

# OIKOS

australia

## Finding the HUNGRY PERSON

Healthy Assembly Life *Jon Zens*

AND SOME APOSTLES *Phil Walters*

#prayerwalkaustralia *Arlisa Hatesic*

PREPARING  
for WHAT'S TO COME *Neil Cole*





## DIRECTIONS

### Cast your net on the other side

The well-known story of the disciples of Jesus who had fished all night and caught nothing (Luke 5:1-11), only to have Jesus tell them to cast their net in on the other side (and at the wrong time of day) resulting in a catch so big that the nets began to break and the boats began to sink, challenges us.

It reminds us that all our efforts are futile without him.

Jesus says to Peter that from now on he would catch men (people). They then left all and followed him.

Only by following Christ's direction and methods will there be lasting and significant success in outreach. It was about Christ and his supernatural miracle working power.

This is what we need to breakthrough and catch "fish" in Australia.

Sometimes it seems like we have been working all night for nothing. I feel the answer in outreach is to be guided by the Holy Spirit about when, what to say, how to say it and to whom.

With this need in our hearts and minds we are planning a special regional gathering of friends of simple church and missional movements with **Stuart Gramenz on April 29 & 30 in Melbourne**. The focus will be on listening to our Lord's directions.

I hope that many of you can share this time together and make this the key focus for the year - listening and following the instructions of Jesus for our place and time!

If you have stories of this happening for you please send them to us so we can share and be encouraged....

*bless you, Phil Brown*  
**OIKOS DIRECTOR**



Buzz Hoffman.Foter

## OIKOS Australia

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

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# Finding the person God has made **HUNGRY**

**You have to be awed by the grassroots churches of the early Christ-followers. As they gathered and lived-out the rhythms of the Body of Christ there was nothing boring about it!**

In Acts 4:29-31 they prayed like they expected God to move with love & power and use them in extraordinary ways...and HE didn't disappoint them!

They never allowed following HIM to become routine, business as usual, or just going through the motions. It was not culturally or politically correct ... as a matter of fact it was downright risky.

They were giving their lives for the Kingdom's cause! And, God used them as His tools to change their world.

## AN UNPLANNED CHURCH PLANT

Note the influence of four distinct factors in the church planting passage in Acts 16:6-15 (it will help if you read the passage first).

1. **The Holy Spirit** guiding leaders to unlikely persons/groups and preparing those specific hearts for a spiritual beginning
2. **Prayer** as a point of connection with not-yet-believers

3. **Relationship** ties quickly drawing family and friends into new elemental church bodies
4. The **absence of money and facilities**

Paul was just beginning his 2nd missionary journey here, and was obviously seeking the Spirit's guidance to the right places and people. He was sensitive enough to God's leading that he refused to go into an area if the Spirit redirected him. How refreshing. It's not uncommon today for Christian leaders to plan a great endeavor "for" God, and then proceed whether the Spirit affirms the idea or not! **God knows what you want Him to do, but what does HE want you to do?**

So, don't just race ahead with the plans that you have in mind, even if your motives are good. Rather, seek God's definite direction and go to that group of people, even if you have to keep praying and waiting until HE makes the path clear. God already sees a person (or persons) whose heart and life He has been working in...someone He has been making "hungry" for His love, forgiveness, and Lordship...**let Him guide you to that person!**

## A PRAYER PLAN

As one church planter says, we should have a "prayer plan" for finding persons

and starting churches, rather than an "activity plan!" God has a way of guiding us to the persons HE has made hungry for the Gospel when we take time to seek and wait on His leading.

I hear practical examples of this wise counsel from all over. A former missionary to Africa says his team quit going into villages and showing the Jesus film because too many who responded were only curious and didn't stick with their profession of faith. Instead they began to pray that God would lead them to a "person-of-peace" (Luke 10:1-9)...a person God had made ready for their message or their mission....a person who opened the door to his/her circle of relationships. Sometimes it took 14 months, and sometimes 5 minutes to "encounter" this person....but prayer was the key. The believers and churches started in this manner flourished.

Still another example comes from Alabama. A pastor planted 52 churches in five years in low income apartments, primarily by prayer-walking in the apartment complexes...seeking the person(s) God had made hungry!

And how about Austin, Texas....a missionary kid, now grown, began to prayer-walk in a "rough" apartment complex and after several months encountered

(Continued on page 19)





# LIVING CHURCH PRIMES

Roger Thoman

It is always good to review the basics of church which is, by nature, organic and living. Church is the people of God organically connected to God. At Pentecost, when the Spirit breathed upon God's people, this organic connection came to life. Thus we see terms for the church like: 'living church,' 'body of Christ,' 'seed planted that produces fruit 30, 60, 100 fold.'

When church is understood this way, its development becomes less about planning 'how to build' and much more about learning to facilitate the life cycle that is already inherent within it.

The simple DNA of the living church is evident:

**1. Intimacy with Christ.** The abiding living relationship with God is at the core of our life with God and the life that grows out of the church (God's people).

*Jesus did not invite us to follow a religion of rules, nor did he mandate an order of service or church structure to follow. He did ask us to follow him. Out of that flows all of the life, joy, and power that we need to live fully in him and for him.*

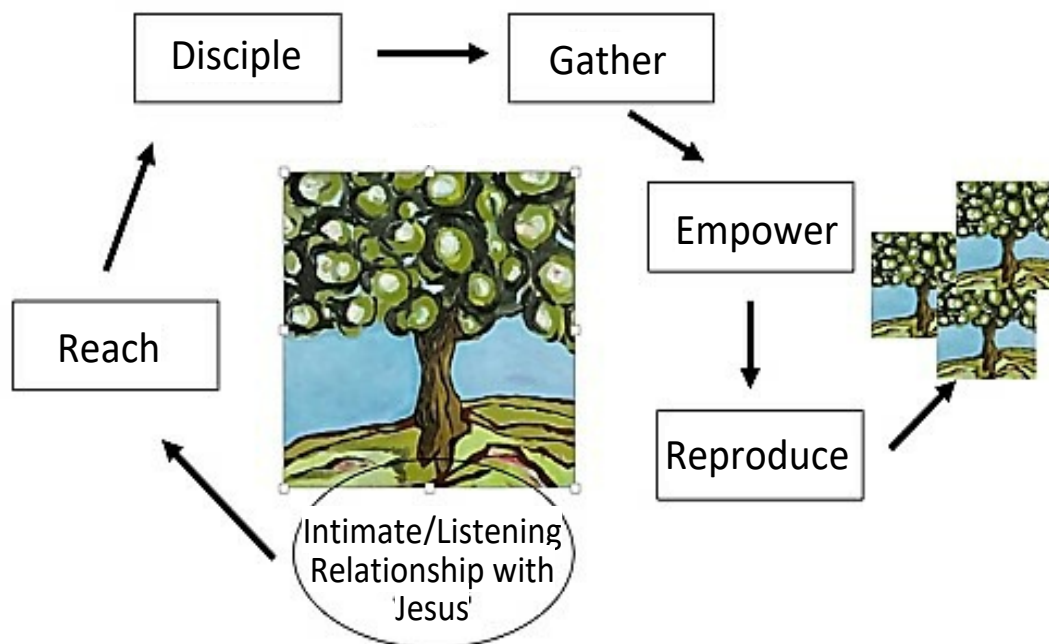
**2. Reaching out with love.** The experience of being loved by the God of the universe produces an outward desire to love and reach others with the same Gospel love.

*This is not a project nor a program, but a way of life that involves an outbreak of Jesus' love toward others.*



# CHURCH

## Living Church Life-Cycle



**3. Disciple-making as a lifestyle.** This is not about what we have to give to others, but it is about relationships in which we come alongside people while they discover that God speaks directly to them. We walk with them but the word and the Spirit of God become the teachers.

