

OIKOS

australia

*"Anyone who believes in
me may come and drink!"*

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

UNCHURCHING *Richard Jacobson*

RAISING THE BAR
Of DISCIPLESHIP *Maurice Smith*

Am I Irreligious Enough? *Bessie Pereira*

OUR SIMPLECHURCH JOURNEY *Ken & Beryl Seeley*



Ready to share your story?

I attend a weekly men's prayer group, usually with my youngest son. The men are mature Christians and I've been learning a lot from them. I feel privileged to have these men as friends.

One man prays every morning that God will lead people across his path and help him to recognize the opportunity. He then promises to faithfully share his testimony when this occurs. He then trusts God to be at work in his life that day. He has written a book ("I dare you God") about the most extraordinary ways God has used him in leading many people to faith.

Another guy is always looking for opportunities to pray for people with any health issue. He has seen a number of people healed miraculously. It has opened the hearts of some older men to the Lord when previously they were closed and uninterested in Christian faith.

I've learned that true Christianity involves a life regularly touched by the Holy Spirit and his power – it's more than good concepts and ideas.

We were sharing around the group this week and decided to each share our testimony or story. It focused on what our life was like before we met Christ, how we accepted Christ and then how it has since changed our lives. It was interesting to hear the stories. As I've reflected on this experience some things stood out to me:

1. We need to be good at this and so should practice it so we can share it whenever we have a chance. Even longstanding Christians need to be able to share their story in an interesting and compelling way.
2. We need the *3 minute version* as one may not have the opportunity to give the longer version.
3. It is more impactful when it is shared personally as a story without a lot of "christianese" jargon or advice. When people use first rather than second or third person language, it is more interesting. "I" is better than generalized statements using "you" or "they".

Personal story telling also helps to grow our relationships and appreciation for each other. I heard my oldest son share some aspects of his story and journey in accepting Christ that I hadn't heard before! Simple church is based around relationships and so telling our stories helps deepen our understanding of each other.

As we have laughed together and listened and shared, I can see that real Christian faith is joyful and contagious. If it's not why would anyone be attracted to it?

Finally, while appreciating solid Bible teaching and knowledge, our spiritual journey and experiences with Jesus are so central to our faith journey. I find that frequently non-Christian people are often more interested in my experience and spiritual journey than in my beliefs.

Perhaps this is what being a "witness" is really about!

bless you, Phil Brown
OIKOS DIRECTOR

OIKOS Australia

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

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WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

MICHAEL BUTLER

*Anyone who believes in me
may come and drink!*

For the Scriptures declare,

*'Rivers of living water
will flow from his heart.'*

*(when he said "living water"
he was speaking of the Spirit
who would be given to
everyone believing in him. But
the Spirit had not yet been
given). John 7:38*



After decades of knowing Jesus, I am finally learning to walk in the Spirit.

It is a phrase that has occurred in conversations or readings many times over the past months, and slow that I am, I am trying hard to listen.

It seems to me that walking in the Spirit is the pinnacle of our walk with Jesus, because at long last we listen to what he says, and try to act on it; strange though that may be at times. Jesus tells us here that anyone who believes in him may come and drink. Walking in the Spirit is for all believers, not just the chosen few.

About the only two things I understand in this area, are that it takes time to cultivate, and time to listen. Don't come to God in a rush and expect to understand him clearly - and be prepared to work at it.

We can walk in the Spirit every day of our lives, listening to him almost moment by moment, and it can be powerful. At no time is this more true than when we are looking for opportunities to speak to others about Christ. Over the years I look back and perceive the many times the Spirit was prompting me to talk to someone, and alas, I ignored it as a figment of my own imagination. In the past week, 3 incredible incidents have occurred that illustrate exactly why God wants us all to walk in the Spirit, listening carefully and closely to the Holy Spirit.

This morning I went out for an early surf, and waiting at the shower afterwards, I listened to 2 women my age talking about various male encounters in their lives, with little satisfaction. One was talking honestly about whether to leave her husband. At this point I was able to light-heartedly talk to them about the beauty and benefits of my own marriage experience, which like many I know, has taken time to nurture. The wait though is worth it. She listened, interested and ended up thanking me gratefully, genuinely – it's as if she had been waiting for someone to come along and confirm her deep desire to stay. She would give it time. It was a prompting from the Holy Spirit to converse, and I'm delighted I did. Jesus in our everyday world, walking in the Spirit.

Last night a young man in our gathering whom we have come to admire told us how he prayed differently with the Lord this week, asking God to speak to him more directly about their future. So God obliged, and woke him up at 5am saying, 'Buy a one-way ticket to China, and meet a man with this name.' He, and his wife were surprised. They waited for confirmation given it was a huge decision, and were shown it

later in the week. The man's wife was applying for a particular job in the city and had been told she had been unsuccessful, but – they noticed a certain TESOL qualification on her resume and asked if she would be interested in working in China! They leave early next year.

Walking in the Spirit, listening to the voice of the Spirit as he directs our paths.

A week ago, a dear friend was down visiting and we were in our local town, looking for opportunities to talk to people. As we

sat having coffee, a young toddler rode up to us on her shiny bike, and stopped and stared. Our friend asked her name, at which she rode on – what a strange man. The girl's father walked up, and we asked his name, to which he responded and then asked ours. Our visitor, out of the blue came up with a rather cryptic response, and said "I don't know yet. I have a new name, but I don't know what it is." Only a very few would understand such a response, and who would say that to a stranger? But, our stranger understood, he retorted, "is it written on a white stone, your new name?", to which I replied, "yes, as in Revelation 2." We couldn't believe it, he understood. He, his wife (who was on the next table already talking to one of our wives) and their daughter were from Brazil and they were believers, looking for a group to join who would go out on the streets to witness with. We have since connected with them, and are really looking forward to getting to know them, as we talk to so many Brazilian students where we are. Walking, doing, while listening to the Spirit. When he leads, the conversations are meaningful.

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As we've already decided, it takes time to move into a deep relationship with God. Few ever take the time. It is for me, a huge challenge. Slow down enough to spend time with him. Yet, without it we will be less effective than we might be.

The beauty of it all... is that we can bring Christ into our everyday world... all we need is to listen to him and to act on what he prompts us.

We are likely to miss those opportunities that only he can point out, because only he knows the hearts of each of us.

The beauty of it all – aside from a deep and intimate relationship with the Saviour though, is that we can bring Christ into our everyday world. There is no magic or mystique, we don't need to be a famous preacher, or a 'known personality' in church circles, neither do we need to have all our theology correct and accounted for; all we need is to listen to him and to act on what he prompts us.

Walking in the Spirit of Christ, bringing Jesus into our world right where we are. Available to every believer in him.

Fabulous isn't it.



Michael and Sally Butler lead a gathering in Sydney, Manly Disciple Makers. These are people who want to move out into the world and follow Jesus' command to "go and make disciples."

As a group, they go out most weekends onto the streets of Manly and preach and share the Gospel with anyone the Lord leads them to. Along the way, they have had hundreds of conversations with Muslims, atheists, agnostics and believers who have lost their faith. They pray, preach, heal and deliver all manner of people, hoping to introduce people to the reality of Jesus.

At the moment, the Lord has led their gathering to 2 groups in particular; a housing commission block and a growing group of believers who are inactive in their faith but want more. You can read of some of the adventures on nobrokenreed.org or get in touch at justbutlers@gmail.com



WHO CAN YOU SHARE THIS WITH?

Four key possibilities....

