web-logging craze (www.blogger.com) has enabled us to keep our story documented real-time and from the point of view of each participant. Music, art, and poetry allow the community to present the story in fresh, creative ways. Even something benign like how you design your house can communicate truth about the Kingdom. Parable is in its nature a creative act so it is most effective when you decide to be original and invite the Holy Spirit to tell God's story through your life. Don't just use someone else's stories; come up with your own!

PARTIES

Jesus often used the party or feast to represent the kingdom of God. "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God." (Luke 13:29) His first miracle was performed at a wedding reception, he feasted with his brand new followers Levi and Zacchaeus, and his most famous parable ended with a huge party for a prodigal son. Often, Christians think true spirituality looks more like fasting than it does feasting. But Jesus responds, "Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom?" (Luke 5:34) The Subversive Community knows how to party.

Our community has organized a few parties, which we call Kingdom Feasts. We invite friends, family, co-workers, people from other churches, and anyone else who wants to come. The last one was held at the beach where we cooked a ton of burgers and played volleyball in perfect South Florida weather. Another time we fried up a bunch of shrimp and worshipped into the night. But each time, our focus as participants is to demonstrate to ourselves and our guests that the kingdom of God is here.

The Subversive Community would never be caught trying to coax the world into a church building. It believes the church (which is you and me) exists primarily out in the world just being itself. But we are not passive observers of a world going to hell. We are here to

overthrow the world's assumptions about life and our hope for the future. Peterson now completes our job description:

"This is our primary work in the real world. But we need continual convincing. The people whom we are praying and among whom we are telling parables are seduced into supposing that their money and ambition are making the world turn on its axis. There are so many of them and so few of us, making it difficult to maintain our convictions. It is easy to be seduced along with them.

Words are the real work of the world - prayer words with God, parable words with men and women. The behind-the-scenes work of creativity by word and sacrament, by parable and prayer, subverts the seduced world. The pastor's real work is what Ivan Illich calls "shadow work" - the work nobody gets paid for and few notice but that makes a world of salvation: meaning and value and purpose, a world of love and hope and faith - in short, the kingdom of God."



A blogger since 2002, **MIKE BISHOP** describes himself as a husband, father of three, trying-to-be-apprentice-of-Jesus, ecclesial trouble-maker, and wanna-be engineer. He and his wife Amber and family have lived in Jupiter, Florida since

2001 planting missional communities and seeking God's Kingdom. www.whatischurch.com

(CARAVAN OF COURAGE cont. from p 10)

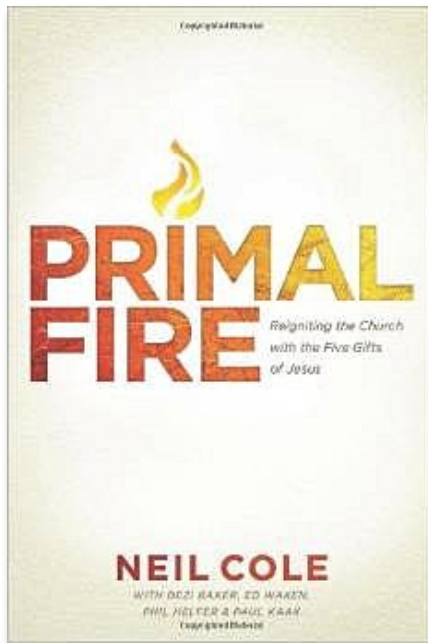
for the southwest region of the State.

If we do find people interested we then intentionally follow them up via email, phone or Skype, as well as visiting them as soon as we are able again. The last leg of our tour will take us northeast through Roma, Miles, Chinchilla, Mundubbera eventually finishing in Rockhampton on 2 July. The trip will cover over 3000 km and go through 20 towns. If anyone senses God would have them partner with us on one of our "tours" please get in contact as we have a number of tours planned each year around the North West, Central West and South West of Queensland. Watch out for dates (at praxis.org.au) in the near future about when and where the next tour will be going." If you would like further information, contact Ron and Paula Turner at rppkturner@bigpond.com

Reviews

There is an ever-increasing library of resources related to simple church and missional movements on the market.

For a broader selection go to
www.oikos.org.au or
www.house2house.com



we all work together to ignite the church's full potential and passion.

I've had the privilege of walking with Neil Cole and his cohorts (Phil Helfer, Ed Waken, Dezi Baker, and Paul Kaak) in varying degrees over the last 15 years. I've been an "insider" to the learning that has fleshed itself out into the work Primal Fire. Keen attention to the APEST (apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, shepherding, teaching) gifts has been part of my experience with the Church Multiplication Associates movement throughout (more at CMAResources.org). This is the best articulation and action of a true APEST team that I've experienced on the planet.

