

OIKOS

australia

Are You
SERVANT
To the
SERVANTS
OF GOD?

Josh Lawson

Does **GOD** have
"TO DO" LISTS?

Guy Huse

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Bringing the **LIGHT OF CHRIST** into Communities



Graham Wheat



DIRECTIONS

DON'T BECOME WEARY IN WELL DOING.

AS I visit and talk with leaders of missional communities and simple churches around Australia, I am frequently amazed at what they are doing. Often with a few helping hands they are making a significant impact on people lives. They are expressing the Kingdom of God in their local areas.

Let me mention a few examples. One simple church has a ministry weekly to provide a meal for needy people on a Friday night. They also organize a work for the dole program that touches a range of people and help unemployed people find dignity and in some cases real work. Often these people need hope and skills to move on in life and also to find someone who believes in them.

Another group regularly goes prayer walking and seeking for people of peace in their community. The daughter of a couple shares faith with her school acquaintances and has baptized several of them. They also have overseas students living with them for 2 weeks at a time and they share Jesus with them. They meet with other missional leaders and pray and encourage each other and host traveling missionaries. On Thursday nights they open their home for school friends to come to dinner. They also join a team in praying for the local High School and for this generation.

Another missional leader runs a men's network that is touching mature men who are re-finding Christ and Christian community and following "the spirituality of Jesus". Amazingly, men far from God are now being reached and in many cases coming to know and follow Jesus.

Another simple church is led by a couple who have connected with their local school and various sports programs. This provides contact with parents and families with kids involved in sport. They play an active role in the club which enables them to meet and talk with all the families. And they get to know the parents who often ask questions and share their lives and struggles. When appropriate they seek to share their story and Jesus with these parents.



Another couple runs a yellow roses day for all parents who have lost babies and children, such as in still birth etc. Large numbers of people connect with them in this way.

Missional leaders of another simple church work amongst a caravan park and run BBQs and film nights for these long term residents. They are becoming the "pastors" or Chaplains for these people who often have experienced some very tough seasons in their lives. They also work in Housing Commission flats and units bringing hope and community to these people. One leader has become a sports Chaplain of a VFL football team in order to connect with the lives of the players and their families.

I could continue with stories of others. What amazes me is the dedication, prayer and passion that these people bring to loving God and loving others in their community. They are seeking to touch lives and share the good news of the Gospel and make disciples.

We are yearning and praying for a multiplication of these missional communities and simple churches to see movements break out everywhere. Our vision is to see these missional hubs growing in every town, suburb and neighborhood in Australia.

OIKOS Australia

Multiplying disciple makers and simple church

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The GOOD Wine

'And no one after drinking old wine desires the new, for he says, "The old is good"'
Luke 5:37-39



PHILLIP WALTERS

One of the joys I had at the end of 2015 was that of knowing that my kids, having outgrown the church fellowship that Esther and I pioneered 25 years ago, have each become part of vibrant, outgoing churches in their own right.

And as I attended some of the celebrations of my kids' churches over the Christmas period, I thought to myself, "Why wouldn't you want to be part of something like this?" And I'm reminded of Jesus words (above) concerning old wine.

I never could understand that add-on. Jesus is addressing the Pharisees who want to contain everything in old lifeless religious patterns, old wineskins. And here he is seemingly complimenting the product of those wineskins. And of course he is right.

If the fruit of the vine has been good and the wine maker and wineskins have done their job then the product will be 'good'. That's the aim of the good vintner.

It didn't, however, start out that way. At one stage it was new wine in a new skin. And not necessarily very appealing to the taste buds. But, through a process of heat and fermentation and

age, under the care of wise vintners, it matured and turned into a highly desirable product, one that you'd want to let linger on the palate and then come back for more.

However... no winemaker, having produced such a vintage, then proceeds to simply increase his product by adding new wine to it. That's not how it's done. What he does is start a new wineskin. With fresh grapes that will not necessarily produce the same tasting wine (the same hints of mulberry and subtle notes of grapefruit and old boot leather).

And it seems to me that no matter how 'good' a church fellowship is it will not get better by simply adding new people. Someone has to go off and start a new wineskin. And stick with the new wine through its unpalatable fermentation stages.

This is surely why Jesus' church planting strategy was not about starting something that got bigger and bigger but centred on finding a new wineskin, a new 'person of peace', and kicking off something fresh - in his or her own space (Luke 10:5-9).

Nurtured initially by a disciple-making, apostolic type person checking in to see how the maturing process is going, he or she sticks with them through the early fermentation stages, making adjustments and corrections here and there, but allowing the new fellowship to find its own flavour and characteristics (hints of their own ethnicity and background and subtle notes of their housing estate).

And in the end becoming so 'good' why would you want to leave? Why would you want to go back to immaturity?

Unless of course you'd caught the bug of wanting to create more wineskins and more wine. Wine that is, of course, not for a private cellar but for sharing. From house to house and table to table as it was poured out at Pentecost.

To slightly misquote Jesus, "The vineyard is heavy unto harvest and it looks like a good year for bottling. Pray the Lord of the vineyard to send the pickers out, and the treaders and the vintners. Let's get it in. New wine in new wineskins. More good wine in the making."

PHILLIP WALTERS, Yeppoon, Queensland
BACKYARDBELIEVERS.COM

ReJesus the church! Alan Hirsch

Much can be said about the defining role of Jesus in the ecclesia...what we call the church. Christians have always agreed that the church is all about Jesus—her very existence, identity, purposes, and functions are all indissolubly bound up with this person who is at the core of it all. How could it not be so if he is our Founder, Redeemer, Lord, and our Head?