*The Bible, indeed, is far more powerful than we realize. It has the power to transform hearts and lives, all by itself, through the energizing of God's Spirit.*

**4. Gathering simply and in a participatory manner.** Gatherings are family-based and allow every person to grow spiritually, care for one another, and exercise spiritual gifts. Healthy missional-family gatherings continue to encourage the upward, inward, outward processes of loving God, blessing one another, and reaching out to others.

*What we do see in Scripture are many different types of gatherings which took place frequently, naturally, and often spontaneously... They took place in normal, everyday settings and they fit into the rhythm of everyday life.*

**5. Empower others to go, reach, disciple, and gather.** This is the function of 'leadership' as it seeks to serve others who are becoming fruitful, vibrant, and reproductive.

*Everything is given away: spiritual authority, recognition, encouragement, opportunities to minister and serve. This leader empowers others so well that his or her own ministry goes virtually unrecognized.*

### Where does one begin?

It is difficult to get away from the idea that there must be a one-two-three blueprint to follow that will allow me to facilitate the growth of 'a church.' But it is more about lifestyle than planning and more about listening to God than following someone else's map.

Still, there is an intentionality that can move us forward. These five rhythms become essential to discovering how God would have us walk with him in the growth of his church. There are many tools and methods for walking out each of these rhythms (perhaps a subject for another post), but through prayer and listening, God is able to lead us to those tools and methods that will be best for our context. When we are diligent

about walking out these rhythms, God will lead.

1. Godward Rhythm: How can I root myself more deeply in His love?
2. Missional Rhythm: What field(s) am I assigned to sow in? Where is my Calcutta? Who is my next 'person of peace?'
3. Discipleship Rhythm: Who has God provided to mentor/disciple me? Who can I invite into a discovery, encounter with God through His word to walk alongside as he/she learns to follow God for himself/herself?
4. Community Rhythm: Who am I called to build one-another community with?
5. Reproductive Rhythm: How am I empowering my disciples & community to do the same (#1 - #4)?

### ROGER THOMAN

All quotes are from the *Simple/House Church Revolution* book. [Simplechurchjournal.com](http://Simplechurchjournal.com)





# #prayerwalkaustralia

OIKOS AUSTRALIA is initiating a plan to encourage believers from all churches and persuasions to get out and prayer walk or prayer target the streets and towns or suburbs of our nation, either individually or as groups. You can tweet us at [#prayerwalkaustralia](#) or connect through our website at [oikos.org.au](#). We'll also be featuring stories to that effect in upcoming Oikos Magazines, starting with this one from Ailsa Matesic on the NSW South Coast.

## A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

It all started one morning I was desperately asking Father for local people to pray with. I didn't care if our journeys were different. Tired of my own plans and listening to others' plans, I just wanted to be with people who wanted to seek God, listen to Him and do what He asked. I wanted to be with people who would help me stay on this track too.

He answered this prayer, but in a way I had not previously expected. Long story short, I started making connections with believers, mostly women, around my local area and city from all different churches, nationalities, backgrounds etc., with one thing in common - Jesus.

## SHELLHARBOUR

Since then, a small but committed gathering of women meet at least once per week. We meet in one town per week, the person whose town we are in hosts our time together. It's not just a prayer meeting, we eat together, pray for each other, encourage each other, pray for the church in that town, often prayer walk and sometimes meet personal needs. And we have a map of our area, highlighting which towns we are praying in and where we are yet to pray. We are believing for every town in Shellharbour City Area to have at least 2 or 3 that we know intentionally listening

to God for His Kingdom to come to that particular town.

Another door God opened was for us to go and pray for our local council. It happens that one of the women in our network is an acquaintance of the mayor of Shellharbour.

We wanted to pray for her and bless her. My friend approached the mayor and she has agreed to hold an afternoon tea and prayer at the council. This woman is soft to God. We are also thankful to God for her and this opportunity.

## ALBION PARK

Since then, another prayer that our family has prayed has been answered. We wanted more people in our own town of Albion Park to pray with. Two of the women I pray with every week are a part of a church that owns a house in Albion Park and every Tuesday night we meet with a few women and men from that particular church at that house. Last week we started to prayer walk AP together.

## 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

The 40 days of prayer and worship has been a privilege to be part of. I had been reading some books in the bible like Haggai, Nehemiah, Ezra etc., increasing my passion to walk with God, being led by His presence as I/we walk out our everyday life. I want His Presence more than

anything, for myself, my home, my town, my region and nation. For me to do my part in this I have to let go of a lot of things. Faith increased as other things become less important. They were distractions. We really want to see a people built together where God is pleased to not just visit, but dwell with us and us with Him, being continually filled by Him. Carrying His



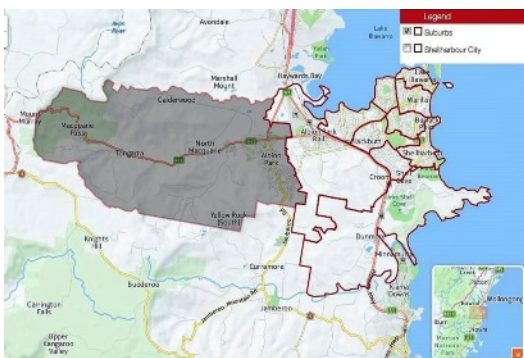
presence into our world makes all the difference.

People, particularly not-yet-believers, are not interested in doctrines, agendas, fancy programs etc. They want and need real encounters with Jesus. They want and need a real family. And for this cause we pray and we go! I have had the privilege of initiating and facilitating a 40 days x 24 hr prayer watch in our region. I have had the joy of gathering with other believers whose churches have hosted these gatherings.

It appears that as we listen and take the next step that God asks, He opens the way for us. We just keep being obedient to the next thing He asks us to do. This requires being still and listening. And letting our time with Him not just be about the work of the Kingdom but primarily our relationship with Him. This makes our life as believers more joyful as everything is done out of our love for Jesus.

## A FAMILY OF PRAYER

*Nehemiah 4:14 Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, "Don't be afraid! Remember the Lord who is great and glorious; fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!"* Most importantly, apart from our time with Him, prayer needs





to start in our home. We continue to contend for this time together. Praying for each other as we go to school, work and into the neighbourhood.

My daughter Destiny and I (and husband Cris when possible) continue to pray for our local high school. Des and I continue to pray for the local high schools of the South Coast. We are hoping to get in another prayer tour soon where we drive to each high school and pray outside the gate, speaking God's plans over those students and their homes and teachers etc. I am part of two teams of women who go to two different high schools to spend time with young teenage girls. Without the prayer support, this could be just another program. Cris also meets with other men in our region to pray. He Skype and prays with people in our nation and overseas as well.

### **MORE THAN A PRAYER MEETING**

It's more than just saying I go to a prayer meeting. Our lives are to be lives of listening and obeying. Prayer is the place to start, the place to keep moving forward. And the place we will end. Listening and obeying TOGETHER creates real community, starting with HUMILITY toward God and each other. Check out the beginning of the church in Acts!

Personally I think it's useless to initiate community (which I'm so passionate about) without starting with THE COMMUNICATOR!

*As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built TOGETHER into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*  
1 Peter 2:4



## A VISIT TO THE SUPERMARKET

**A**t 84 years young, since my wife Kathleen died seven years ago, I now live alone. One of the chores I truly hate, is shopping, so I go early at 8.00am on pensioner's discount day to avoid the old folk!

The checkout was busy and the young woman, Mandy, was whizzing the goods across the bench at the speed of light. It was impossible to know which end this lone ranger needed to be, loading, or receiving.

In desperation, I just stood, crossed my arms, and said, "That is just about the luck I have, I have searched for a 'fast woman' all my life, and now it is too late".

Mandy burst into laughter and asked what made me so cheerful and happy? "I have Jesus in my life," I said, "so I have everything to be thankful for".