Many in mission circles are talking about the need for this APEST community of leaders, but hardly anyone really has that kind of community. What Cole and friends express in Primal Fire is the real deal. It is not merely theory, but theology, theory, principles, practice, victories and pains through real life and ministry. It is a treasure to have this snapshot as captured in Primal Fire.

A word of warning: Don't merely flip to the chapter on your favorite or perceived gift (chapters 9-13) and read about what an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd or teacher does. I was tempted to do that, but if you do (or maybe when) make sure to take the time to engage with the first 8 chapters of the book! If you don't, you will be missing some VERY important foundations from the whole of the New Testament. Most importantly, you'll skip

a tremendous exegesis and exposure of Ephesians chapter 4 (which Cole appropriately dubs the "Magna Carta" of the church [primarily chapters 5-8]).

In those foundational first eight chapters, you'll be challenged in your theology and your practice. For instance, Cole draws out that church leadership isn't merely to servant-hood, but to truly be servants. And beyond that leadership in Jesus' church and hierarchy have no place together! Into church practices, elders and deacons are addressed thoroughly. In fact, a revolutionary biblical proposal on deacons will have you chewing through the Scriptures again.

In the portions of the book that expose and articulate the five APEST gifts that Jesus gave (chapters 9-13), I believe that the authors' hope is that these pages in Primal Fire will affirm what Jesus has given and will draw together fully functional APEST teams. In fact, as I finished this book (the first time), I left it with a missionary team in Chad (Africa) with the hopes that they would be able to capitalize on these insights to fuel a burgeoning church-planting movement there.

Since this is Jesus' idea and His gifts for the maturing of the Body, I wholeheartedly encourage you to chew on the content of Primal Fire for the greater multiplication of disciples, leaders, churches and movements all over our globe. [Mike Jentes](#)

PRIMAL FIRE: REIGNITING THE CHURCH WITH THE FIVE GIFTS OF JESUS by Neil Cole

This review by Mike Jentes is from Amazon.com

In the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus embraced five core spiritual gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers—and the world was set on fire as a result. Over the past two thousand years, however, some of these gifts have been neglected or set aside, and we've forgotten what we're capable of. Now, in Primal Fire, Neil Cole shares the surprising truth about the five gifts of Jesus—what they mean, how they reflect Christ, and the remarkable power and synergy that comes when

Surfing Simple Church Sites worth checking out on the Web

For all our Simplechurch Surfers here's some more alternatives to Facebook.

www.schoolofchrist.org This is the website of CHIP BROGDEN (page 3 - MEETING TOGETHER What's Missing?) If you are looking for some excellent teaching, not just on the nature of the Church but, more importantly, the nature of the Believer, then this is a site worth exploring. Brogden's writing

is very challenging, uncompromising and simple. There's plenty of free stuff besides his books and regular free webinars.

www.whatischurch.com If you enjoyed Mike Bishop's article on page 12 and want to "join the Revolution" then here's his blogsite. "The Myth of Bi-Vocational Ministry" is worth a read. Plus it's always encouraging to read of the journey of other missional communities. Helps to know you're not alone.

Stay up to date with news, events and challenging articles on the OIKOS Blog - www.blog.oikos.org.au

TWO MOTORS



In every car there are two motors - one runs on gasoline and the other on electricity. The gasoline motor is huge in comparison to the electric motor; but it is the tiny little electric motor that is designed to start the gasoline motor, and the gasoline motor is designed to provide the power to move the car. As soon as the big motor engages, the little

motor disengages. If it did not, it would burn out in a matter of minutes.

The apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher are servants to the Body of Christ to act as initiators (starters) to get the body functioning. Just as the starter motor disengages as soon as the big motor starts, so it is with the wise leader. If he stays engaged he will burn out, just as a starter motor would do if it did not disengage after starting the big motor.

As long as the little starter motor is trying to move the car by the power of a single battery, the car will never function as it was designed to function. It is only the 350 horsepower motor that was designed to

move the car, and it is only the Body of Christ that has been designed to build up the Body unto the measure of the fullness of Christ. Only as the Body of Christ is released to minister to itself will it ever attain unto the fullness of the maturity in Christ.

Robert Fitts - *The Church in the House - a Return to Simplicity* www.robertfitts.com

LEADERSHIP QUOTES

The way of a Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which the world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross... It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest. (Henri Nouwen)

True "leader-servant-shepherds" must be willing to invest deeply in a few people rather than attempt to minister to "masses."