If Jesus is God's will in human form and the perfect expression of his nature, then we cannot bypass him and still remain in the Faith. Even our understanding of God is fundamentally changed by him: Whatever we now seek to know about God must pass through the lens of this particular person—Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is "the Father's 'summary statement'...the Logos of the Father—the *logic or purpose in and through which the whole divine economy is conceived and implemented.*" This is what we mean when we say that Jesus is preeminent. To get a feel for the importance of this, listen to Paul who in order to communicate something of the revelation bequeathed to him about the meaning of the church has to resort to some pretty dense theopoetical rhetoric...

13 He [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by and through him all things were created everything in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he existed before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the ecclesia. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the

fullness of God was pleased to dwell 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col.1:13-20)

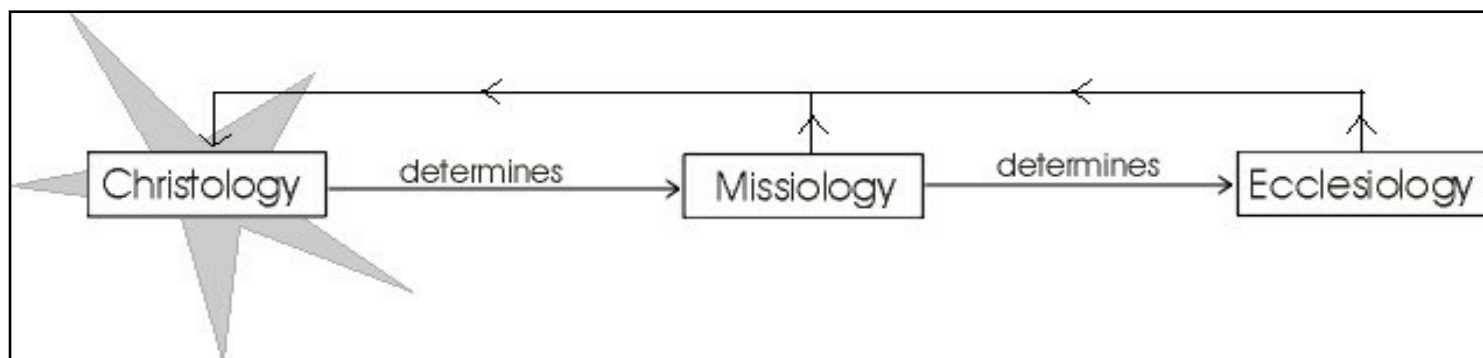
The ecclesia therefore ought to be the one place in human existence where Jesus is to be taken with the utmost possible seriousness... enough to

make him central to absolutely everything *Christ-ian*. For all Christians salvation depends on identifying with Christ. Christian Identity follows from Christian faith. Who could deny this? And yet, the church has consistently failed to fully represent Jesus in the world. In fact, one can perhaps say that any church is dysfunctional to the degree that it lacks focus on Jesus. In other words, the lack of Jesus ethos

and presence lies at the root of all dysfunctional religion. Religion has a way of marginalizing the centrality of Jesus in the life of his people—apparently he is too difficult to deal with. You might think that all this is Sunday School and goes without saying. But it's truly astounding how churches forget their very nature and purpose as *Jesus's* people.

If we take the ongoing role of Jesus seriously it stands to reason that the life of his people must be patterned on the life and teaching of Jesus. The founder sets the primary pattern and therefore the standards of legitimacy. The church as the Body of Christ is intended to be the corresponding and living expression of everything Jesus stood for and proclaimed. But in order to remain true to this unique calling, churches need to constantly undergo the process of returning to Jesus to assess whether it is faithful to him and what he intended as its sole Founder. It stands to reason that fundamental renewal, in any time and place, must involve a primal return to the Founder to see whether we line

The church as the Body of Christ is intended to be the corresponding and living expression of everything Jesus stood for and proclaimed. Fundamental renewal must involve a primal return to the Founder to see whether we line up with who he is and what he intended.



up with who he is and what he intended. This process of theological recalibration I simply call the *ReJesus effect*. In *The Forgotten Ways* I called it Jesus is Lord, and in 100Movements — focused as we are on practical application and competency — we simply call it *Declaring Identity* because it is going to force us to clarify where we stand in relation to the Lord.

ReJesus involves the following process -

Christology (everything we know and experience about Jesus) determines **missiology** (our purpose and mission in the world) determines **ecclesiology** (the forms and functions of the church.)

In this model Jesus is, and must remain, the defining criterion for everything important about the church. Where else can we go to gauge whether we are truly *Christ-ian* people and we are truly witnessing to the Jesus revealed the Gospels and not some Christ-fantasy figure conjured up by an idolatrous religious imagination? The church must

constantly return to its Founder in order to legitimize itself at the most fundamental level. We must identify ourselves. Are we really consistent with the ethos, teachings, model, and agenda of our Founder?

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. – 1Cor.3:10-11

This process of continual re/turning to the Founder, I continue to believe, secures the irreplaceable role of the Jesus in the movement that claims him as Lord and Savior. Therefore any attempt to circumvent or diminish the preeminence of Jesus in our lives (individual and communal), means that we inevitably end up with something far less than what God intended through us first place. We are either defined by Jesus or we are not. And history is clear that to the extent that we are not defined and shaped by Jesus,

other cultural and spiritual forces quickly will fill the gap and we inexorably move to becoming a false, illegitimate, and toxic religion.

By declaring our identity in Jesus, we clarify the most important aspect of the church...that it consists of the people who are redeemed by Jesus, who belong to Jesus, are led by him, and are willing to be defined by him in every way possible. We are being transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2Cor.3:18).