Mandy paused from empowering the cascade of groceries, and said, "Tell me what that means to you".

The queue was growing behind me, and time was of the essence, so I told her how Kathleen, my wife, should have had a lifetime in a wheelchair, but after we prayed to Jesus, she was completely healed. So much so that over the last 30 years she and I walked most of the difficult walks in the English Lakes Districts and the Yorkshire Dales.

"Would you like to ask Jesus into your life"? I asked, and as the queue got longer, Mandy was "born again". (I would have liked those waiting in the queue to respond as well, but I cannot have everything.)

Over the next several weeks, I could encourage Mandy each week, she seemed so hungry to know more, and it was great to see how the Holy Spirit was ministering to her. Then, the Thursday before Christmas, it seemed at first as if it was at an end. "Mike, I am glad you came today, this is my last day working here and I wanted to say goodbye". To be honest I was crestfallen.

Mandy then told me, "My parents go to one of 'those funny Pentecostal Churches' in Brisbane, and I told them I had accepted Jesus, and they were so pleased, and I am going back home to be with them".

I thought that would end this story, but a few weeks later, her parents telephoned me and we had a long talk. They had prayed for Mandy to receive Jesus for several years, and were in tears of joy as I spoke with them. Mandy had drifted away from Christianity and church-going like so many people who are expected to attend but never led to an experience of the Spirit filled lifestyle.

I assured them that the full gospel "Christ in us" life is real and encouraged them to pursue it for themselves and for Mandy, who in a very "unlikely" way had been drawn into the Kingdom.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit are sons and daughters of God".

**MIKE HICKS** lives in Eastwood, Victoria, near where he meets regularly in a group attended by Phil and Kate Brown. Every morning he prays that the Holy Spirit will lead him into similar encounters.



# AND SOME APOSTLES...

*A call to recognise God's master builders in the Simplechurch movement.*

PHILLIP WALTERS



**W**e are just about to have a much needed multi-story car-park open near the beachfront of our town of Yeppoon. It's suddenly starting to take shape and is looking great. However, the spurt of obvious progress was no doubt preceded but a couple of much longer hidden stages.

Starting with the planners and engineers, who probably laboured over this for longer than the build. Then there was the clearing of the old site and the laying of sufficient foundations to support the visible, usable finished form.

The apostle Paul saw the Church taking a similar journey. Starting with the prophets labouring over the picture of what Jesus saw. This community in the earth that he would build, that "the gates (councils) of Hell will not prevail against."

Then walking together with the apostles (the Master-Builders - 1 Cor 3:10), those with the gifting to actually see the thing come together, adding substance to the vision. Starting with the clearing away of the old and the laying of true foundations. Servants of Christ, gifted with patience and perseverance.

## **BIG PICTURE MINISTRIES**

Both of these foundational gifts of Christ to his Church are "big picture" ministries (unlike the pastor and teacher and, to some extent, the evangelist, who are often much more locally inclined) and Paul seemed to think that without them we would look in vain for the thing that Jesus was after. And in fact history has shown that without the big picture we finish up building short-term structures that the gates of Hell have a field-day with.

All of these gifts have been given to the Church until we rise to the fullness of Christ's intent for his church (Ephesians 4). Without the whole five, and especially the first two, we are doomed to keep building structures that will never fully reflect Jesus nor hold the multitudes that are yet to come in.

## **SO WHY, IN THE SIMPLE-CHURCH SCENE, AREN'T WE TALKING MORE ABOUT THEM?**

Especially when there are so many working among us!

Three reason's I can think of:

**1. They are already among us** - we just don't often acknowledge them as such. Indeed most of those that I know don't feel a need to use that terminology. They are not into titles and are much more focused on doing what they are gifted to do. Making disciples for Jesus and motivating and teaching the rest of us how to do the same. They shun unhelpful publicity and prefer to work in the background. That doesn't mean, though, that their gifting is not



recognised and sought after. They are simply not followed for their name or preaching skills but for the fruit they produce. We need, however, to up the game as far as our support for them because they are not meant to come begging and we owe it to them as unto Christ.

**2. There are elements of the simple-church movement who have a hard time with leadership.** Having moved away from front-led church some are in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Especially if they (i) have an underlying independence that has not been dealt with or (ii) have sat under the kind of controlling leadership that was stifling and needed to be escaped from anyway. The problem, however, is not "leadership" in itself. Leaders will and need to rise in every group. Indeed Christ has gifted them to us. Without them there is no

movement but just an encamping around grievances, pet doctrines and "fellowship". True servant leadership is to be embraced, honoured and walked with.

**3. A third reason is the perception that anyone who claims to be an apostle is self-serving and false.** And the truth is that, as Paul discovered, some are. Some indeed seem to need titles (Reverend, Father, Pastor, Apostle, etc) in order to maintain respect for their ministry. To many though, such titles, though they may carry them, are unimportant. They see such references as merely job descriptions and are more interested in the job. Which they are carrying out to the best of their ability, answerable first to Christ and then (if they are wise) to those they work among. They deserve to be recognised and appreciated.

Simple-church is for many a part of God's movement of the church back to the simple, relationship-centred and easily

multiplyable model that Jesus birthed. However, unless Jesus is allowed to build, with the team of his choosing, it will be far from simple and we will end up frustrated and disillusioned. Paul wrote that "God was kind and let me become an expert builder. I laid a foundation on which others have built. But we must each be careful how we build, because Christ is the only foundation. (1 Cor 3:10)" We need to have the same "kindness" toward the "expert builders" that God has placed among us. We will never rise to the fullness of Christ's vision for his Church on earth without those that he has appointed to help us do so.

He has given "Some to be apostles..." Let us acknowledge them, receive them, love them, feed them, and honour them. For the sake of Jesus and his Church.

**PHILLIP WALTERS - YEPPPOON, CENTRAL QUEENSLAND [backyardbelievers.com](http://backyardbelievers.com)**

# The Church in Western Democracies

**The Church in Western democracies, in general, have built-in barriers which are counter-productive to the challenge of Jesus to make disciples of all nations.**

We live in democracies which are affluent, peaceful and comfortable. This leads us to be averse to very costly sacrifice and suffering, which following the Lord Jesus Christ demands. To be willing to lose control of our lives and give back to Christ complete control of the whole of our lives is radical and revolutionary.

Over many years we have been preaching and teaching that repentance is turning away from self and sin. We have failed to add the greater emphasis in Scripture which is to turn back to God and humble ourselves before him. The parable of the 'Lost Son' illustrates this well. This has allowed us to run on 'Cheap Grace', forgiveness without repentance. The gospel unravels without the Holy Spirit.

Most churches have an ordained hierarchy of leaders, who are elevated in authority over their people. This is

confusing and restricting when challenged to submit to Jesus Christ's authority over us.

The worship of God is our highest calling. So to call our weekly meeting in church 'worship' is to make it all important. This is the opposite of the teaching of the New Testament. Our worship of God is our living for Christ all of our life. The gathering of Christians is not called 'worship'. Our work is to be used by the Holy Spirit to grow his Kingdom, which grows the church.

The weekly services in the church assume that all are Christian. They are predictable, impersonal, passive and unappealing for many. There is no dialogue with the people and no sharing of our life and witness during the week. Few would miss us if we weren't there and vice versa. It is meant to be a meeting of Jesus' revolutionaries. This is in sharp contrast to being in a small group.

Churches rely on their people being at church regularly and giving their offerings generously. The budget to cover paying the leaders and

maintenance of the buildings looms large. The emphasis on money can easily deflect us from our prime commitment to sharing our faith in Jesus Christ. It deters poor people from joining us, seeing the church as basically middle class.

If we did preach the necessity of being willing to lose control of our life and give back to God complete control of the whole of our life, it would make belonging to the church a great deal harder.