I want to start a simple church/home church or grow an existing one - who can I share with and invite along?

We need to be connecting regularly with people not yet connected to Jesus. Sometimes simple church groups looking to grow, or people looking to start and to multiply, just wonder where to start.

For the Spirit led Christian it begins with a passion and eagerness to share Jesus wherever possible. We are then seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit who prompts us when to speak and for the right words to say. Jesus himself said "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it." John 12:49. Jesus said he only did "what he sees the Father doing." John

5:19. As we go about our activities at work, shopping, recreation, or just meeting people unexpectedly, we can be led to listen and to share our experience with Jesus as he prompts us to. We can also pray for and intentionally focus our attention in connecting with four major groups of people:

1. Our Oikos. This is our family and friends, and people in our relational network. It includes extended family, work associates and even some social media contacts - Facebook etc. They are a natural place to start telling our stories and experience with Jesus. This is reflected in Jesus instruction to the demon possessed man from the Gerasenes area to "go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you...." Mark 5:19. Sometimes we reach a place where, once we have
(Continued on page 7)

FROM MONUMENT TO MOVEMENT..

Metaphorically speaking

Metaphors and symbols are not just used to illustrate an idea; they actually contain the very idea they are meant to convey. They are much more effective means of communication than the more discursive logical forms of language.

Metaphors and stories not only speak to the mind; they also capture the heart, mind, and will all at once. But the trick is that in order to unlock the ideas that metaphors convey one must activate and engage the imagination. To those of us trained in rationalist thinking, this seems strange, but in the logic of the Bible, stories, metaphors, and images don't have less truth than abstract propositions; *they have more truth.*

You can be sure Jesus did not proliferate metaphors just to make the Bible more palatable to kids; rather, he was offering us multiple new ways in which to reimagine ourselves, our tasks, and our purpose in the world. These metaphors are concentrated visions/paradigms of what we can and must be to be faithful to God.^[1] And importantly for movemental thinking,

because metaphors awaken the imagination, they are our best tool for thinking creatively. New metaphors invite vision and innovation.

Why all this geeky information about metaphors? I offer it because metaphors matter in all things related to leadership and organization. Gareth Morgan says, "Ideas about organization are always based on implicit images or metaphors that persuade us to see, understand, and manage situations in a particular way. . . . The challenge facing [contemporary] leaders is to become accomplished in the art of using metaphor to find new ways of seeing, understanding, and shaping their actions."^[2] Metaphor is also important for us because if we change the primary metaphor, we then see everything in a different light, and behaviors change according to the new perception.

For instance, I currently live in Los Angeles, a city with upward of twenty million people—depending on who is counted. This is almost the same as the entire population of my country, Australia (twenty-four million). The problem with LA is that if you use the metaphors associated with a city, it just does not make any sense

at all: LA has no center or circumference—as someone said, "There seems to be no *there* there." There is no unifying aesthetic, no corporate "personality," as in, say, New York City. And the vast majority of Angelinos certainly don't see downtown LA as their city—in fact, most of them avoid it like the plague. The result is that one never really "arrives" in the city of LA. But instead of viewing LA as a city, if you view LA as a small country (consisting of around forty-five discreet "cities"), then it makes total sense. I now say that I live in the country called LA. Change the terminology and you change the way you perceive and experience things.

The reason why metaphors are powerful descriptors is that they filter and define reality in a simple fashion (for example, "Richard is a lion," "the brain is a computer," or "organizations are machines"). Even simple words like *amoeba*, *beehive*, *fort*, and *cookie cutter* provide clues as to how people see and experience paradigms in relationship to organizations. For instance, if I said that such-and-such church was an elephant, what images come to mind? What if I had used the term *starfish*? Each metaphor will convey different

information about reproductive capacities, mobility, strength, wisdom, personality, courage, and so on. Identifying the metaphors thus offers significant clues about where to focus the efforts at shifting the paradigm. And what is more, change the metaphor, and you change the imagination ^[3]

Taking this further: If I suggest that the *church is a religious institution*, what images come to mind? Normally the “institution” metaphor carries the associated imagery of buildings, stability, stalwart solidity, budgets, programs, policies, staffing and volunteers, hierarchical organization, and so on. But if I simply change the metaphor and suggest that the *church is a movement*, it ushers in a whole new way of seeing the same reality. The lens or paradigm has changed. What seemed familiar now is recognized in a new light. The word “movement” invites you to see the church as more fluid, message based, adaptive, high energy, vital, and so on. We are forced to rethink everything in the light of that term.^[4] That is why I always tell would-be church planters: don’t plant

churches—because *you think you know* exactly what they are—plant movements instead! Planting a movement involves an almost completely different agenda than planting a church!

If we are to awaken Apostolic Genius and to recover the dynamic of the outstanding transformational movements in history, then we must flip the dominant metaphor from the essentially static-institutional ones that dominate our ecclesiology to the more dynamic organic-movemental ones. By changing the metaphor to that of organic images and movements, *everything* changes. You have to live the metaphor to enter the paradigm. Begin with a different image/metaphor in mind, and you will end up with a very different organization. Enhance movement thinking by informing yourself and the organization about the nature of movements, start using movement metaphors throughout, and everything will begin to adjust accordingly.

^[4]*The Bible writers (Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Paul, John, etc.) were all prolific users of image and metaphor. When Paul repeatedly uses the metaphor of the church being the body of Christ, for instance, we are*

meant to directly experience what he is referring to.

^[4]A recent Seth Godin post sums up the power of metaphors rather poetically: “The best way to learn a complex idea is to find it living inside something else you already understand. ‘This,’ is like, ‘that.’ An amateur memorizes. A professional looks for metaphors. It’s not a talent, it’s a practice. When you see a story, an example, a wonderment, take a moment to look for the metaphor inside. Lessons are often found where we look for them.”



ALAN HIRSCH is the founding director of [Forge Mission Training Network](#). Currently he co-leads [Future Travelers](#), an innovative learning program helping

megachurches become missional movements. Known for his innovative approach to mission, Alan is considered to be a thought-leader and key mission strategist for churches across the Western world. He currently co-blogs with Neil Cole on [100movements.org](#)

This article was taken from the new edition of *The Forgotten Ways*

WHO CAN I SHARE (Cont. from page 5) shared Jesus with this circle of family and friends and find that some are open and others are not, we then need to expand and connect with new relational networks.

2. Kingdom Hubs. These are projects and involvement in the local community that bring the blessing of the Kingdom of God to people. As we love, care and share in the wider community it brings contacts and connections with people. We can listen to people’s concerns and needs and show how Jesus can help. For example we can pray for people experiencing heightened anxiety and stress and ask Jesus to bring His peace into their lives. We have found a number of these type of opportunities to pray for people and talk of Jesus in a community project we are currently involved, with so I know personally how effective this can be. It can be such a natural way to connect and share.

3. Incarnational Living. This is following the example of Jesus who entered into our world and lived and ministered to the lives of ordinary people who needed healing, deliverance and the hope found in the Gospel. This approach involves us in joining new people groups and activities, eg. sailing or mountain climbing, photography, sewing groups, school based parent groups, sports, bird watching, surfing - the list is almost endless. The key is linking your hobby and passion areas with connecting with people. As we build relationships opportunities surface to listen to people’s needs and heart concerns and to then share how knowing Jesus is the “good news.”