ALAN HIRSCH
(alanhirsch.org) is an Australian author, missiologist, and thought leader in the missional church movement. Author of *The Forgotten Ways* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, Alan is the founder of 100Movements, Forge Mission Training Network, and Future Travellers. www.100movements.com

(Continued from page 2)

DON'T GROW WEARY!

It is easy to grow tired and weary and to feel alone and insignificant.

To counter this we need to network regularly with other simple churches and missional people and see that we are part of a bigger canvas that is being painted. It is a picture that reveals a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. God is doing something here in Australia even though it can appear so small and humble. It is the beginning of something much larger. I meet followers of Jesus spread across the country who are awakening to the fact that sitting in a church each week isn't the final fulfillment of the purpose of God for their lives. It is about making disciples who make other disciples. It is about bringing, healing and blessing and new hope and life to others.

Paul urged the Corinthian believers in a cluster of simple house churches to stand firm and let nothing move them¹. He urged them to give themselves fully to the work of the Lord because their labour in the Lord wasn't in vain (1Cor 15:58)

The reward is multifaceted. It includes obedience to Christ, seeing lives changed and transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Seeing hope replace hopelessness and dignity replace a sense of worthlessness. It is seeing society impacted and ultimately having friends to journey together with for eternity. Jesus said that the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few, so pray for more labourers to be raised up from the harvest and in our context from the existing churches! New disciples making new disciples until this country we all love is transformed. A reproducing missional hub

in every town and every suburb and each people group in this land.

Impossible you say? No, with God all things are possible – see what is happening around the world at the moment. Like a mustard seed the Kingdom of heaven is growing and will continue, despite all the opposition of the enemy, until Jesus returns and the Kingdom is fully established which will “endure forever” (Daniel 2:44).

So don't be discouraged or grow weary in well doing!

¹Gehring, Roger W. *House Church and Mission. The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity*. Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub, 2004:142

bless you, Phil Brawn
OIKOS DIRECTOR

Bringing the Light of Christ into Communities

GRAHAM WHEAT



For the past 3 years I have been privileged to serve as a Community Chaplain in Social and Affordable Housing here on the Gold Coast. The vision of Churches of Christ in Qld, for whom I am currently employed, is “bringing the light of Christ into communities” and my unique role as Community Chaplain is to demonstrate unconditional love, to be available when people are in need (physically, emotionally and spiritually) and to assist people on their journey of faith.

This is all part of the denomination’s wider mission strategy of creating “Kingdom Access Points” and promoting healthy communities. As a Christian organisation we recognise that God’s heart leans unmistakable towards the poor or marginalised while never diminishing the inherent value of all people. In short, what we are trying to achieve is transformed people and transformed communities that reflect the Kingdom of God on Earth.

We have 5 housing complexes on the Gold Coast which accommodate people of any age, race, religion or background; people who have been granted residency by Qld Housing as eligible recipients of low cost housing rental. Most of our properties are comprised of unit blocks of up to 6 stories, each containing between 15-33 units.

In order to begin to achieve our purpose relationships need to be developed and to do this I hold different social events on each site, which can comprise of morning teas, BBQs, bus trips, garage sales, etc.; anything that gathers people together and enables rapport and trust to be established. Part of this process also involves looking for a “person of peace” as described in Luke 10. This person is often the key “inside” influencer-type person in any particular



community who is often receptive to us and our mission. I also seek to support residents who identify as having a Christian faith through such activities as discussions, prayer meetings, communion, reflections and the like.

Community Development also forms a vital part of my role as Community Chaplain. This means I proactively seek opportunities to facilitate, nurture and use the 6 underlying principles of a healthy community (safety, acceptance, respect, inclusiveness, involvement and justice) as expressions of the Kingdom of God. Further to this, our vision is not only to just nurture healthy communities but to also empower people to care for themselves and for others.

After a long battle with illness, resident Adele lost her beloved husband, David. Not only that but because of her finances she had to move into a smaller unit. Some of her neighbours and I discussed how we could help her shift to another unit on a different level of the high-rise complex. Adele recalls it well. "So the day I decided I was going to shift, the word got around and all these guys turned up. They said, 'We've come to help you shift' and it probably took them an hour." "They got shopping baskets and anything they could find," continues Adele. "They put everything on the trolleys and in the baskets, and shifted everything up in our lift. They asked me 'Where do you want this?' and 'Where do you want that?' and, in about five hours, my whole unit was moved. All the furniture had been placed and one of the guys said, 'I'm not going back down with them – I'll stay here with you and you tell me what I can pack into the cupboards', so he started opening boxes and putting them in the cupboards. That just knocked me out completely."

The generosity of spirit and humanity shown by fellow residents left an indelible

mark on Adele. She recounts how she felt so loved and accepted by her community who rallied around at such a difficult time. Not long after this unforgettable demonstration of community spirit and kindness, Adele joined this helping team herself in the hope that other residents could experience the kind of neighbourly help she received on that unforgettable day. I have regular talks with Adele, she attends our prayer times and her faith continues to grow. Why is that? Because she had an encounter with the Kingdom of God in action on earth.

Mark 3:31-34 indicates clearly that Jesus considered all people to be his family, which implies non-judgmental acceptance, belonging, fellowship, caring and loving. 'And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" Jesus obviously engaged holistically with his community.