Could these be a cause of the rapid decline of the church in numbers and influence ?

A prayer for constant use.  
*Loving Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, you love us and gave your life for us. I love you and give my life for you. I am willing to lose control of my life and give back to you complete control of the whole of my life with all of my heart, in the power of the Spirit alone.*

**BOB COLLIE - NUNAWADING, VIC**  
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# Preparing for WHAT'S TO COME

**NEIL COLE**

*Two articles by Neil Cole looking at some of the vulnerabilities facing the western church over the next few years*



## 1. A Parable from the Past

I'm often asked if I feel that our organic church movement has accomplished all that I had hoped. The answer is no. We are not the movement that I hoped for... yet. But that is partly because I have always felt that what we were doing was preparing the church for what is coming: persecution. I see our work as sowing seeds for a future harvest, and I believe that future is getting closer every day. Am I some fringe conspiracy theorist? I don't think so, but I'm not impartial on the question. In all of history, the freedom we have experienced in our lifetime is actually an anomaly. The Bible makes clear that those who follow Christ will be hated and will endure persecution. I suspect there is good reason for my thinking, but if I am wrong and persecution doesn't come, I have not lost anything. But if it does and we are unprepared then we have lost much. We have this generation to make a difference in and will give account of what we did with the time given to us. I feel called to prepare God's people for a future that is less open and free, but far more fruitful.

One of the heroes of my faith is Watchman Nee. God used him (and others like him) to prepare the church in China before the Communist revolution took over. He launched the "Little Flock" movement, which was a radical departure from the Western church model that had been planted in China prior. It was smaller, simpler in structure, inexpensive and indigenous. The churches met in smaller gatherings in homes led by ordinary people with real jobs. He brought the same sort of preparation that I have been devoted to enacting.

When the communists took power they arrested the church leaders (like Nee), seized all church property, kicked out all missionaries and burned all Christian literature. The indigenous expressions of simple churches meeting in homes not only survived...they thrived. The Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong sought to eliminate all religion from society in China, but instead mobilized the church and it grew from about 2 million Christians in 1949 to over 60 million.[1] It is estimated today that there may be upwards of 80 million Christians in China.[2]

Contrast this with the church of Russia. The Russian Church was dependent upon three things: holy buildings, holy men in robes, and holy services performed by those men in those robes and in those buildings. When the communists took over Russia, they seized all the buildings and arrested, or compromised, all the leaders of the church. The church was devastated. It did not thrive. Granted, there was a remnant that struggled to survive underground, but the Christ followers were not able to see the exponential growth the Chinese church did.

I carry deep inside a feeling that everything I have been about for the past 20 years is just preparing the bride of Christ for what is to come. In fact, 100movements is birthed to prepare God's church for what is to come. Like Nee, we have been striving to bring health and simplicity back to the church, and with that an ability to ride out any storm that may come.

[1] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006, p. 19

[2] Philip Yancey, "Discreet and Dynamic: Why, with No Apparent Resources, Chinese Churches Thrive," *Christianity Today*, July 2004, p. 72

## 2. The Vulnerability of the Western Church

Imagine you are a character in an original series *Star Trek* episode on some strange magical planet and you are captured for the entertainment of the gods who inhabit the planet. You will fight like a gladiator against a wild beast. You may choose your weapon: a machine gun or a bazooka. You can also choose your foe: An angry mutant grizzly bear twice the normal size or an ordinary swarm of agitated killer bees. What choices do you make?

Even though the fierce bear may be terrifying in appearance and a single bee may seem small and insignificant (sans allergies), a swarm of bees is something you cannot stop with such weapons. The choice should be an easy one. [Note: no animals were hurt or injured in the writing of this blog post. This is only an analogy to make a point about vulnerability. I do not need any comments from animal rights groups because I would never shoot a bear with either a bazooka or an automatic weapon, and if I shot a swarm of bees

with either I would not likely hurt or injure a single bee. Point made.]

*I do not think persecution is so far off. What would it take? Not much. I believe the pieces are already on the board and being pushed into play. Truthfully, however, I think most churches can be taken out before any persecution ever occurs.*

The large churches in the West are far more vulnerable than most care to admit. With the rapid rise of the mega church we have been watching the church become more centralized, more expensive, more personality-driven and consumer-oriented. In fact with the closure of so many smaller churches and their people being assimilated into the larger ones, we have actually concentrated all our people, resources and ideas into a few large targets rather than many smaller autonomous ones. We have also seen that the church is more dependent upon a single charismatic leader. Take him/her out (or compromise this person) and the whole church suffers greatly. We are regularly seeing some of these large "successful" churches struggle after the departure of their dynamic leader. It's becoming a weekly occurrence.

For the sake of discussion let me simply map out a few feasible steps that would permanently alter church as we have known it. In fact, it wouldn't take persecution to close many churches down, just a few legal changes that are likely already being considered.

If the following benefits were revoked many churches would close: the tax deduction for contributions, property tax exemptions and the parsonage allowance. I say this because the way we do church is so expensive that we rely upon these special privileges to survive. This is especially true in a struggling economy where our government is looking for ways to reduce its deficit and increase tax revenue to provide more services for its constituents—services, by the way, that churches no longer supply to the community.





photo: life church

## How Will the Church Respond?

We already have earned a reputation of being intolerant in our society. Evangelical and fundamental expressions of Christianity that are too closely tied to the Tea Party and Republican agendas have consistently decried those who have what we call “special entitlements.” This will set us up for public mockery...something we should be used to by now. When these laws take our own entitlements away and we are found complaining louder than all others, our reputation as hypocrites will be confirmed in the eyes of the world and will only expedite passage of these laws.

If you are a leader of a church, as you read this I suggest that that you ask yourself how your church would survive if these three tax benefits were revoked. That is far better than to simply write off what I am saying by telling yourself this could never happen. Crunch the numbers. Do the math. It will be scary but may lead to some good sound steps to be better prepared.

### Removing the Parsonage Allowance

Few ordinary citizens know about this special perk that pastors get. I have enjoyed this benefit and to be honest, I don't even know why it is afforded to me. All money spent on housing (rent/mortgage, utilities, furniture, homeimprovements/repairs/upkeep/supplies) can be taken off the salary of a paid church leader even up to the entire amount they are paid in salary. I actually feel like I am betraying our “special club” for even speaking of it publicly...like I might jinx it. Add to that the fact that church leaders are able to opt out of social security and you can easily see how pastors are able to get by on much less than the rest. If you don't think churches rely upon this your head is in the sand.

A pastoral staff can literally double with this benefit allowing a church to maintain a professional staff twice the size that it can actually afford. There are not many churches in the West that feel like they have more staff than they need. Most churches have far more ministry than they have leaders. The more a church relies upon professional staff the more vulnerable it is.

### Removing Property Tax Exemption

What would happen if our churches were forced to pay taxes on their property? This would push most churches over the edge of viability, at least in their current form—especially if the other perks mentioned above were also removed.

Most cities are already openly hostile to churches and trying to prevent them from acquiring property because there is no income from these organizations. I cannot imagine that the city of Houston isn't glaring at Lakewood Church's \$32 million/yr income and wondering what the property taxes should be. The Houston Rockets used the same space more often during the week and paid their fair share. This is how the world sees our special perks. Most city officials see the local Denny's as more beneficial to the community than the local church. Why? Because the restaurant provides meals, jobs and taxes. The local church usually provides none of those things. No wonder there is an unapologetic hostility toward churches looking to purchase property increasing in neighborhoods across the US.

### Removing Tax Deductions for Contributions

If people could no longer write off their contributions to churches I am sure that many churches would see their annual income drop severely. I would like to think it isn't so, but why else is it that we count on larger gifts at the end of the year? It's because we know people are looking for a tax benefit. Granted, this is likely the last perk to be removed because so many other non-profits benefit from this.