4. Walk up contact – street work. This could involve knocking on doors and offering to pray with people for needs etc. This takes courage and boldness and a readiness to receive various responses. It also requires interacting with many people in order to find the few who are spiritual open. It can be a bit of hit and miss, but

has also led to many people being touched by God and so should not be discounted. One family goes out every week in Sydney onto the streets in Manly doing this work of contacting people. They have been led to meet some people who are receptive.

In each of the above groups of people we are asking the Holy Spirit to lead us to the person of peace who we can then work with and with their “oikos” or relational connections. If we have worked through our oikos and networks then its time to connect with people in new relational networks, maybe options 2 or 3 or 4.

In it all we can ask Jesus to prompt us each day with the right words for the right person at the right time.... As we pray and seek connection and opportunities we will see Gods blessing – and growth!

PHIL BROWN



THE OIKOS 2016 DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Phil Brown reports on a busy year as Director of Oikos Australia.

This year has been a significant year for Oikos with an emphasis on establishing new regional coordinators, updating communication tools such as the Website and for meeting with leaders and new contacts.

The National conference was a key event for teaching and connecting. The regional Coordinators and others have been involved in reaching out and discipling new people and establishing simple churches. Some of this is reflected in the regional reports that have come in. The following is a summary of the activities I was involved in and of key events.

ADELAIDE JUNE 2016

A June invite to Adelaide included a meeting of approx 25 plus people in which vision and stories were shared plus an outline of the 7 commands of Christ for making disciples.

Kate and I spent Sunday and Monday visiting and meeting with key leaders including Bruce & Sally Bennie (Oikos Regional Coordinators) and Paul and Libby Whetham who have developed the "lifeboat resources" and run a *Soul café* outreach. Libby is also reaching out to muslim woman refugees.

We also met with Craig Jopovich, Adrian and Peter Steiche, leaders of the

Starfish network. I then visited with Greg who runs a missional community and has bought a boarding house for ministry purposes. All appreciated and valued the training, ideas, time shared together and relationships developed. It was helpful to Bruce, as the new regional coordinator, to meet the other leaders. Further training and support would be helpful. They are keen for further contact.

We also visited the *Cornerstone* "mini muster" gathering at Bendigo in Victoria. This rural based missional network has been going for some 30 years and includes missional communities at Swan Hill, Wagga, Newcastle and other locations. They run discipling courses for students and have a deep level of community engagement and unique expression of Christian community. It was both inspiring and helpful to establish contact with this network.

In October Bruce Bennie organized another regional gathering in Adelaide. He reports that the fellowship was excellent and new people were connected with. Some leaders from the Starfish network were also able to attend.

THE OIKOS NATIONAL CONFERENCE Aug 26-28, 2016 (Burleigh Heads QLD)

Approximately 85-90 people attended the Conference (some were day attendees) from Friday night to Sunday lunch time at the CYC camp at Burleigh Heads. The Conference focused on Spiritual Transformation and Movements.

Peter Rhoennfeldt was the key note speaker along with Stuart Gramenz, and Rudy & Julie from PIPES (Partners In Prayer and Evangelism) with a focus on Prayer. Stuart's experience in evangelism in Australia was very practical – if not challenging.

There were people attending from the Gold Coast, SE, central and northern Queensland, SA, Vic NSW and ACT. Attendees included core Oikos leaders and families plus many new people. They are all seeking to make disciples and grow simple churches. Some are finding that it is a challenge to reach new people and most need encouragement, equipping and connectedness. Teaching sessions were followed with workshops and times for sharing Kingdom stories. There were also some amazing prayer results with some experiencing healing. This has resulted in further Gospel sharing when they returned home.

Following the Conference regional coordinators have committed to regular prayer walking in their areas, praying for the area to be open to the Gospel, for "people of peace", and seeking guidance



Stuart and Mary Gramenz

in what God is doing. Secondly they have committed to establishing at least one new second generation simple church in their areas. There has been a largely positive response to the Conference.

We are grateful to the Crossing for supporting this missional training and equipping endeavor.

ON THE WAY HOME

Brisbane

While in Queensland we were able to stay with regional leaders Paul and Annette Land who have been involved in reaching out to street people and others for some time in the Brisbane area. They face the challenge of other Christians with different agendas attending, and caring for high needs people in their group. We were able to consider needs, encourage etc

Valla Beach (near Coffs Harbour) We visited and stayed overnight with Andrew and Anna and family and spent time listening to their needs and their heart to grow a missional community where they live. They are finding it difficult to establish a group and to find people who are interested. We explored some possibilities together.

Manly Sydney

In North Sydney we met on the Friday night with Michael and Sally Butler and a group of approximately 10 people. One member of the group had just experienced his father passing away, so wasn't able to come. One younger couple who witness on the streets, praying for people, have experienced people being healed. One couple is seeking to live sacrificially with part time work to focus on spreading the gospel and had shared Jesus with another couple who have accepted Christ. In turn they have shared at a wedding with their family from England, and his brother and others are now Christians! The group leaders go out most weeks onto the streets at Manly to meet and reach new people. Others are networking with new groups of young people in order to share the Gospel. We spent Saturday with the Sally and Michael and their family, talking, praying and sharing.

Glenbrooke (Sydney)

We visited a great couple who have run a simple church group for a number of

years. We had not met them before this time. Currently they are linking with a larger established church, but are developing a missional group with some people connected to the church and are reaching out to others in their area. They agreed to support people interested in Oikos in the area.

Goulburn. We met Glenis who, with her family, is part of a small home church. They seek to reach others with door knocking and community service. Kate and I spent time, listening, encouraging, suggesting possibilities and invited her to the Canberra equipping time which she drove down to be part of. Their needs are connectedness and reaching and discipling new people.

Canberra

Wayne Crockford, the Oikos Regional Coordinator, is trying to establish a new missional group and so invited various friends to the meeting. Approximately 15 people plus our family were part of this connecting and equipping time. People were at various stages in their journey; the majority were mature people.

I shared the 7 core discipling Commands of Jesus and the discipling process. Some were challenged and confronted by this discussion. Most are involved in regular churches but some are searching for something more. A high level public servant is considering moving and starting a home church. Ted and Rosalie (retired accountant in the public service) are part of a group that holds weekly ESL lessons for foreign students in Canberra. They invite these students on Thursday nights to a Bible discussion in their home.

Those who are catching the vision need further support in growing new groups. Those connected to established churches were challenged in how to be more missional and to focus on disciple making.

REFLECTION

The travel and visiting over 13 days enabled us to connect, share vision, encourage, train and equip; to further build relationships for further mission together. The vision of disciple-making and generational multiplication of simple churches is an essential component of future growth. It also has given me a clearer picture of what the challenges are,



Celebrating Phil's birthday in Canberra with family and Wayne Crockford (behind the camera)

and where future equipping, training and practice is needed.

NEW REGIONAL COORDINATORS

This year we have a number of new regional coordinators, which are important to foster and support groups in their areas.

- Sydney – Sally Butler
- Wagga Wagga – Lindsay Hoile
- Canberra – Wayne Crockford
- Melbourne NE - Roger Donnelley
- Adelaide -Bruce Bennie
- Capricorn Coast – Andrew King
- Albury/Wodonga - Ngaire Booth

NEW MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

Roger's simple church has planted a Second Generation group in the Heidelberg area of Melbourne. Wayne has developed a new group in Canberra

WEBSITE

A new Oikos website has been created in an endeavor to continue to attract people to simple church and communicate effectively in a relevant manner. We have also begun to use CRM, a tool that will help us collect and communicate more effectively with contacts and people interested in simple church. We have sent out 2 newsletters with one more planned before the end of the year.