Sadly, there are still plenty of residents who never engage in our activities, avail themselves of our services or even socialise with others. For many of these, life has delivered some hard blows, people have failed or hurt them and isolation has become their safest choice. Sometimes, a crisis will provide an opening to serve them but oftentimes it is in being a consistent and loving presence that will eventually turn the tide and trust can be rebuilt over time.

Evelyn* came to us from a women's shelter as a tiny, timid, wary, Hungarian victim of domestic violence. She had no furniture at all which we found out accidentally after nearly 2 weeks of occupancy. Evelyn seldom answers her door or her phone thus making care of her extremely difficult. It took a lot of persistence to finally win her trust in order to provide assistance. Eventually, with the help of other residents and other donors we managed to fully furnish her unit. Gazing at her new furniture in tears, she mused, "You know I don't believe in God but I need to think about this. I'm not sure what all this means". It was so easy then to share, "I know what it means: we care about you and God cares about you too." "I need to think more about that", she concluded.

Rather than being found guilty of closing the door of the Kingdom on anyone by way of legalism, judgmentalism, or with institutional barriers (see Matt 23:13), Churches of Christ in Qld are getting out into the communities and strategically placing chaplains and systematically creating spaces where people can readily be exposed to God's kingdom on earth and it is our hope and prayer that many will enter, engage in its activities and discover Jesus is King.

GRAHAM WHEAT
coomerachristiancommunity.org



A young boy with dark hair and a red wristband is standing in a river, pulling a large, tangled fishing net. The water is murky and greenish-brown. The net is made of fine mesh and has a dark border. The boy is looking down at the net with a focused expression.

GOSPEL SHARING IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

This is a report by David Milne of MOVE NETWORK, a disciple-making work that evolved out of the ministry of Steve Addison, author of What Jesus Started and Movements That Change the World.

Over recent years MOVE team members have trained over a thousand Australian Christians in simple skills to make disciples who can in turn make disciples. Having trained so many, it seemed prudent to revisit some of those trained and find out how effective the training had been. Given that our goal is to make disciples among those who are not yet Christians and in an effort to focus the study, the specific area of “gospel sharing in the life of the believer” was investigated. While disciple making (and MOVE training) is more holistic than just gospel sharing, it is often the starting point for a person becoming an obedient follower of Jesus. The investigation focused on factors that helped an existing believer become and remain a regular, faithful sower of the gospel. A qualitative research process was applied using data gathered from semi-structured interviews with sixteen believers who before training were sharing their faith less than once per week. (Most were sharing perhaps once or twice a month, if the opportunity arose).

During the interview analysis stage those who were sharing more than once a week after the training were grouped and classified as L1 sharers; those still sharing less than once per week were labelled L0 sharers. As it happened there were eight in each category – all had been functioning as L0 or L1 sharers for more than six months at the time of the interview.

It was encouraging to learn that the sixteen believers who were interviewed had collectively baptised eleven people and engaged in more than 740 gospel sharing events as a result of the MOVE training and on-going initiatives. (Note that in this study sharing events counted were as follows: sharing your story (testimony), a Gospel presentation, a Bible story or praying for a need with a person who was far from God). On average people who become L1 sharers improved from 1 share per month to eight per month.

DAVID MILNE

Often these believers were part of a team already connecting with lost people, however prior to the MOVE training they lacked skill to initiate a spiritual conversation, listen to their friend and then share some "gospel" in response. Prior to the training there was a Christian presence - the training helped them get to proclamation. For example, it was exciting to hear from Rosalyn, who prior to training had never baptised anyone, but in the 2 years since training she has shared the gospel multiple times and baptised 2 people. One of those baptised has in turn been trained and baptised 2 of their closest friends! Some consistent themes that emerged from the interviews indicated that the simple skills taught built competence and confidence, leading to willingness to share. Trainees also understood from reflection on Scripture, that disciples need to take initiative, go to the lost and to be intentional about sharing. This was encouraging. Positively the training enabled almost all attendees to initiate more gospel sharing, however not everyone continued in this vein. Unless other supportive processes came into play, reversion to L0 activity was likely.

SUSTAINING GOSPEL SHARING

Multiple factors were observed by the researcher and identified by the interviewees that facilitated sustained L1 activity. These grouped easily into five themes:

1. TEAM! Being part of a discipling team or community that intentionally connects weekly with people who are not yet Christians was the most significant supportive factor. The disciple making community may run an ESL club, a play group, visit people in their home to share faith or run a discussion group at a university for example. The cluster of supportive activities provided by the teams encountered in this study included: friendship, pastoral support, prayer and ongoing training. Every L1 interviewee in this study was part of such a team, while all L0 believers were not part of such a team. It was noted that five L0 sharers were for a period functioning as L1 sharers while in association with a team – now no longer in a team, their gospel sharing frequency has diminished.

2. INNER CONVICTIONS. A number of L1 believers reported that they felt compelled to share the gospel. Regularly

sharing their faith had become for them a strongly held inner belief seeded from Scripture, sermons, other Christians or from the training experience. Believers spoke of a compulsion to share; feelings of guilt if they remained silent; concern for the plight of lost people and the need for all disciples to obey Jesus' words in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-2). L1 sharers who identified inner convictions as a primary source of ongoing motivation were able to lead others.

3. RESULTS. When believers have taken initiative to share faith and have then seen God do something in people's lives or experienced the Holy Spirit working in them as they spoke, they have been greatly empowered to persevere. Results reported were people being saved, friends being interested in knowing more, sensing a closeness with the Holy Spirit as they shared or finding words as they spoke that the believer felt were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Where no results were achieved (e.g. witnessing in a shopping centre over a 6 month period) it was hard to sustain outreach. Where L1s had multiple points of contact with the lost, after a time they focused on the field where some results had been observed.