It's a simple scenario and as you can see it is not only possible, but there is movement to already enact some of these plans. Are your churches getting ready?

Like the Russian church prior to communism, our churches are dependent upon holy buildings (remove property tax exemption) and holy men (remove parsonage allowance) that perform holy practices in those buildings (remove tax deductible donations). Our vulnerability is quite obvious. These three areas of dependence will kill us. We must decrease our dependence upon buildings, budgets and big shots. We must also respond to our society with love rather than with lobbying for self-interested legislature.

Church leaders need to be considering these possibilities and take steps to be prepared. I firmly believe that the more we move toward an incarnational, missional and movemental expression of ecclesia the better prepared we will be. We must be aware of our vulnerabilities and shift toward a form of church that is less easily destroyed. We must adopt more of a swarm mentality to survive and thrive in the coming days. Then no weapon fashioned against us will be able to stop us.

***Editor:** While it is true that Australian churches do not necessarily enjoy the same perks there are certainly moves to remove those that we have. We have the same enemy and can well do to make the same adaptations.*

**NEIL COLE** travels around the world sowing the seeds of God's kingdom, catalyzing the development of organic church networks and coaching leaders. Catch his blog at [cole-slaw.blogspot.com](http://cole-slaw.blogspot.com)



# The Church Is Not Like Family

Dhati Lewis

JuhanSonin-flickr

**O**f all the word pictures and metaphors used to describe the church, one stands out above the rest: **family**. In fact, it is so much of the essence of the church that it cannot even properly be called a *metaphor*.

Metaphors describe what the church is like or similar to—light, flock, field, building—but family is not metaphorical; it is a literal description of the phenomena we know as church.

The church is not *like* family; it *is* family.

God is literally our Father, Jesus is literally our elder brother, and we are literally brothers and sisters in Christ. Family is the primary way the early church identified themselves.

This can be seen by the fact that the word *disciple*, so prevalent in the early part of the New Testament, disappears after the book of Acts. It is replaced by the term *brother* in the rest of the Bible. Family dominates the self-understanding of the early church.

We could argue that this is because of Paul's letter but it didn't come from Paul.

It is deeply rooted in the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

## The Christian Identity as Family

Our creeds and confessions focus on Trinitarian orthodoxy, but Matthew 3 emphasizes the revelation of God as family. What the revelation of Jesus Christ introduced into the world is that God is more than what we thought, namely that God is family.

In our adoption as sons, we are brought into the experience of what God has always been. In church life we are usually more concerned about orthodox statements that express this reality than we are with living out the experience of family.

## What Does Your Church Believe?

In his book *When the Church Was a Family*, Joseph Hellerman writes of a time that he was made aware of his error in his own ministry. A friend of his came to pick him up at his office for a lunch appointment and, while he was waiting, picked up a brochure titled *What We Believe*, and began reading it.

Afterward, the friend made a stinging evaluation. He said, "Joe, a person could

read through your statement of faith and conclude that Christianity, as your church teaches and practices it, has everything to do with how an individual relates to God and absolutely nothing to do with how people relate to one another."

Hellerman later reflected, "... our church's doctrinal statement wholly ignores God's design for human relationships, a topic that occupies a great deal of the biblical record." Paul consistently threads together the Fatherhood of God and believer's relationships with one another. He cannot think of God outside of His "Fatherness," and can't think of believers outside of their "brotherhood."

Our problem is semantics. When we say church, we don't think family. We have to understand that we are not simply planting a church, we are not starting a Bible study, we are not starting a 501-c3; *we are establishing a family*.



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# Healthy Assembly Life (Part I)

*Jon Zens*



## **"Accept One Another / Admonish One Another"**

After being a Christian for fifteen years, around 1980 I began to struggle with a problem that occurs with tragic frequency in Bible-believing circles. I saw church split after church split. I saw brethren biting and devouring one another. I thought in my heart, "How can the New Testament, which puts so much emphasis on love and unity, become the source for so much division and strife?" Somewhere in the midst of my personal turmoil, the Lord brought me to the two-fold perspective of Paul in Romans 15. It does not, of course, bring an immediate resolution to every possible scenario we will face. However, I strongly believe that to the degree that we can practice this two-fold dimension of assembly life, we will go a long way toward avoiding the ugliness that, unfortunately, has come to mark much that bears the name Christian.

In the context Paul has dealt with the sticky reality that the early church had to face early on – Jews and Gentiles were brought together as a new man, and they were meeting together in the same homes. Paul, of course, did not opt for the easy thing to do, namely, have Jewish believers meet in one place, and the Gentile believers meet somewhere else. The only consistent outworking of the Gospel was for the two radically different ethnic groups to meet together because Jesus on the cross brought the two together, thereby making peace (Ep 2:12-18). This was a volatile situation, and Paul faces it head-on in Romans 14-15.

So after dealing with how Jewish and Gentile saints should show love to one another in areas like foods, drinks and days, Paul comes to the conclusion of the matter in Romans 15:7 – "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Then in verse 14 we discover the flip side of this exhortation to accept each other – "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness,

complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." In these two verses a tension is revealed that we must all wrestle with: how can we pursue truth together without destroying our fellowship, and how can we pursue fellowship together without avoiding Christ's truth?

Churches tend to illustrate the pendulum swing – they either pursue truth in an atmosphere without love and caring (which results in witch-hunts), or they emphasize acceptance and love with little interest in Christ's revealed will (which results in gushy sentimentality). Why do we sever what God has joined together? Why can't we cultivate and encourage an atmosphere of acceptance in which we will learn to speak the truth to one another in love? Our tendency is to reject other Christians who disagree with our understanding of Scripture in what we regard as crucial issues. Or, there is the tendency to so underscore acceptance that there is no concern for revealed truth. To fully accept one another in the bonds of the Gospel and to instruct one another in an atmosphere of acceptance is a tension we must face and work out.

Growth, according to Paul, can occur only when we speak the truth to one another in love (Ep 4:15 ; Jn 17:17 ). Elliot Johnson rightly observes, "In a sense, Evangelicals have lived with an interpretational truce. While we agree on doctrinal 'essentials' we have also agreed to not talk very seriously about issues of disagreement. Yet Paul charted God's strategy for Christian growth [in Ep 4:12 -13]. In order to reach unity we need some way to talk about our different interpretations and to evaluate these differences" ("Author's Intention & Biblical Interpretation," Position Paper given in Chicago at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1982, pp. 1-2).

The problem in most configurations of believers is that the very rationale for the group's existence rules out the possibility of certain truths being



discussed. The truth is already defined in terms of some predetermined boundaries. I suggest that this kind of behavior is childish and makes a mockery of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel. When we face new issues from the Word are we willing to work together, study together, pray together and even fast together in order to seek the Lord's mind and come to greater agreement? Most of us are ready to separate from other brethren at the drop of a hat. But it takes a commitment to the truth and to the brothers and sisters to be willing to work matters out.

### **"Agree with One Another" (1Co 1:10)**

No human family can function indefinitely without having to face a conflict or problem. Likewise, in Christ's family there will be problems that must be resolved. Indeed, much of what was written in the New Testament had to do with correcting errors of teaching and practice among the saints. What guidelines does the New Testament give for working through the bumpy times that any congregation will inevitably face? 1 Corinthians 1:10 reveals some critical apostolic teaching in this regard.

First, it can be noted that Paul directs his exhortation to the brethren. These were believers in a city who maintained an ongoing relationship with one another in the bonds of Christ. They were committed to one another because of their common interest in the Gospel. It is this deep mutual fellowship (koinonia) in Christ that provides the backdrop for Paul's approach to them with correction. Larry Crabb notes a vital perspective that emerges from this consideration, "Change takes place when truth is presented in relationship. Perhaps a relationship of deep regard and empathetic concern is the context for change, creating an atmosphere in which the truth of God can be heard nondefensively and thus penetrate more deeply . . . to be healthy, a church must present truth in the context of encouraging relationships" (Encouragement: The Key to Caring, Zondervan, 1984, pp. 84, 91).