SPECIAL VIDEO SERIES

The "disciples toolbox" is a 13 part video series that we have developed, introducing people to key concepts in making disciples and growing simple churches. Check them out on the new Oikos website.

SPECIAL EDITION OF THE MAGAZINE

A special free extended edition of the Oikos Magazine has also been printed this year and has been well received – one church leader from Adelaide took 100 copies. Check the website to order a bundle.



REGIONAL GOALS 2017

Hearing from God, Prayer Walking and looking for people of peace.

1. Prayer Mapping

We want to take up the challenge to pray through every village and suburb across the OIKOS communities and send out travelling workers to plant missional groups in them. Part of that will be the plotting of towns and suburbs and believing for a group in that town. We will find a map and begin to plot our impact on social media, web & e-news.

2. Second Generation Groups

We want to take up the challenge to seeing Second Generational Groups (the birthing of second groups out of a parent group) established in our current areas.

3. Regional and State Gatherings

We will look at running a number of regional gatherings in 2017.

NEXT YEAR AND THE FUTURE

As I reflect and pray I see four key challenges for Oikos to work towards with Gods' blessing.

1. Firstly we need to establish more simple churches, as often requests are received and we don't have contacts or groups in some locations. We are praying for coordinators in Tasmania . WA, and Northern NSW. There are some possibilities. Please pray for God to raise up laborers from the harvest.

2. The second challenge is to see the multiplication of disciple makers and simple churches in each area. This coming year we are believing in faith to see the establishment of at least one new second generation simple church in each region. We are praying for movements to begin.

3. Thirdly we wish to see each simple churches strengthened, growing and vibrant as we listen to God and see him working supernaturally and powerfully. Our God is the God of miracles!

4. Finally, we wish to see an increase in effective communication. This includes raising the

awareness of other Christians regarding missional communities and disciple making. We wish to see the Oikos magazine subscriptions and circulation increase significantly, along with people interacting with the website and Facebook and blog .

NSW South Coast Region Report!

By Ailsa Matesic

In a nutshell, this year has been like no other. This year i have found myself, with Cris or my daughter or somebody, travelling more. Visiting others, staying with them for the purpose of connecting and encouraging and equipping, where we can. This has taken me/us, not only on more trips along the South Coast, which honestly is a blessing and not too hard to take at all.. As well as inland. This is small beginnings as I still have commitments with my personal family each day. For this reason, we also recently initiated a once a month NSW Cuppa and Skype.

This year we have felt prompted to invest more time in seeking God, not only personally but with others who genuinely have this same conviction. This has resulted the beginnings of many connections and some developing relationships with the Body of Christ in our region and beyond. Giving us a more realistic picture of where the Church is at, and the great things God is doing with/through people who will humble themselves and seek His face. We are thankful that there is definitely an increase of this in the South Coast Region! We are also very thankful that we see more of an openness and reception for what God is doing with the "organic"

part of His Church, which allows us to partner in a wider way without compromising our convictions. South Coast Region (SCR) pioneers continue to invest prayer and GO into local schools, workplaces, playgroups, streets, shopping malls, neighbours etc We continue to spur one another on to BE AMONG THE PEOPLE! To be Jesus in our words, actions, praying for the sick etc. Responses and opportunities mostly coming from young people.

Because our networks have broadened we also are having more opportunities to host travelling men and women with gifts the Lord is using to mature His Church. eg. Recently having Frank from Empty Hospitals, gifted in Evangelism and healing, hosted in Cambewarra, near Nowra. Fiona Brown opened her home to about 25 people including about 6 from South Coast (OIKOS). SCR aim to gather more for this purpose.

We have so much to look forward to in our region and in this nation! Especially in the area of prayer.. where everything of God is birthed! We are excited to be a part of and in a small way welcome Jason Hubbard and team who are doing a prayer tour throughout our nation. As well as be involved with The National Day of Prayer on 26th February and the 40 days of Prayer in Worship March 1- April 9. Only this morning Destiny and I were on the beach sharing our stories on video.

We strongly urge everyone to leave the shore .. ride the wave of Gods presence, it may be small at the moment but its building into something big and beautiful! It is the most thrilling and fulfilling ride! Because it IS GOD!

Catch you on it!



Destiny with the kids at Burley Heads

OUR SIMPLE CHURCH JOURNEY

Ken & Beryl Seeley
ADELAIDE



Ken and Beryl Seeley from Adelaide tell their story.

Our journey towards simple church began more than 20 years ago when we were attending a local Baptist church. The home group we were leading developed into something much more than just a home group - most of the people who came along began to talk about a New Testament model of home based church that could be more effective in the community if we didn't have to 'go to' church. We approached the 'church elders' and asked for their blessing so that we could continue to be a 'ministry of the church'. Sadly, they reacted angrily and told us we were being 'divisive', so we didn't proceed but chose to 'be obedient' to the leaders. As the years went by we realised we had made a big mistake but felt we had missed the opportunity.

After we retired in 2014, we were able to go overseas on the 4 month holiday we had promised ourselves. During this time of travelling without the pressures of running a business, we found ourselves experiencing God's presence

so much more than we had for many years – and yet we hadn't 'gone to church'! It became very clear to us that we couldn't go back to being trapped into 'going to' church and that we wanted to BE the church and go 'to the people'. We wondered how that was going to play out – how would we actually be able to make contact and get to know new people so that we could share our faith.

Prior to going on our long holiday we had been running marriage courses for the church we had been attending. We wondered if our move away from structured church would put an end to running the courses but not so – we were contacted by a lady who had done the course, asking if she could refer a relative to us. Several more couples have contacted us 'out of the blue' and about 20 couples have completed the course with us, several who are not (yet) Christians. Throughout the course we often mention that our faith in Jesus has been the significant strength in our own marriage of 53 years. At the end of the course we always give people the option of talking to us if they would like to know more about the Christian faith.

A couple of months ago we were surprised to receive an email from Michelle, another lady who had completed the course, saying that she wanted to be baptised. Ken replied at once saying that he would be delighted to baptise her but since it was mid-winter it would be a bit cold here in SA to use an outdoor pool or the sea. After having coffee with her it was clear she didn't want to wait until summer and because she wanted to invite family and friends, using a domestic bathroom was out of the question. Ken promised to find a solution for her, so he approached the local swimming centre. The manager was very helpful and offered us the exclusive use of one lane for an hour

on a Saturday afternoon – for just \$30. Doing the baptism in such a public place was fantastic – both staff and other people using the pool were inquisitive and asking questions. Ken used the opportunity to explain the reason for baptism and read a few verses from the New Testament. We were able to talk about our faith to Michelle's family as we enjoyed a simple lunch back at Michelle & Gary's house afterwards.

Yet another amazing opportunity was to be asked by one of our daughters if we would be willing to have a friend stay with us for 8 weeks. The young lady lives in Perth and is studying nursing externally through Uni SA. She had to be here for a hospital placement and would otherwise have needed to stay in motels. Towards the end of her 8 weeks she began to ask questions about our faith and shortly before she left we were able to lead her in a prayer of repentance and begin her faith journey.

Soon afterwards, we attended the Oikos Gathering and at breakfast on Saturday morning we happened to share a table with Peter Rhoennfeldt. We shared with him that we were quite concerned about sending her out into the world as a 'baby Christian'. Peter reminded us that the Ethiopian Eunuch had also been sent out to fend for himself without even the benefit of the New Testament – and apparently he was the founder of the entire Ethiopian church. Obviously God planned for us to sit at that table!