4. PRAYER or praying with a partner sustained believers in sharing faith. Most L1 believers had regular prayer partners. Partners prayed for one another and for those with whom they shared. It was interesting to note that on average both L0 and L1 sharers prayed for about 30 minutes per day (the range was 5 min to 90 min per day). However, analysis of recorded interviews revealed that L1 sharers mentioned prayer a total of 169 times, while L0's roughly half this at 87 times. It seems probable that the L1 engagement with the harvest inspired a more mindful and ready disposition toward prayer. Given that half of those interviewed were praying for less than 17 minutes a day (some for 5 mins or less), it would seem that prayer and devotional life may be a weakness in the life of Australian believers. Where God is birthing significant discipling movements, intense prayer and fasting accompanied with wide sowing of the Gospel is evident (among other things). On average leaders in such movements are praying for 2 hrs a day and the average believer is fasting one day a week and involved in regular corporate prayer (Trousedale 2012, Watson 2014). The study suggests that

we Aussies may need to do some work on our prayer life and our abiding devotion to God!

5. TRAINING After the initial training, (usually delivered over eight 2hr sessions with evangelism experience), ongoing relevant training, coaching and peer support meetings were seen to be of help. Effective support revolved around reviewing the progress of the team, looking for where they may be stuck, debriefing and designing appropriate activity to improve skills. Sometimes teams simply needed to practice what they already knew, or meet to encourage one another, others needed to be coached or to learn conversation skills via roleplays. This renewed competence and confidence, extended skill sets in specific areas of weakness thereby facilitating progress.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Many of us see a desperate need for our friends and neighbours to know the living God. We know that the Lord Jesus is so much more compassionate, kind and loving than our friends perceive and that their future is bleak without Him. A real move of God is required in this nation in order to bring people to Christ. While it is God who births disciple-making movements, it is our responsibility to be disciples who pray AND share Jesus in order to make disciples who are trained to then do likewise (consider Mark 4:1-25, Luke 10:1-10). These disciples then gather into church structures that are simple and healthy (see Acts 2:36-47).

This study has highlighted the fact that many believers will greatly increase in confidence and competence to share their faith if given opportunity to learn the simple skills required to transition from being a "Christian presence" to becoming a proactive disciple maker. Critical to the enduring success of the disciple maker is the opportunity to belong to a team that is actively sharing the gospel where they can be encouraged through prayer, problem solving, skills development and companionship to continue with the good work of multiplying disciples of Jesus.

***Dave and Sue Milne** (movenetwork.org) are from Wollongong. Dave is an engineer who has increasingly devoted his time to making disciples at Wollongong University. He trains others to do the same in the Illawarra and around Australia.*

Snapshots of Community

OIKOS welcomes new regional leaders.

Over the past quarter we are excited to welcome to the Oikos team new regional leaders from Sydney, Regional NSW, Nth Suburbs Melbourne and Adelaide. We welcome Michael & Sally Butler (Sydney), Lindsay Hoile (Inland Central NSW), Ngaire & Colin Booth, Fraser & Annette Reynolds (Albury/Wodonga), Bruce & Sally Bennie (Adelaide), and Rodger & Katherine Donnelly (Nth Suburbs Melbourne).

We are seeing an increase across Australia of individuals and groups being planted and many groups are experiencing multiplication growth. *The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47)*

Here's a brief story of the journey of one of the couples, Colin and Ngaire Booth (Albury/Wodonga).

OUR STORY

One wonders where to start, as it seems a long time since our interest and conviction about "House Church" began.

We were beginning to understand "one Church/one city" more than thirty years ago, and then, as we heard Barry Smith speak about the Church returning to the homes in the last days, it all makes sense.

Our experience and practice over these years has been to have various groups meet in our home and, more often than not, we included a meal. So it was just normal and even natural to have communion too. How good these gatherings have been with such a sense of family and oneness. We all need a place to belong and have a sense of home.

In 2002 we knew to move back to "the border", as this region is called, as we were nurturing a vision for house Churches across the Riverina. During this time we have met a number of Christians who have left the organised churches and of course have heard of many more in other countries. Early last year, as we were seeking to renew this vision, we had an interesting re-connection with Graeme Cooksley in Townsville. We had known him and Carol in Palmerston, North New Zealand, when we were first married in 1967. They were a very generous hearted couple toward us. We appreciated their

kindness more than once. So, through a mutual contact in NZ, we got to chatting and progress has gone on since then. Graeme had also made us aware of LK10 and Tony and Felicity Dale. We have since been in touch with all of them, asking advice and learning new things ourselves. Graeme connected us with Lindsay Hoile in Wagga Wagga in June of last year. So then we arranged our first weekend Oikos meeting in Wodonga, in October. This was a vigorous weekend as we held the Saturday in a local Community Centre and the remainder of the weekend in a large country house. It was a great time of "family" as Phil Brown and his family joined us.

We are planning another soon in Wagga Wagga, as since October 2015 there are now two groups there, keen to be connected to Oikos. We are enjoying meeting new people and making new friendships.

*Blessings to you all,
Colin and Ngaire Booth.*

Ngaire and Colin Booth visited Wagga recently, meeting at Lindsay Hoile's house church in the morning and then meeting at the house church of Neil & Pam Harvey for lunch and an afternoon meeting followed by dinner. Ngaire ministered the word to everybody present with healing and deliverance following. We were all



GET CONNECTED

Iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another (Prov 27:17).