This insight reflects what we saw in Romans 15:7. A loving, caring, accepting atmosphere must be the context for speaking the truth to each other in love (Ro 15:14). What reason would we have to think that Gospel truth will take deep root in a setting which reflected instead the modified line from the old song, "Where seldom is heard, an encouraging word"? Next, Paul confronts the Corinthians with a very serious problem. Paul had a number of issues with them, but this is the one at the top of his list. They were clustering

around gifted personalities, and by such schism were ruining the image of an undivided Christ. "Each one of you is saying, 'I'm of Paul; and I'm of Apollos; and I'm of Peter; and I'm of Christ.'" This sinful division was already occurring and had driven the saints apart from one another.

To solve this problem Paul appeals to them to agree about the wickedness of this situation. If they agreed then the divisions could no longer exist. The participle *katartismenoi* used in verse 10 is significant. It is from the same verb used in Ephesians 4:12, translated there as equip or prepare. It is the verb used when the disciples were "mending" their nets (Mt 4:21; Mk 1:19). We could loosely translate the verb, "mending with a view toward rendering something as functional again." This idea also emerges again in Galatians 6:1, "restore such a one . . ."

As used in the context of 1 Corinthians 1:10, we can see an important implication of being "perfectly united in mind and thought." While we are not given any of the details as to how they worked this out, at a minimum we can say that the Corinthians had to work through this matter until the breach was mended and they finally agreed. A process which results in unity is in view. They were already split apart, so in order for the torn garment to be repaired they had to: (1) take the apostolic instruction; (2) come back together; (3) face and discuss the word of the Lord together; (4) repent of their sins; and (5) be restored again to their original oneness.

The utterly amazing fact is that, even with all their problems, Paul assumes that the assembly has the spiritual resources to overcome their waywardness. Many posit that the problem-solving abilities Paul presupposes will only work among mature churches. But this is a bogus suggestion. Corinth was in many ways a very immature assembly, but Paul still expects them, for example, to deal with immorality in their midst (1 Co 5) and to resolve their disputes internally without going to unbelieving courts (1Co 6).

The apostles taught that within the New Covenant community all were anointed by the Holy Spirit who enabled them to test and discern what the will of God might be (1Jn 2:20, 27; 4:1; 1Th 5:21). The *ekklesia*, therefore, is first of all a discerning community, able to bind and loose, and thus is also a decision-making community. The very word chosen to earmark the New Covenant people of God, *ekklesia*, is taken from the secular political realm, not from a

religious context. *Ekklesia* referred to a group of people with common interests getting together to accomplish certain business. It would be very similar to the town meetings that took place in developing America in the 1800s. John H. Yoder observes that, "The word *ekklesia* itself . . . does not refer to a specifically religious meeting, nor to a particular organization: it rather means the assembly, the gathering of a people into a meeting for deliberation or for a public pronouncement . . . The church is where, because there Jesus is confessed as Christ, people are empowered to speak to one another in God's name . . . It is only in the local face-to-face meeting, with brothers and sisters, who know one another well, that this process can take place of which Jesus says that what has been decided stands decided in heaven" ("Binding & Loosing," Concern #14, Feb. 1967, pp. 2ff.; cf. TDNT, IV, p.336).

As you reflect on the New Testament epistles, it is quite striking that church leaders are not addressed separately, as if some special decision-making authority resided in them. Instead, Paul directs his writings to the entire assembly. For example, he does not rebuke the elders at Corinth for failing to deal with the immoral person or for not resolving the disputes among the brethren. He puts the nexus of responsibility on the whole congregation to carry out Christ's revealed will.

Paul's approach flies in the face of the traditional decision-making method, which views "the pastor," or a body of leaders, as the source of decisions. Abraham Kuyper, for instance, removed the right to judge from the congregation and asserted that "the administrative authority over the church rests not with the members, but properly with the presbyters" ("Pamphlet on The Reformation of the Church," The Standard Bearer, Oct. 1979, p. 14). Jay Adams avers that "take it to the church" means "take it to the elders," who then forgive or excommunicate (Ready to Forgive, Pres. & Reformed, pp. 3-4). Such an interpretation is arbitrary, informed more by presuppositions than by the text itself. Elders will certainly be a part of the discerning process in the body, but the New Testament will not sustain the notion that elders are the process itself. The truth is, there is very little focus on elders in the New Testament, compared to the at least fifty-eight "one-another" imperatives found therein.

Both times Jesus uses *ekklesia* to identify His New

*(Continued on page 17)*



# WHEN LEADERS NEED LEADING AND LEADERS ARE BLEEDING



Erroll Mulder

## *First off, let's clarify that there is such a gift as leadership, both in the OT and NT.*

The apostle Paul, having expounded the Good News of Christ in all its ramifications in ch. 1-11 of his Roman Letter, goes on in ch. 12 to outline the outworking of that Gospel, one of the things being the diversity of spiritual gifts given to the Church for community and mission (12:3-8). These gifts include the gift of leadership: v. 6ff, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith... if it is leadership, let him govern diligently."

When the same Greek term is used elsewhere by Paul, it is in the context of eldership (mature believers), including managing one's own family well (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4-5). To my mind such leadership would be horizontal (pastoral) rather than hierarchical, exemplary rather than controlling, persuasive rather than dictatorial.

## *Secondly, let's put Christian leadership into its proper and biblical perspective:*

while important, it is not nearly so emphatic in the Scriptures as in our day when the Church is largely governed by modern business and administrative models rather than the biblical servant-leadership modelled by Jesus.

Having been involved in the institutional/denominational church for decades, I gave myself wholeheartedly to books and seminars and training courses on church leadership. I attended umpteen Bill Hybels' Global Leadership Summits, read many books on leadership, etc. I honestly believe that all those courses and books, while led and written by sincere men and women, gave to leadership a position that is not reflected in the Scriptures, the NT especially. I well recall reading some of John Maxwell's books on leadership and thinking to myself, in my more honest moments, but 'that's just not me': i.o.w. if I led my flock like that I would not be true to the person I was as one created in God's image and redeemed in Christ. Needless to say, while all the above challenged me in some or way or another, it also led to much false guilt and a sense of resignation, 'Oh well, maybe it works for others but it doesn't seem to work for me.'

## *Thirdly, I submit that true biblical leadership is often 'reluctant leadership,'*

and I am more than comfortable with being known as 'a reluctant leader.'

I was intrigued recently by a short YouTube presentation by the Northern Irish writer and philosopher/theologian, Peter Rollins [ok, he's provocative (aren't the Irish? lol), but so was Jesus]. In the presentation Rollins defines a true leader as 'one who refuses to lead,' a true priest as

'one who refuses priesthood,' thereby forcing 'the priesthood of all believers' in the body. I liked that immensely!

Especially when we realise that NT leadership is 'servant leadership': think of that profound passage in Jn. 13 in which Jesus washes his disciples' feet and directs them to do likewise! I think many of the leaders in the Bible were 'reluctant leaders.'

• **Take Moses.** Read Ex. 3 and 4, where Moses tries every trick in the book to avoid leading God's people Israel: 'Who am I?'... 'What shall I tell them?'... 'What if they don't believe me or listen to me?'... 'I have never been eloquent... I am slow of speech and tongue, O LORD, please send someone else to do it...'

• **Take Jeremiah.** In ch. 1, in response to God's call to become a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah objects 'Ah, sovereign LORD... I do not know how to speak; I am only a child...'