We had a fantastic time at the Gathering and we were encouraged and inspired by all of the speakers and everyone we chatted to. We are excited to see what else God has planned for us to do as we continue this exciting journey doing life with Him - simple church style!

KEN & BERYL SEELEY



Beware the

Josh Lawton

HOMOGENIZATION of church life



There is always a temptation for small groups of Christians who meet in their homes to become insular and ingrown. This can even happen with “organic” churches that come together around an epic vision of Christ as all in all.

I know, because I’ve been there. For three years I was part of an intimate gathering of believers who struck out beyond the pale of institutional Christianity in search of life together in Christ. While we did discover a deeper fellowship than anything we’d experienced in traditional church, we also ran up against the roadblock of spiritual homogenization.

Homogenize: To form by blending unlike elements; to make uniform or similar, as in composition or function

Spiritual homogenization occurs when utopian visions of church life eclipse your view of the people right in front of

you. You fall in love with your idea of the church more than the church itself and as a result you begin to exclude, if only subconsciously, those who don’t fit your mould. It is a form of idolatry that leads to paralyzed growth and ultimately a sterile testimony.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”

One example of spiritual homogenization is when people move from all parts of the country to be together and yet never attempt to get to know their neighbor who already lives across the street. Such sacrifice is noble, and it is born out of real spiritual hunger for community, yet if the same drive is not compelling a person to build relationships with the people already

surrounding him, that community of non-natives will always have a touch of artificiality to it.

The group I was part of struggled to stay out of this trap but we were not always successful. And we lost opportunities for fellowship with other Christians and service to non-Christians because of it.

THE PROBLEM: SECTARIANISM

The problem is that we humans are so darn sectarian. We like to spend time with other people who think, feel, and look just like we do; this makes us feel better about ourselves. Such tribalism may be a necessary aspect of human interaction and life in this world, but if we can’t transcend our natural divisions in Christ, what have we really been saved from?

When it comes to church life, the danger lies in wanting to spend all your time only with those who share your specialized vision of ekklesia to the

neglect of the existing community around you, most of whom don't "get it" like you and your special friends do.

I'm telling you, I've seen this happen with far too many groups and I've experienced it myself: When you begin to care more for a particular ideal, movement, or -ism than you do for the Lord Himself

who is at work in many wonderful and mysterious ways in people of all shapes and sizes, He will be obliged to deliver you from your idolatry by smashing your wish-dream into a thousand little pieces.

And He won't apologize for the mess, either.

Regardless of how it plays out, one of two things will happen to a church that suffers from chronic spiritual homogenization: Either that assembly will come to nothing (mercifully so, I might add), or it will wilt away into irrelevance as a spiritual force and cease to have any real impact on principalities and powers.

There is a third option, however, that can lead to recovery, if you are willing to get off the couch and serve someone.

THE SOLUTION: SERVICE

In Luke 14:15-24 Jesus tells a story about a man who made a feast and sent out invitations for people to come. Evidently these were the "friends, family, and rich neighbors" Jesus had warned his own patron about two verses earlier (see 14:12, 13).

"All things are ready," he told them, "come to the feast." But one by one they made excuse as to why they could not make it, so the table was spread but the seats were empty. The work was finished, but those bidden had better things to do. Angry, the master sent his servants to bring in "the poor and crippled and blind and lame" from the city streets. "Go and compel them to come in, that my



house may be filled," he said. And it was so.

Now, to the church whose corporate pulse has begun to slow due to the debilitating effects of spiritual homogenization, might I recommend the same course of action?

Maybe you've been calling out for the world to "come and see" your dazzling expression of Christ when what you need to do is "go and compel" them to come in (there is a season for both, you know). If your group is anything like mine was, you know how frustrating it can be at times to have the table spread full of spiritual riches and no one in the seat next to you with which to share them.

You may chalk this up to the inevitable notion that you are God's remnant in the earth and that others out there just don't get it like you do. So you turn more and more inward, brushing aside the needs of those around you as you tinker with new and better ways to meet, seeking God for higher revelation and deeper community among a dwindling number of people who are looking more and more alike with each passing day.

GO OUTSIDE YOUR CIRCLE

Face it: Yonder shores of church life utopia are a myth. Your illusory expectations are preventing the very experience of community you seek. By all means, keep assembling with those who share your hearts' hunger—stir each other up every chance you get—but realize that in order to find what you seek you will also need to look for it outside that small circle of friends in whom you think God is most likely to

move. You will need to go out in service to the poor, the blind, the crippled, and lame, whether or not they ever darken the doorstep of your meeting in return.

Not only do the poor have needs which the Body of Christ is called to meet, but they hold treasures of God's Life that will answer your own hunger for spiritual reality. I can't explain

the mechanics of this but it's true: Christ has hidden Himself within the needy and destitute—they are Jesus in disguise (see Matthew 25). It is easy to get lost in philosophical and theological pursuits, frantically seeking the knowledge of God. But Christ is so easy to find in service to and solidarity with the "least of these."

In addition, the dispossessed and disadvantaged of the earth are not so busy with "stuff" that they have no time for fellowship. The kingdom of God belongs to the poor because it is usually only those in the margins who are conscious enough of their need to receive it.

So if it seems the well is running dry, try reaching out to touch your Lord in a homeless person on the street or prisoner at the local jail. Listen to what he has to say and minister to his needs. Forego your meeting and get your hands dirty for a change. You may be surprised by what you find.



JOSH LAWTON
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Celtic Clues for Missional Communities

In 563 AD an Irish prince set out with a bunch of friends in small coracles (very small boats) to cross the Irish Sea to the wild western coast and islands of what is now Scotland. The purpose of the highly dangerous journey was 'Mission', to take the gospel to the fierce pagan tribes of Scotland and northern England. He and his companions set up a base on the small island of Iona, and from there over the next 35 years developed a missional network. His name was Columba.

As we struggle in the mission of the gospel to the pagan tribes of our own 21st century society (and make no mistake we live in a pagan land), we do well to reacquaint ourselves with the mission of Columba, for to do so is to go back to the Celtic past to find clues for our own missional future.

The mission strategies and methods of Columba give the lie to the so often frozen imaginations and assumptions of many Christians that how we do church and local mission is the way it has always been done and must be done. For Columba's methods, and the resulting establishment of Christianity in the pagan world of Scotland and northern England, bear almost no resemblance to the way 'Church' is done for most Christians today, and almost certainly have some lessons for small group/house churches today.

Columba's strategy was to send out small groups who established huts among their pagan neighbours. They then sought to attract people to the gospel by their way of life, by their care for all, and by the preaching and practice of their faith. Indeed there are parallels between the way they practiced the

Christian faith and the description of first church Jerusalem we see in Acts 2:42-47.

A note of caution however! The 'house churches' of the New Testament were quite different from many house churches today that meet inside a closed building so that no-one outside really knows what is going on. In contrast, the 'house churches' of the New Testament met in buildings with no glass in the windows and which were very close together, that is if they didn't meet in open courtyards. So all the neighbours could both hear and see much of what those 'weird' Christians were up to when their fellowships met. Thus the house fellowships of the early church were very visible fellowships.

So what clues for our own mission can be gleaned from Columba? Columba's context was to do mission to 'pagan tribes'. That is our context and challenge also but the contemporary church (Australian anyway) appears to find this fact hard to grasp.

the house fellowships of the early church were very visible fellowships

The Celtic mission strategy was not to try to 'drag' pagans into sizeable 'church' centres but to embed small missional, very visible faith communities within the pagan society.