This old proverb is as true today as it was in the past. There is mutual benefit in the rubbing of two iron blades together; the edges become sharper, making the knives more efficient in their task. The meeting of two or more together in the Lord's name will always guarantee blessing as He will be amongst them (Matt 18:20).

OIKOS regional gatherings and monthly conference calls are an encouraging and inspiring opportunity to network, fellowship and cheer each other along as disciples of Jesus. Get together with believers in your area, meet with another simple church, organise a regional gathering in your area - and enjoy the blessing of being sharpened.

Oikos conference calls are for regional or simple church leaders or wanna be planters. Join us on Skype on the first Monday of the month 7.30pm (Melbourne time). Contact Phil Brown (0409 137 988) with your Skype details.

If I were to ask you, “What is it that all Creation is awaiting eagerly?” you would most likely say, “The return of Jesus!” And you would be wrong. No, instead, what Paul says is that all Creation is waiting eagerly for those who are in Christ to awaken and rise up.

“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” [Romans 8:19-21]

All Creation is eagerly awaiting the Body of Christ to rise up and bring forth the Kingdom of God which lies within each of us. Like tiny seeds of mustard pressed into the dry ground, or a light sprinkling of yeast that spreads within the lump of dough, we are the promise of a Kingdom to come that all Creation yearns for. This has always been part of the Father’s Master Plan – to transform us so that we can transform the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. [See Revelation 11:15]

Forget about “winning America (or Australia – Ed.) back for God”, our mission is to usher in the Eternal Kingdom of God – where His perfect will is always accomplished in the lives of His people – and to transform others around us into people who are also carrying around the promise of the Kingdom within. It’s not about turning America into a nation where Christians feel more comfortable and “at home”. It’s about changing people into transformational agents of the Kingdom who are radiating love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, mercy and perseverance. Truth be told, if we start doing that our communities will start to be anything but “comfortable”, but never boring.

Just before this passage in Romans, Paul says something wonderful about our identity in Christ as “Children of God”: *“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to son-ship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” [Roman 8: 14-17]*

As the Children of God, we are: Led by the Spirit - Without fear - Heirs of God - Co-heirs with Christ - Sharing in the sufferings and the glory of Jesus.

In fact, it is this process of suffering that is key to what Paul is saying in this passage. This is why he says: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” [v. 18] Please notice: Paul does not say that our sufferings don’t compare to Heaven, or to a place we will go when Jesus comes back.

Nope. Look again. Paul says, “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the GLORY THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN US.” [Emphasis mine]

What is this glory that will be revealed in us? It’s the very same glory that Paul says “all creation waits in eager expectation for” when “the children of God are revealed”! He encourages us to endure suffering in this life, because through that suffering for the Kingdom and the Gospel of Jesus, we are being transformed into His image and we are fulfilling our call as seeds and as yeast to usher in the glorious Kingdom of God in the here and now.

All creation is groaning for you and I to wake up, step out, and begin to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God at this very moment in-time. What are you waiting for? If you keep waiting perhaps even the rocks will cry out, “Hurry! Child of God! Liberate us from this bondage and decay! Bring forth the glorious freedom of the Lord Jesus, our King!” Let’s not delay any longer. Rise up, oh sleeper. Wake up and step into the fullness of your calling as Children of God.

“Let the Kingdom come!” Amen.

all creation awaits

KEITH GILES

subversive1.blogspot.com.au



Are you SERVANT to the SERVANTS OF GOD?

JOSH LAWSON

I recently had an email conversation with a brother who shared some valuable insights with me concerning the Church, God's purpose, and where it all may be heading in our day.

We were talking about certain messengers of the Cross and various movements which have arisen over the past century... pioneers who opened wide a vision of God's eternal purpose which multitudes of people are now catching sight of, if only second-hand.

In particular, our conversation centered upon how God may now be working among those Christians who are just beginning to see the Way as opposed to those who have been holding out for many years in a desire to see God's "full thought" realized.

I will let the email speak for itself without going into more detail (he has given me permission to reproduce it here). Suffice it to say that I believe this brother's opinion is dead-on accurate.

Here is what he said:

You may be interested to know that we have launched an initiative in our city called "City Church" (as a principle, NOT a name.) We aim to bring people together as the body of Christ under the Head, without any of the distractions that have haunted the church for two millennium. The rules are simple: No titles, no church names (save "the church in Bloemfontein") and no peripheral doctrinal distinctive (including name-dropping of those who are strongly associated with any such distinctive).

I find it fascinating that the ideas that many of us have been acquainted with since the 80's, and especially the early Gene Edwards days, are suddenly eagerly accepted by believers who have never heard of the Brethren, Edwards, Lee, Viola et al. This has led me to an interesting conclusion (perhaps I should say theory, but I'm quite convinced).

The "Recovery" is not going to take place within the confines of those groups who have been advocating it most passionately, but as a totally new

work of the Holy Spirit, although it will be characterized by the very truths propagated by those groups. Some are going to reap where others have sown, in other words. This may sound unfair, but I have learned that this is so much part of the journey of the cross—that we minister not for our own vindication but solely for the glory and purposes of God—like a solitary desert flower in full bloom.

So what if the prophets die without ever having had the privilege to hear "You were right"? In fact, if any person is offended that his message has been picked up by the latecomers, and fruitfully propagated by them, he/she should consider both their own motives and the parable of the workers hired at different times.

Secondly, I think there is a prophetic culture that sometimes develops among those who are afforded an early glimpse into God's ways, which could eventually be a hindrance when those ways manifest themselves. Because we see, and know, we are more vulnerable

to spiritual frustration, and to striking the rock. And so others who saw less, and knew less, enter into the very promises we have given our lives for, while we don't enter ourselves.