• **Take Jesus.** I have been working through Jesus' story from the perspective of the evangelist Mark: again and again, when people wanted post haste to make him their messiah-leader, he stalled the process. It was only when there was no other way, as evidenced in Gethsemane, that he rose to the occasion of open leadership, only to be judged and crucified of course.

• **Take Paul.** While a brilliant and forceful personality, he deliberately refuses to baptise believers (bar one exception) in the early Church so that he might not be the cause of schisms in the body (1 Cor. 1:10-17), and then goes on to relate his weakness, fear, unpersuasive preaching and servanthood to Christ and all people (1 Cor. 2-4). In 2 Cor. 12 he thanks God for a humbling 'thorn in the flesh' (a physical affliction of some kind?) to counter the 'surpassingly great revelations' given him by God, so that he exclaims in v. 10, 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.'





- The clergy-laity divide.
- Hierarchical leadership.
- Since the Reformation, the one priest/preacher/pastor/teacher model for local church leadership, with elders and members playing an inferior role.

In my own denomination, while we prided ourselves in holding to 'the priesthood of all believers,' I was in a way forced into the 'senior pastor' mould. If a church member or my assistant pastor visited someone in hospital, it was not considered a proper visit by many. If I was absent from the pulpit and an elder preached, people felt cheated (wasn't I paid a salary to preach?). When other congregations around us flourished, I felt the pressure to perform and achieve the same results. I remember one of our senior elders saying to me in a leadership meeting, 'Pastor, you are the chief visionary in this church – go get a vision from the Lord, share it with us and as elders we will support you.' I complied, but my 'vision' was almost immediately rejected by those same elders who, together with their families, held the power in the congregation. I can recall, on leaving that pastorate, saying to a fellow-pastor 'That's the system for you, it will use you and spit you out.' He agreed, but to this day is giving his all to the very same system, which I think is rather sad. At this moment I could name a number of 'senior pastors' in my city

who are being abused by the same system. As Peter Rollins pointed out in his presentation, church members want you to lead, but will blame you when (according to them) things go wrong – they won't blame themselves. Here is some handy counsel from Rollins: 'we have to listen for ourselves and take responsibility for ourselves;' "we must refuse to 'colonise God,' because his name is above every name!"

**Personally,** while God has graciously gifted me with some of the gifts mentioned in Eph. 4:11, I see my calling as using these gifts in a horizontal (vs hierarchical) servanthood, edifying the body to perform its Christ-ordained function in the world. I wouldn't exchange my current ministry of 'facilitating' organic house churches in our city, under the functional headship of Jesus and constrained by his love alone, for the biggest mega-church or traditional church going. No way, Jose!

**ERROLL MULDER**, is a proud South African, living in Port Elizabeth with wife Melanie. After pastoring five denominational churches over thirty eight years God called them out to facilitate organic house churches in their area. "This has been the most satisfying, joyful time of our lives, following Jesus on 'the road less travelled'". [errollmulder.wordpress.com](http://errollmulder.wordpress.com)

**Fourthly, I maintain that one of the main reasons for so many misconceptions of Christian leadership can be laid at the door of the 'church system,'** i.e. the institutional, denominational church system we see and experience all around us on a weekly basis. Since the days of Constantine (300 AD), the Church has been institutionalised and professionalised, from which the greater part of the Church has not recovered.

From Constantine's day we have inherited several evils:

#### **HEALTHY ASSEMBLY LIFE** (Continued from page 15)

Covenant people, He attaches binding and loosing to its function (Mt 16:19; 18:18). This clearly indicates that we need to significantly broaden our ideas of what is entailed in doing "church." Traditionally, doing church means going to a building, sitting in a pew, singing some songs, putting some money in a plate, hearing a sermon, shaking the pastor's hand, and heading home to get your roast out of the oven. Most fundamentally, however, ekklesia means doing the whole gamut of kingdom activities with other committed believers in a local congregation. We are not used to thinking of resolving disputes within the body as church, but the essence of practicing ekklesia involves problem-solving and decision-making in an atmosphere of loving acceptance where Christ's truth can be spoken in love.

It behooves us, therefore, to realize that it is expected of assemblies to agree with one another and to be perfectly united in mind and thought. This does not mean that we must have unanimity regarding every doctrinal nuance, but it does mean that we must be ready to work things out with our brethren as required in light of apostolic teaching. Paul was not surprised when congregations had problems, but he was upset when they failed to work through their problems together as a body.

Here is a question each of us needs to face: when the inevitable day comes in my assembly that a problem surfaces, am I going to run and hide from it, or am I going to stand with the body and do my part to be part of its resolution? Real ekklesia requires hard work and commitment, but we must



never forget that Jesus' presence by the Spirit, persistent prayer, preferring others ahead of ourselves, and fervent love are where the battles are won.

**JON ZENS** is an active author and a traveling speaker, ministering in organic church conferences and best known for pioneering New Covenant Theology, which sees the entire Bible as a revelation of the gospel of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ.





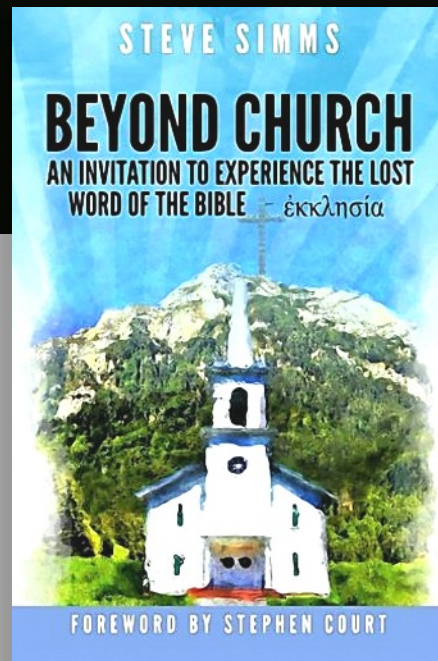
# Review

## BEYOND CHURCH by Steve Simms

Excellent!!! Steve Simms has managed to articulate very clearly things that have been crystallizing in my heart and mind for years.

His explanation of 'ekklesia' is exactly on target. Steve not only provides a description of the Greek concept of ekklesia in the time of the Apostle Paul (in smaller villages and towns across the Roman Empire, local elders would gather regularly to discuss and deliberate over a variety of social and political dilemmas facing the towns and villages). Steve also describes how the NT vision of ekklesia refers to a particular body of people called out of the Roman and Judean system to come together into a separate, politically autonomous community with the living, resurrected Christ as the head. I Corinthians 14:26ff is explicit that in the Christian

ekklesia everyone was expected to seek revelation from the Lord, contribute to the meeting and exhort one another to love and excellent works. Most importantly, they were seeking direct instruction from Jesus on pressing questions specifically faced by the ekklesia. When I read the New Testament one fundamental aspect of ekklesia that I walk away with is the idea of receiving instruction directly from Jesus. In Ephesians 3:10 Paul writes concerning the purpose of the ekklesia - "that, through the [ekklesia] the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). Ekklesia clearly refers to a called-out group of people whose primary purpose was to make decisions for the community in which they lived and this was to be a witness to the larger world. Not only does



Steve's thesis support this understanding, Steve clearly articulates a vision of how to create and sustain that vision of ekklesia today that does not merely give lip service to the concept of following Jesus, but provides a clear pathway and model to follow.

**Dennis A. Brownon (Amazon)**

## CHURCH in the ASHES

**Guy Muse  
Ecuador**

**A true story heard from a fellow Ecuadorian church planter working in a neighboring region of our province.**

Luisa was eager to start with her new church plant. She had nowhere to go, and did not know where to start. After praying, she felt led to start under the shade of a tree near where she lived. Her first gathering consisted of herself and two other girls. Luisa was ecstatic. She was on her way to becoming a church planter!