These communities were regularly observable by local people who could see how Christian communities operated, and also this provided opportunities for engagement, showing God's love in practical ways and sharing the gospel. Columba's communities were highly flexible and mobile and would move according to the dictates of the mission.



Something our generally building-centric models are certainly not designed for, and we should ask the question as to how flexible and adaptable are even our simple churches in order to change according to the needs of the gospel?

Columba's missional groups intentionally and seriously impacted the community around them. Do ours?

The setting up of such missional communities was difficult and required sacrificial commitment, indeed the commitment indicated for disciples when Jesus said that if anyone wants to be his disciple then "Let him deny himself and take up his cross". (Matthew 16:24) Remember that in Jesus time for someone to take up their cross meant they were going to be crucified.

The Celtic Christians developed one of the great and most effective missional movements in church history. It was a small community missional network built on flexibility, visibility, risk and sacrifice. If we are prepared to open our minds and explore their methods for 'Pagan Mission' they may helpfully provide a lens through which we can examine our own faith communities, and so contribute to the missional challenges of our simple, alternative churches in 21st century Australian society.

MARTIN BRAGGER
(Wollongong)



RAISING THE BAR Of DISCIPLESHIP

Maurice Smith



I've often wondered, if Jesus was walking the streets of America today, where would He look for disciples?

As Christians, we assume He would want to recruit from our Church. Maybe even plug in to our discipleship class. After all, He couldn't help but be impressed with the workbook and DVD series we're going through. Right? Well . . . probably not. Personally, I think that in His quest to find potential disciples, Jesus would stop in at the local men's shelter. OK, I'm biased. Because that's where I met Carl and the gang. And that, of course, requires a story.

At the time, Gale and I were serving on the Board of a local men's shelter. I had finished the first edition of our discipleship book *And They Dreamt of a Kingdom*. I invited several men in the shelter to join me on Saturday mornings. I would cook breakfast and afterward we would go through the book together, chapter by chapter. And, yes, in case you were wondering, ten men could easily plough through four pounds of bacon, three dozen eggs and a couple dozen pancakes (and still ask "Is there any more?")!

It was an "eclectic" group, to say the least. An atheist (whom I once called on to open in prayer. We both got a good chuckle out of it), a couple of sex offenders, a couple of homeless Vietnam vets (one of whom was in our shelter because he had "mooned" the staff of the previous shelter where he had been staying - gotta love these guys!), and other assorted homeless guys. And you thought your house church was a challenging handful! And then there was Carl, a recently released ex-felon with a wry sense of humor. Very few things slipped past Carl. During one of our discipleship studies, he asked a question that cut to the heart of contemporary discipleship. "*Maurice, do you enjoy talking above our heads,*" he asked with a wry grin. "*You see, I don't think*

so," Carl continued, "*I believe you're trying to get us to think more.*" Like I said, very few things got past Carl. In a single question and observation, Carl had summarized both the goal of my discipleship book and the challenge of contemporary efforts to make disciples.

I can only speak for myself out of my own experience, so my perspective and sphere of reference is admittedly limited. But from what I have personally witnessed in my 40+ year sojourn as a disciple of the Kingdom, my conclusion is that we do people around us a tremendous disservice by dumbing them down. We spoon-feed people "reduced fat" truth in the hope of making biblical truth more palatable. We put it on DVDs because we think people need to be entertained. We put it into fill-in-the-blank workbooks because we think they need it "simplified." But the end result is a generation of professing believers who are unable to "think beyond the spoon," or the workbook. Don't believe me? Then you missed out on the whole Bill Gothard video presentation/workbook craze. Trust me. I was there. As a church, we love this kind of stuff, in the mistaken belief that it somehow produces multiplying disciples. It doesn't.

In our attempt to quickly produce "reproducing disciples" we ask what are the bare essentials we need to teach them in order to "equip" them to become "disciple-makers." What we actually produce are nominal believers who scarcely understand what it means to BE a disciple of the Kingdom, much less how to pass their faith on in a meaningful way by sowing the seed of discipleship and the Kingdom into the lives of others. As my ex-felon padawan disciple, Carl, observed, it's time to think. It's time to raise the bar of discipleship to where Jesus placed it.

Discipleship in the school of Jesus and the Kingdom was not unlike the high jump bar or (Continued on page 17)

9 Ever-Present Distractions



that keep us from FULLY LIVING

Joshua Becker

Our world is becoming increasingly filled with distraction. Information moves faster, louder, and brighter than ever before. Entertainment, social media, and marketing have never been so prevalent. They beg for our attention and our focus. In so doing, our minds are diverted from more important work.

We would be wise to adopt principles that help us live less distracted.

However, these distractions are easy to notice. We readily admit that we spend too much time checking e-mail, watching television, or playing games on our phone. After all, the battle plays out in front of us each day.

Far more detrimental to our lives are the subtle distractions that quietly surround us. They are not announced with blinking lights or beeping sounds. In fact, they have become so commonplace and ever-present, we hardly even notice their existence.

But these distractions take residence in our mind and wreak havoc on our pursuits. And in the end, they keep us from living our lives to their greatest potential.

Consider this list of 9 ever-present distractions that often keep us from fully living. And recognize if any have taken residence in your heart.

1. The Promise of Tomorrow. Joshua Glenn Clark said it like this, *"We waste so many days waiting for the weekend. So many nights wanting morning. Our lust for future comfort is the biggest thief of life."* It is not entirely foolish to look toward the future and plan accordingly. However, when we endure our days only for the sake of tomorrow (the weekend, the vacation, or the retirement), we miss out on the full beauty and potential of the present.

2. The Pursuit of Perfection. We ought to pursue excellence and pride in all we do. Our next step forward should be the right next step and it should be taken with as much intention as possible. But *doing our best* and *achieving perfection* are rarely the same. When perfection becomes the goal,

it becomes the enemy of progress—and in this way, it often distracts us from taking the essential risk of moving forward.

3. The Regret of Yesterday. To live is to experience regret—nobody escapes life unscathed. We regret our actions, our decisions, and our motivations. But no amount of regret can ever change the past and only those who have come to recognize and admit their imperfections are able to move beyond them. Call your mistakes what they are, offer an apology when necessary, and then move on. Don't allow regret from the past to negatively distract from opportunity in the present.

4. The Accumulation of Possessions. The things we own require our time, our energy, our money, and our attention. Every increased possession adds increased stress in our lives. And yet, we continue to pursue and accumulate more and more and more. But more is not the answer. More has become the distraction.

5. The Desire for Wealth. Those who chase riches have misplaced their greatest potential and traded it to the

highest bidder. Our lives were designed for contribution—to provide a positive impact on society for ourselves, our families, and those who live in community with us. Sometimes, our contribution provides financial excess. Other times, it does not. But either way, when our contribution to society becomes chiefly motivated by a selfish desire to accumulate riches, it has become self-focused. And we have lost our opportunity to live it to the fullest.

6. The Need for Notoriety. The life you live is the life you live regardless if anybody notices or not. Those who live lives focused on the need to be recognized for it are usually the first to take shortcuts to get there. Instead, find significance in the eyes of those who know you best—because in the end, that is all that matters anyway.

7. The Pull of Comparison. It seems, by nature, we feel compelled to compare our lives to the people around us. We compare our belongings, our appearance, our families, and our successes. But each time we do, we place our focus and energy on the wrong person. Comparing yourself to others will always cause you to regret what you are not, rather than allow you to enjoy and grow who you are.