Would I be out of line if I suggest that some precious brothers are simply too hard, too inflexible, too solitary, and perhaps too proud, to effectively mingle with the prodigal latecomers who never really had much of a big picture understanding to begin with? Would I be out of line if I suggest that this might be part of the reason why Israel did not recognize their own Messiah?

It seems that Moses hardly ever enters the promised land. Or at least he does so in death, and not in this life.

Does this ring a bell in your spirit, or am I the only one? If you see farther than others (spiritual speaking), don't isolate yourself and become high-minded about it. Humble yourself and serve them. Do what the Lord Jesus did: Wrap yourself with a towel, get down on your hands and knees, and wash their feet. Remember: *Those who are first shall be last, and those who are last shall be first.*— Jesus

The Church is in dire need of men and women who lead from the back rather than the front. Those who will be servant to the servants of God in the spirit of Abigail (1 Samuel 25:41).

May the Spirit of the Lord raise up such men and women, and may they no longer be scattered about but find one another and begin to do unprecedented things together.

Josh Lawson insearchofthecity.com

By the way, here is the blog where my friend regularly shares his thoughts. Stop by and see him sometime. naturalchurch.wordpress.com

Does God Have To Do Lists?

The past few weeks have been frustrating. For every item I am able to cross off on my "To Do" list, 2-3 more are added. Calls needing to be made, reports overdue, projects awaiting attention, documents needing translation, individuals needing counselling, materials needing to be reworked, follow-up visits that should have been taken care of weeks ago, banking and financial matters needing attention yesterday, etc.

In the past fourteen days, I have only been able to cross off fourteen items total out of 40+ things needing attention yesterday. That averages to one item accomplished per day!

Why am I getting so little accomplished these days? I can answer that with one word. INTERRUPTIONS. And what is the definition of interruptions? PEOPLE!

People calling. People needing help. People asking favours. People dropping by the house. Meetings...requests...office/paperwork. Endless correspondence where

you respond to an email and there are two more that pop up in the inbox while answering! Night and day, it never lets up. When is one supposed to get around to doing "our stuff" when everybody else's stuff is taking up all our time?

But...

What if God also has "to do" lists? What if God has on his list today for Juan to call me and see about our getting together for coffee at 2:15 this afternoon and talk about his problems?

When I seriously pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done..." am I not in effect saying, "Lord, your "to do" list has priority. Your agenda today takes precedence over my own." While meeting Juan at 2:15 may not be on my list, I would be foolish to blow off meeting Juan at 2:15 if he is on God's list.

I am reminded of a Mark Batterson quote I once came across -

One of my mottos is "ministry happens." I think that at least 90% of the ministry that happens in the gospels is spontaneous. Jesus was headed from one place to another and an opportunity would present itself. Jesus was willing to get off the beaten path and take the road less travelled. He didn't see them as detours or dead ends. Too often we mistake human interruptions for divine appointments.
- from a Mark Batterson message entitled "Wild Goose Chase."

For people like myself who are geared toward intentional ministry and "to do" lists, the above thought is a needed reminder. Am I too busy to take time for someone interrupting "my ministry?" Am I so geared towards that 10% intentional ministry that I overlook the 90% God sets in my path daily?

J. Guy Muse - Guayaquil, Ecuador
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Review

SIMPLE CHURCH - Unity Within Diversity.

Editor: Eric Carpenter

Challenging, intriguing, and provocative, Simple Church: Unity in Diversity is not a typical collaborative writing. Instead of the usual format of one author's views being promoted against other authors who disagree, this book is a refreshingly positive collaboration in which each person shares one aspect of what those who gather in Simple/House/Organic Church models are for. While all of the writers have apparently "left the building", they haven't left behind their faith in Jesus, their desire to see many come to faith in Him, their devotion to God, or their love for the Church.

The reader gets a little bit of everything in this book. It contains elements that provide reading pleasure for both the average reader and the biblical academic. There will be times when you overflow in worship and adoration at our great God.

There are bound to be things that make you want to re-examine the Biblical texts. Still yet there are going to be things that you disagree with and some that inspire you.

Among a group of such gifted writers and scholars, mine (full disclosure - I am one of the contributors) is but a small fragment of a very enjoyable collection of writing. Although it becomes apparent as you read that the perspectives of the various contributors are all different. There are different denominational backgrounds, theological frameworks, and styles of writing. Some are exegetical, others are academic, testimonial, and narrative. By the end of the book you realize that our diversity emerges as one unified voice. Our disagreements have not resulted in disunity. Each person has contributed something toward the common goal of promoting unity in the Church and we

SIMPLE CHURCH **UNITY WITHIN DIVERSITY**



EDITED BY
ERIC CARPENTER
FOREWORD BY WAYNE JACOBSEN
AUTHOR OF
FINDING CHURCH: WHAT IF THERE REALLY IS SOMETHING MORE?

have done so through a very positive perspective.

One of the chapters tells of a pastor turned "house church" planter in an impoverished group on the edge of homelessness who now belongs to a group of saints that give 100% of their collected monies to the poor. His testimony alone is worth the price of the book, in my opinion.

Bobby (Amazon review)

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Reconstructing Organic God-Rhythms

ROGER THOMAN

It is relatively easy to deconstruct from institutional church-going and thinking. Many of us would echo the sentiments expressed by some of the people quoted in an article I recently read:

"I didn't want to invite the people that I was first exploring a conversation of spirituality with to church anymore. I didn't want them to see walking with God as a relationship of jumping through hoops – that it was about behavioral management or sin management."