Two weeks later, the tree was cut down by the owner of the property. Luisa was devastated. She went to her church planting mentor and cried, "Now, what am I supposed to do? I have nowhere else to meet. The tree has been cut down."

Her wise mentor told her, "Thank the Lord! He has now provided you with a place to sit! Resume meeting in the branches of the fallen tree."

Luisa did so, and the group meeting continued to meet for a couple of more weeks. All was going well until the owner decided to burn the fallen tree.

Luisa went back and lamented, "Now what are we going to do? The owner has burned our tree. Now we don't have anywhere to sit when we gather."

Her mentor told her, "Go back and continue to meet in the midst of the ashes. Church is not the place, but the people the Lord has given you to work with. Trust God. He is with you."

Luisa did so. She and her little band of new believers continued to meet in the spot where now only ashes remained.

Meanwhile, the intrigued owner continued to wonder at the group that so faithfully gathered no matter what he did to the tree. Finally, out of curiosity, he too began coming to the gatherings to learn more about what was going on.

A few weeks passed and he too gave his heart to Jesus. With his new heart, he donated the portion of land where the church had been gathering. Since it is hot out in the equatorial sun, he also decided it would be nice if everyone could have a shady place to sit. He then built a shelter large enough to accommodate the growing group out of the hot sun.

Many lessons can be learned from this story.

One that registered with me is that God often has to reduce our "tree" (works) to ashes before He can build the church He intends on having.

Another lesson is the idea that set-backs, trials and even tragedies are often viewed as detriments to the work. But more often than not, end up being the very means God uses to accomplish His purposes.

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## FINDING THE HUNGRY PERSON

(Continued from page 3)

two ladies who were open to prayer for their families' needs. He started going by weekly to pray with them and soon one trusted Christ with her life. More family and friends began to join the weekly prayer time at her invitation. Within several weeks the "missionary" suggested they begin a church together in her apartment. She wholeheartedly agreed, along with 30-40 of her friends who started coming!

*If prayer is the key to "connecting" with the person(s) God has made spiritually hungry - in the Book of Acts, and in Africa, and in Alabama, and in Austin - well, you get the idea!!!*

Obviously prayer is more effective than events, activities, and advertising...and costs nothing except our time with God.

### GOD'S STRATEGY

So, what factors cause us to often catch ourselves praying a bit then quickly forging ahead with our humanly limited "outreach strategies?"

As soon as Paul got clear guidance from God he went immediately to that place...that group of people. But, even then he held off on proclaiming the Good News for a few days. It seems he was still waiting, praying, actively seeking, and watching for the person (or persons) God had made hungry for new life in Christ. If I had been there with Paul, I would have probably suggested that we gather a crowd, post some signs, or even have a drawing for one of Paul's well made goat skin tents! But Paul was looking only for a God-arranged encounter with the right person... he searched, but waited on God to connect him to that person.

Finally, down at the riverbank, a place commonly used for prayer in that culture, Paul found a group of women. How many? Probably only a handful. No great crowd here. And, of course, women in this era were not considered equal to men. But Paul began a conversation with this tiny group of "God-searchers", and sure enough Lydia's heart was ripe to



hear God's truth for her life. She was a worshiper of God, but not yet a Christian. How long had God been working in her life? What circumstances had made her want to know more about HIM?

*The same God who saw Paul trying to go the wrong direction also saw Lydia's heart and readiness to hear Paul's message, once he found God's direction. HE brought the two together!*

Lydia quickly invited Paul to speak to her household...her family, servants, and close friends...her circle of close relationships. Almost certainly she became the crowd-drawer, not some big advertised event. It was all tied together by prayer, God's connections, and relationships...no money was needed! Her family and friends also believed and were baptized. This hints that Paul was starting a church right in Lydia's home.....how wonderfully simple.....how God-dependent.....how contagious it all was!

### A LIFE-CRISIS CONNECTION

In Acts 16:22-34, God intersects Paul's life with the local jailer at a time when both were in a life-crisis. God used that crisis to make the jailer "hungry" for something deeper in life, and this tough guy both trusted Christ and opened the door to his network of relationships, his household. I'm sure they saw a big change in their jailer husband/dad/friend. The jailer became

the crowd-drawer and many were baptized upon hearing his story and Paul's message. So, within days a second church was started in this previously overlooked circle of family and friends.

Why was the jailer not at the riverbank with Lydia? They lived in completely different social segments of the city. They worked at different times, went different places, and had totally different lifestyles. Even as new believers their lives clearly did not mesh.

Would her homechurch and his join together now? Probably not. Though both groups would learn to worship, grow as believers, share, and minister to their community, they almost surely would do it in different ways.

### Summary:

- The Holy Spirit led Paul to two groups he would never have picked out with his own wisdom: a woman and her household, and a jailer and his household.
  - Prayer became the bridge between Paul's heart to share the Gospel and Lydia's heart to hear it.
  - Both Lydia and the jailer had an impact on their families and friends, their circles of influence. These new church plants crystallized around the relationships, not around events/activities/ programs. What God is doing in one life profoundly touches others who are close to that person.
  - All of this happened at a riverbank, a prison, and two homes that were adequate, relational, and cost free.
- [www.greenchurch.info](http://www.greenchurch.info)**



## HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO BE RIGHT? Keith Giles - subversive1 Posted: 24 Aug 2016 01:27 PM PDT

Is Christianity ultimately about being right? Or is it about following Jesus?

See, if Christianity is about being right then it's easier to justify cutting off those people you don't agree with. Because, if you see Christianity as a quest for "rightness" then being wrong is the greatest sin of all. However, if you see Christianity as following Jesus, then being right is less important than the quality of your relationship with Him.

Relationships are messy. They're not about correctness, or accuracy. No one measures their relationships in such terms. Instead, we gauge the health of our relationships based on how open our communication is, and how honest we can be with one another, and how much time we spend together.

Jesus also connects our obedience to His commands with our love for Him. It's all through the Gospel of John, especially in John 14. He also equates our love for Him with how we love one another. If we love one another as He has loved us – which is one of His commands – then we are loving Him by our obedience, and by being obedient we are loving others, too.

Elsewhere, Jesus connects our horizontal relationships with our vertical one towards God. He tells us that we should go and reconcile with our brother before we return to complete our acts of worship. And the Apostle John pushes it further by saying that if we claim to love God but don't love our brothers and sisters, we're just liars.

So, what should we learn from this? Perhaps that our interpersonal relationships don't need to hinge on agreement with one another. I can love someone who has the wrong ideas about doctrine. I can fellowship with a brother who sees things differently than I do. I can extend grace to a sister who calls me a heretic. Are they wrong? Maybe. But perhaps I'm the one who is off base? Until we know for sure, our main goal should be to love one another as Christ has loved us.

In the early church, for example, there were three different views of the doctrine of hell. For nearly 300 years none of those people considered the others to be "heretics" or worthy of excommunication or disqualified from the faith. It was only after Constantine shifted the paradigm of Christianity from a focus on Christlikeness [orthopraxy] to one of Correctness [orthodoxy] that Christians started persecuting one another over differences of opinion in matters of faith.

So, nowhere do we get the idea that the Gospel is about having the correct information. Instead, it's about having a transformational relationship with Jesus. This relationship involves abiding in Christ as He abides in us. Through this process, our sinful self is daily crucified and our spiritual self – the "new creature" – is brought to life within us. It's a constant exchange of death for life where the resurrection power of Christ is increasingly revealed in us and transforming us into people who are like Him.

So, in summary, if the Gospel is about having the right information, then being right is everything. But, if the Gospel is about transformation, then being Christlike is everything.

Let go of the need to "be right" and begin to embrace the reality of Christ's transformational life in you! We're all in process. None of us is right about everything. Thankfully, we don't need to be. We just have to keep abiding in Him.

Peace, kg



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