8. The Appeal of Pleasure. Many of us are led astray by the appeal and pursuit of pleasure. “Why not?” we might ask, “what is wrong with the pursuit of pleasure?” And I might even agree, at least to a point. But here’s the problem, pleasure is a terrible teacher. The most significant lessons we learn in life are rarely received during times of pleasure. Instead, they are born out of pain. I am not contending that we should seek pain in our lives. But I am contending a life lived chiefly for the pursuit of pleasure, will usually seek it in all the wrong places.

9. The Presence of Indifference. The world is a big place and we have much to offer. Those who choose to live life as a victim will always miss their opportunity to give. Additionally, those who choose to adopt an indifference to the world around them will miss out on their greatest potential. But those who recognize need and seek to do something about it, experience a joy and fulfillment that can never be discovered anywhere else.

Our world is full of distraction—the most dangerous are those we do not recognize.

But our fullest potential requires that we notice distraction—and work diligently to overcome it.



JOSHUA BECKER is the Founder and Editor of *Becoming Minimalist*, a website that inspires others to own fewer possessions and find greater fulfillment in life. Based on his thoughtful and intentional approach to minimalism, he is one of the leading voices in the modern simplicity movement reaching over 1 million readers each month and speaking both nationwide and internationally. He is a *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author who has contributed to articles in *TIME* magazine, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *Christianity Today*. He and his young family live in Peoria, AZ.

RAISING THE BAR (Cont from page 15) the pole vault bar in track and field competitions. When was the last time you watched a track and field competition where they lowered the bar until everyone could clear it?! No. The bar is continually raised and made more challenging for those competing. So it is in the discipleship school of Jesus and the Kingdom. In their walk with Jesus, the disciples discovered that the bar of discipleship was constantly being raised, not lowered to accommodate those unwilling to strive. With Jesus, discipleship lessons grew harder and more challenging over time. Faith must become personal, not borrowed, and it must grow as opposed to remaining static. Entrance at the narrow gate requires seeking and striving (Luke 13:24). And "hard sayings" require that disciples choose between turning back or continuing on with Jesus (John 6:60-69). Jesus never taught down to His disciples. On more than one occasion, He taught above their heads (as Carl noted) and insisted that they wrestle with the lesson until they understood it. Why? Because Jesus knew that, in the Kingdom of God, spiritual growth and maturity are the product of spiritual truth experienced over time. For this to happen Jesus insisted that His disciples think, wrestle and grow. Three points and a snappy application (or a poem) were not His forte.

In the discipleship school of Jesus, discipleship is a lifelong journey into the Kingdom of God, punctuated by significant moments and filled with eternal truth which will not fit into a spoon and which requires a lifetime of daily obedience and discovery to fully embrace. It's hard to put that into a PowerPoint slide, or into a 140-character tweet on Twitter.

For all of the Carls among us, it's time to think higher thoughts about our discipleship.

MAURICE SMITH is a writer, a keen radio presenter and the instigator of *Feed Spokane*, a coalition of meal providers and community partners in Spokane, Washington safehousesofhopeandprayer.org.



Review

UNCHURCHING Richard Jacobson

Millions of believers are currently leaving the organized church, without giving up their faith. Sadly, many are only defining themselves by what they don't do, as Christians who simply "don't go to church." It's time for these believers to catch a vision for genuine spiritual community, outside the walls of organized Christianity, a way of being the church without going to church.

Unchurching: Christianity Without Churchianity will challenge everything you thought you knew about church.

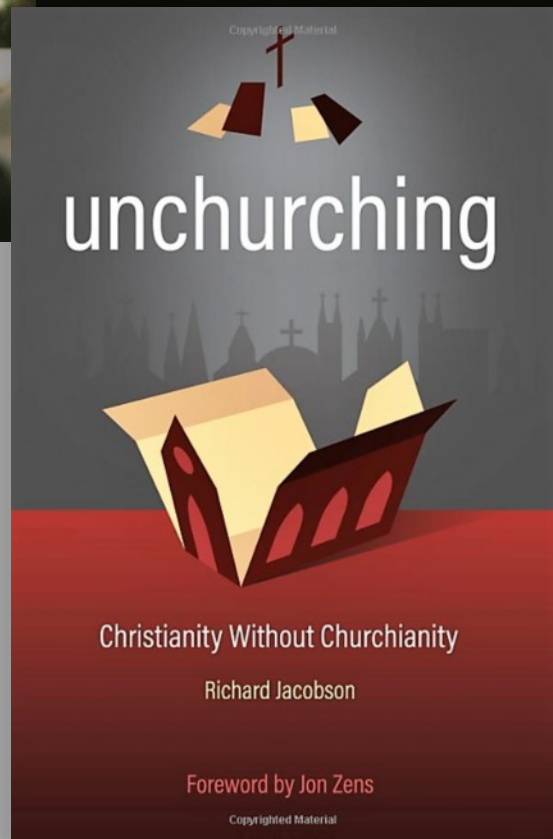
Unchurching boldly examines whether organized churches are even biblical. It thoroughly deconstructs the idea of special church buildings, paid pastors, weekly sermons, mandatory tithes and offerings, gender inequality in church leadership, and much more.

Unchurching is intended to empower believers who are done with organized

church but aren't ready to abandon their faith. It will give non-churchgoing Christians a vision for genuine spiritual community that simply functions like an extended spiritual family. And it will equip them with the language to finally articulate that vision to others.

"Richard Jacobson has been on both sides of this shift and is uniquely qualified to write about it—which he does well, with insight, humility, and scholarship ... Highly recommended." — **Felicity Dale**, author of *An Army of Ordinary People*

"As I read this book I felt my pulse quicken and my heart leap for joy because everything Richard writes about is centered on, around, and in relation to the One who would rather die than live without us." — **Keith Giles**, author of *This Is My Body: Ekklesia As God Intended*



"*Unchurching* will help you capture a vision for a fresh start that is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ ... " — **Jon Zens**, author of *A Church Building Every 1/2 Mile*

AM I IRRELIGIOUS ENOUGH? Bessie Pereira

Do we ask the hard questions of ourselves? Do we search ourselves? Do we ask the "what's", and the "whys", of our beliefs and practices?

One question I ask myself often is, "Am I irreligious - enough?" The tragedy is that many of us never recognise, or worse do not acknowledge, our entanglement in religion. A recent author said, "I look around and see there are those who have grown tired of religion, but are not prepared to jettison the idea of connecting with God."

We even substitute stuff about Him – for Him. I find quite challenging, Paul's words: "That I may know him ..." The invitation in Matt 11:28-30 is to himself, as an alternative to the weary way of religion – to its legalism and demands.

Religion uses rules to force our steps. Religion uses guilt to keep us in line. Religion uses rituals to remind us we have failed to live up to these rules.

The primary mission of Jesus was to tear down religion and replace it with relationship with Himself. The Bible starts with no religion, just a naked uncluttered relationship with God. The Cross has not taken many of us back beyond the Fall, to that kind of relationship.

The first miracle of Jesus is a profoundly irreligious act, as he desecrates a religious icon using religious utensils to hold party juice. That act, it seems to me, was a bit like if today the RE ladies morning tea was laid out on the altar and we gathered around to enjoy – many may be offended.

Matthew 11:28-30 – Is Jesus taking us from holy water to wedding wine? Is Jesus taking us from legalism to life? Is Jesus taking us from religion to relationship?

Matthew 28:30 – "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (The Message)

As we apply those verses, we might even get irreligious – enough!!