"It's hard to demonstrate love from the institution now..."

"[My] training to become a pastor mostly reminded me of the corporate techniques I followed at [General Electric]."

However, beyond deconstruction, the more difficult challenge is to reconstruct a lifestyle with God that is intentional, authentic, meaningful, and impactful. Many people fall through the cracks, today, who have deconstructed and left institutional church life, yet never intentionally develop an organic, significant life with God.

Kyle Rice (same article) describes where his own reconstruction has led him:

"I would say that I am very intentionally engaged with a group of believers who are committed to one another and committed to seeing God's word make an impact around the world."

I would suggest that there are three essential rhythms that make up the adventure of intentionally reconstructing an organic lifestyle:

- 1. The God-ward rhythm.** Everyone knows that institutional church life does not create inner spiritual life. But we still face the challenge, outside the institution, to find the personal rhythms that move us ever deeper into the heart, purposes, and leading of Jesus Christ.
- 2. The community rhythm.** This is a challenging rhythm, but we need the Body of Christ and some shape of authentic community life for healthy growth and alignment with God's purposes. This is often messy, uncomfortable, and difficult to define. But we need others, we need mentors, we need to be mentoring, we need spiritual family, and we need to be sharpened by difficult people.
- 3. The missional rhythm.** Church is always God's people reaching out with the love of God to people who desperately need to know the love, power, freedom, healing, hope,

renewal, and eternal life that only the cross brings. How this rhythm is walked out may be as varied as sands on the sea. But it is an essential dynamic for our organic adventure with God.

I am not trying to dictate forms out of any of these rhythms. In an earlier post I remarked that "if we begin with forms and structures we continue to miss the core reality of relational connection that underlies true church."

However, I am suggesting that, as God leads us out of institutional forms of spiritual life and into organic ones, we can expect that He will draw us into new ways of living out all three of these essential dynamics. We leave the institutions (or not) with intentionality to join our life more intimately, organically, and purposefully with the Person.



ROGER THOMAN
simplechurchjournal.com

Readers who want more info on how Simple Church works would do well to go

to Roger's blogsite and enrol in his free Simple Church Online Course.

The goal of this six-week, online course is for participants to discover more fully the principles of organic, simple churches.

[Jesus Unemployed](#)

[whileweslept.wordpress.com](#)

Posted in [Lifestyle](#) with tags [oneness](#), [unemployed](#), [unity](#) on May 25, 2009
by Mercy Simson

Each one pursues his own work in God's name and believes this is what God is up to and is passionately burdened with right now. Belief in God has imploded into people believing in themselves. What is absent in this journey of faith? Is it the lack of hearing and discerning God, or is it disobedience, living and acting according to convenience, or simply the lack of knowledge of the truth, the inability to let go of tradition or the fear of the new?

If Jesus says, *"I will build my church"*, why then are we so busy building His church? If Church is the body of Christ, which is formed by every one voluntarily binding him/herself to Jesus and to each other, why then is there much disunity, malfunction, retarded developments and cocooned factions in the body of Christ? This doesn't give the picture of the spotless bride that Jesus wants to marry and live happily ever after. How difficult are we yet going to make it for Jesus to build his Church? When will we resign from the job that is not originally ours and give it over to the right person Jesus who really really longs and waits with passion to build His Church. Any way it is his body; will we at all let him take care of his own body? If anyone messes around with another's body, it is called violence and rape. We have not only made Jesus unemployed but we also forcefully plunder him.

And we do all these firmly believing that it is God's will. What ignorance has overtaken us! So we work and work even harder and we run and run until we hit the brick wall and are not willing to learn the lesson. We will not resign and give the job over to the one who is rightly and truly authorized for the job.

Basically, we don't want to trust Jesus with his job. We know better how to build churches. Therefore we sacrifice everything, even the job that is assigned for us: to be in unity with the Father and his son Jesus, **SO THAT** the world may believe in the one that was sent. *"Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* *"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"*. Here, Jesus, gives an important and valid tip on how to let the whole world know about him. Global evangelisation demands the lifestyle of unity of Jesus' body. He also gave the most helpful tip on how to unite, to become one like he is with his Father: *"All I have is yours and all you have is mine"*. When the churches and mission organizations around the globe could honestly say this to each other and mean it then we can experience Psalm 133; his blessing and his life.

So far the world has recognized Jesus as a swear word but not yet as **the Word**, the sent one who deeply loves them. Why? What are we reflecting on this world? Disunity, despair, jealousy, competition, factions and divisions, selfishness, and the list can go on. Jesus even prays to his Father about the glory that he has given to his believers, which his Father had given him, so that we believers are one just like he and his Father are one. Whatever happened to this glory that he is talking about! Where did we lose this glory? Why no one gives even a little consideration to look for it that which we have lost? Is this glory the main component that keeps us as one? Have we lost it or forgotten it? Do we at all care for it or do we ignore it because we want to build OUR churches?

Jesus is longing for you and me to resign and retire so that he can take his rightful place as the architect and master-builder and do what he knows best to do, build his Church. The one through whom the whole universe came into existence is absolutely able to create his own Bride. Jesus has been lonely for a long time now, let's unite so he can celebrate the most exciting day of his life: his wedding.

Let's employ Jesus again and allow him to build his Church and let's indulge ourselves to unite until the Body of Jesus becomes **ONE**. As we unite to oneness Jesus will be easily able to build his Church. If we could earnestly say to the other part of our body: *"all I have is yours and all you have is mine"*, then we know we are one. Then we are dressed worthy for the wedding banquet.



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