Pastors need to redefine success. The popular model of success involves the ABCs - attendance, buildings, and cash. Instead of counting Christians, we need to weigh them. We weigh them by focusing on the most important kind of growth - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, kindness, and so on - fruit in keeping with the Gospel and the kingdom. (Dallas Willard)

Leadership is a person who forms learning communities (environments) where people can be transformed by Christ. (Linda Grenz)

Soul cultivation goes before institution building... The forming of the soul that it might be a dwelling place for God is the primary work of the Christian leader. This is not an add-on, an option, or a third-level priority. Without this core activity, one almost guarantees that he/she will not last in leadership for a lifetime or what work is accomplished will become less and less reflective of God's honour and God's purposes. (Gordon MacDonald)

When I was a new believer, at age 20, how I wish I had someone who took personal interest in my life, my past baggage, and my future ministry. People pointed to programs, but they did not invite me into relationship where I could be transformed as I experienced deepening closeness with both God and other people. (Roger Thorman)

Leadership is the spiritual grace to be able to see another person's divine destiny and impart something into their life that moves them forward toward that destiny. (Roger Thorman)



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QUESTION: How do you deal with theological and doctrinal differences in your house church?

Part One.

Responses by: Barry Steinman and Keith Giles

Barry: Let me start with a story about how we experienced finding agreement in the midst of disagreement.

For about two years, we were meeting with a few families. The wife of one of the families felt very strongly that women should not teach. We felt quite differently about that. We believe that women have full participation in all aspects of church life.

Now this sister seemed to have a distinction in her mind between “sharing” and “teaching”. When we gathered in each other’s homes, everyone was free to talk. From her perspective, she felt also free to talk, because she considered that sharing and not teaching.

As the months went by, we developed a very close friendship with this family. Yes, we knew we had doctrinal differences, but the relationship became more important than our differences.

As time went on, during one gathering, this sister was sharing quite eloquently about why women should not teach. I was in a rather playful mood that day, so I interrupted her. I looked at her,

and said, “so basically you are teaching us that women should not teach”.

Suddenly the room went dead silent. My comment could have blown the group apart. She could have been so offended – she could have left the room. The silence continued for what seemed like a long uncomfortable moment... then suddenly she looked right back at me and broke out laughing.

Thankfully, she also saw the humor in what she was doing. We did not walk away from that time together agreeing about the issue. But we walked away able to laugh at ourselves, and appreciate the fact that our relationship was more important than our doctrinal differences.

I think it is very hard to have a meaningful discussion with someone, if we do not already have a relationship built on mutual respect. In this story, the relationship triumphed over the doctrinal differences, and we learned to accept each other. Respect leads one to want to truly hear and understand why someone they respect believes something so contrary to what they believe. No one’s minds may be changed, but at least we can hear and start to understand where the other person is coming from.

Across the believing world, followers of Jesus disagree about many things. I have come to the point where I believe some truths have preeminence. The importance of loving the brothers and sisters is one of the highest. Arguing doctrine does not accomplish much in the absence of true relationship.

In the big box traditional churches, everyone normally has to believe the same thing. When we were lead out of

the organized church to do something more simple and relational, we found people that were different than we were. We learned to love them based on our commonality in Christ. We discovered that Charismatics and those that didn’t believe that the gifts were for today could actually get along and fellowship together. For me, one of the main distinguishing features of house church is the diversity of belief and practice among those I fellowship with as compared to the uniformity I found in the organized church. Our God is a creative God who fills His world with diversity.

house2housemagazine.com

(part 2 will be in the next magazine)

QUESTION: What about false teaching in home church?

False teaching was a concern in the New Testament and it’s also a concern today in simple churches and traditional churches alike. We actually believe that the “open meeting” format allows for there to be a “check and balance” when it comes to false teaching. If someone suggests to the group a view or belief that is not found in scripture, others in the group have an opportunity to disagree. You see this same type of interaction in the early church (1 Corinthians 14). In fact, we think that an open environment where people feel comfortable sharing their views on scripture can be a great way of learning together as a group. We desire that people feel a freedom to disagree. This is not to say that all the knowledge of our church fathers throughout the ages is not important or to be taken into consideration when we seek to interpret God’s Word, and there are historical “Statements of Faith” - such as that of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which can also be a useful guide to simple churches as we seek to understand Biblical truth.

simplechurchalliance.faclex.com

If you have any questions for the Q&A column we’d love to get them. Drop us a line.

Note also that the OIKOS website has a Q&A page that covers many frequently asked questions.

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