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What's Wrong With Organic Church? (Part 7) **Lack of Strong Leadership? Keith Giles**

This criticism of organic church comes from those outside the movement, not from those within. Mainly because the perception of what leadership should look like differs from what most of us have come to expect in the traditional church setting.

When I was a pastor on staff at a traditional church I was seen as a leader. This meant my success was literally measured by how many people were following me and, more importantly, how good I was at getting them to do the things around the church that needed to be done. In my case this was either serving the poor in one of our regular outreach events, teaching Sunday School on Sunday mornings, attending a youth event, or showing up for choir practice.

As a leader I was expected to read books on leadership, to attend pastor conferences where leadership skills could be developed, and to target those in our church who had leadership potential and recruit them for my particular ministry.

In a traditional context, a good leader is charismatic, inspirational, and motivational. He or she is graded on how many people respond to instructions and perform the desired activity.

In an organic church all of this is thrown right out the window. I once described it this way to someone who didn't understand what leadership was like in an organic church. I said, "instead of a top-down, CEO-style leader like we're used to seeing, imagine someone on their knees with a towel around their waist who is washing someone's feet."

Jesus is our model for leadership in the organic church, and frankly it's much, much harder to emulate his example than it is to just take charge and tell everyone what to do.

As someone who spent a few decades learning how to be good at being up front and telling people what to do and think, this new servant model was much more challenging for me. And it still is.

When our house church group first started I used to answer every question that was asked in our share time. Mainly because whenever anyone asked a question every eye would turn to me in expectation. Everyone saw me as the leader, the expert, and I was only too ready to demonstrate my expertise. Partly because this is how I was trained, and partly because I'm a little bit proud and being seen and treated as the resident expert on the Bible made me feel important.

One Sunday morning when one of our members asked a question about a passage we were discussing together I took a different approach. She said, "What does this verse mean?" and instead of answering I sat back and said, "I don't know. Does anyone else here have an idea?" And after that I did everything in my power to give away the spotlight to the rest of the Body.

Usually I allow someone else to play the guitar during our singing times, but lately I'm the only person who feels

comfortable doing this for our group. The problem this created for us was that it put me in the front of the room and after the singing everyone was left staring at me, once again, in expectation of what I was going

to do or say to lead our group. To counteract this I used to play the last song and then, while everyone's eyes were still closed, I would get up and leave the room. When people opened their eyes I wasn't sitting there and it forced the group to take responsibility for the share time without looking to me for guidance. I would only return to the group after I heard them talking from the next room, usually carrying my second cup of coffee, or a book I wanted to read from.

If anything, leadership in a house church context is more about what you don't do and how you facilitate the group to function and grow apart from your constant oversight. There have even been meetings where I'm not even there! Usually those are the best meetings of all, I say.

Leadership as Jesus modelled for us was not top down, it was bottom up. He always found ways to ask the right questions, to recognize the people on the fringes, and to model a radical form of service to those he was leading. Jesus was a master at leaving hard questions unanswered, and asked hard questions of his own in order to help people work out the answers they were seeking. Even though he was full of knowledge, even though his disciples desperately wanted him to just tell them what to do and how to think, he continually kept them mentally and spiritually engaged by always giving them some other mystery to work out, or some new concept to explore.

I am not like Jesus. Not yet. I mean, I really wish that I was, but the truth is that I'm still learning how to let go of my authority and position and to help others to grapple with His Word and to be led by His Spirit as they follow Jesus daily.

Certainly, I do have something to contribute to the church family that God has made me part of, but I do not have all the answers. I have part of the message, but according to the New Testament, God will lead each of us by His Spirit and has already gifted everyone in our fellowship with the gifts they need to be a blessing to others in our fellowship. The ministry of the Body is found in the Body, and not in me or any other expert. Allowing Christ to be the Head of His Church and to lead us whenever we gather together is not always easy, but it does require much more faith and a lot of grace for one another as we learn how to share and to serve one another in His love.

KEITH GILES - subversive1.blogspot.com



Surfing Simple Church

Sites worth checking out on the Web

OIKOS HAS A NEW WEBSITE

One of the most important functions of Oikos Australia's ministry is to be a Resource Centre for all things Missional/Simple Church.

In keeping with this mission we have introduced a new, much more user-friendly and interactive website, with a whole lot more resources.

HOME PAGE

Beginning with a **HOME PAGE** that incorporates the once separate Blog Site into the one site. Our hope is to have as much Australian content on the Blog as possible.

The **WHAT'S NEW** section following brings you up to date with upcoming Regional and National Gatherings, other important upcoming Conferences, the latest Oikos Magazine and important news from around the Regions.

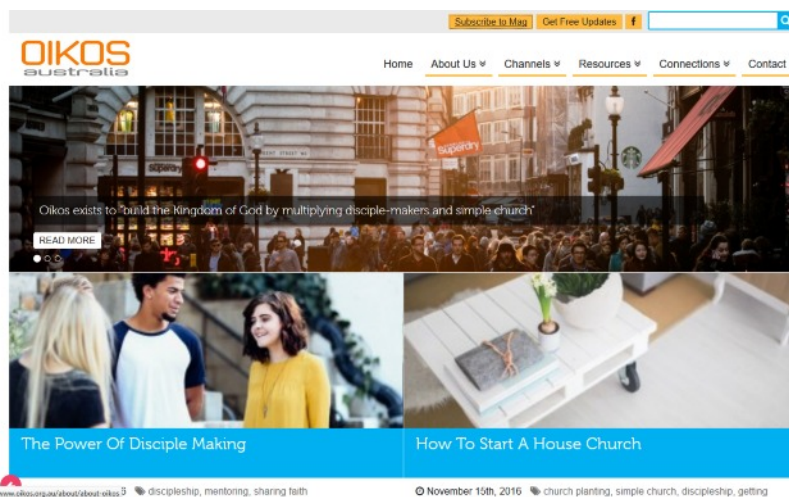
Then the **VIDEO RESOURCES** section gives a link to our OIKOS DISCIPLE MAKING TOOLBOX video series, plus links to some great YouTube resources.

Following that is a good list of **POPULAR ARTICLES** drawn from the best of past Magazine articles and a gleaning of great Online articles from other Missional/Simple Church sites.

SUBSCRIBE/DONATE It's now easier to subscribe to the Magazine, to the free online Newsletter and to financially Support us from the Front Page, with a new and easier registration and payment section.

ABOUT US

If you're new to OIKOS and want to find out what we are about, why the emphasis on Simple Church and Disciplemaking, or to check our Q&A section, then the **ABOUT US PAGE** is worth a visit.



CHANNELS

A new feature is the **CHANNELS PAGE** with dozens of articles and videos gathered under the categories of Missional / Simple Church / Leadership / Families / Discipleship / Youth / Getting Started / Stories.

RESOURCES

The **RESOURCES PAGE** is the place to go for past Magazines, Free Downloads and Useful Links, plus the expanded Discipleship Toolbox video series and other resources.

CONNECTIONS

Many people can feel isolated from other Christians in their missional outposts. We at Oikos love to connect with families, small groups and simple churches. Under **CONNECTIONS** you will find the contact details for many teams and local simple churches from every State.

CONTACT

And of course there's our **CONTACT PAGE**, an easy place to send us an email or find a contact phone number. We want to help you on your mission and are happy to take your call. We're pleased with the new website (thank you Andrew, Brayden & Kate) but would love your input. Go to it, scan through it, and then drop us a comment on the contacts page.

Contact Us

oikos.org.au

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