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# OIKOS

## AUSTRALIA

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## OIKOS Australia

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

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## DIRECTIONS

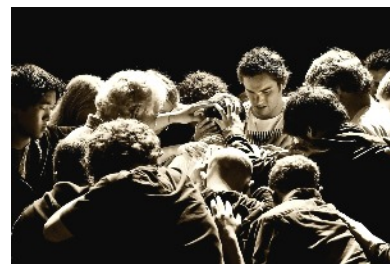
### SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SIMPLE CHURCH

In simple churches, who does what is – er fairly simple! People tend to serve as they feel led and in ways that fit them as there are few if any appointed positions to aspire to. The motto is “if it needs doing – do it.” If you want to coordinate a group, pray and invite friends, go for it. Of course some guidance, equipping and support are needed and healthy but I

guess you see the picture. Many denominations and individuals have various theologies of spiritual gifts so this isn’t a theological treatise but observations of what actually tends to happen with followers of Jesus who gather in simple church groups

Every believer has a responsibility to reach out and to love others and to share Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom with new people. We all do it in the capacity that the Lord gives us. As I have observed missional communities I’ve reflected on how the New Testament teaching of spiritual gifts applies to them. ( See E4:1-16, 1Cor 12, Romans 12:3-8 etc). Obviously it still does and finding and expressing ones particular gift is important.

Indeed some believe that each believer can be used by the Holy Spirit with a particular gift as the occasion requires. For example one may not generally exercise the gift of healing, but be called to pray for a sick person who is present and the Lord heals



them. Recently our youngest son Kieran, in a men’s prayer time, felt led to ask if anyone had pain in their knee? An 84 year old man responded that he did and that it was bandaged up. Kieran prayed for him and the man reported the next day that the pain had gone and his knee was feeling fine! Our second youngest son, Jamison, was overseas and saw a man with doubled up feet and twisted toes, shuffling and walking with difficulty. He prayed for him and the mans feet and toes straightened – praise God! At this point I wouldn’t say that Kieran or Jamison had the “gift of healing” (although they may do,) but God used them when he chose to work through someone at that point because they were available.

It is also true, however, that God does give people certain gifts which remain with them and are exercised frequently and seem so “natural to that person” or more correctly - “supernaturally operating” in that follower of Jesus.

Mature spiritual “fathers and mothers” need to be encouraging each member to use the gifts and passion areas for the Kingdom and to exercise their spiritual gifts. Regional Coordinators should be aware of those hosting simple churches and engage in supporting their growth and development.

We also need to be looking for and affirming those who do the apostolic work of raising up new networks of missional communities and simple churches movements (apostles) and for those who are especially gifted in leading people to make decisions to follow Jesus (evangelists) (see Phil Walters’ excellent article on Apostles in a previous Oikos edition). *(Continued on page 19)*





LIFE  
BEGINS  
after  
COFFEE

MARTIN BRAGGER

# Small is Beautiful

**T**here is a well-known saying that ‘Small is Beautiful’. This is certainly true in the context of mission to our 21<sup>st</sup> century society, retreating as it is at an increasing rate from its Christian heritage. The process of de-Christianization, the evacuation of the gospel from the fabric of culture, is clearly indicated in recent national census results showing those identifying as Christian falling from 61% five years ago to 51% in 2016 and the ‘no-religion’ category shooting ahead of all others to 29%.

Against this we see the failing mission of the traditional church, greater Sydney being a prime example, where Newcomers (the de-churched and unchurched) having fallen to 8% of congregations in 2016 from over 12% in 2001. Other regions are worse.

So where does ‘Small is Beautiful’ fit in to this dispiriting picture? A missionary tale might help answer that question.

Just over a year ago a Christian guy James started to read his bible in a Community Centre café where there were always many people present, there for a coffee or snack, or to participate in the regular schedule of events in the Centre. He did this on a weekly basis, always at the same time and day. Each time he ordered a coffee and did some bible study, making notes on his laptop. He noticed that each week there were the same couple of guys (Al and Jay) having lunch together. After a few weeks one came up to him and asked what he was doing and this led to an ongoing conversation over the weeks. Sometimes the conversation turned (was turned!) to spiritual things about which they raised many questions in response to which James was able to give some input from a Christian perspective.

After a few months of this James said he planned to start an informal spiritual discussion group which would look at what the bible had to say about the topics they had raised in their conversations. He asked if they were interested in joining? To which they said yes.

So then, a more formal group began, given the name ‘*Coffee with Spirit*’, with James, another Christian friend and Al and Jay. Each week they did a small bible study pitched at varying levels according to who was there. After a while a short prayer time was developed for concerns raised by the group. Initially James was the pray-er, but then after a few weeks a wonderful thing happened. Jay started to pray himself, out loud and in a very public place! A little while later Al began to join in the prayer time too! This is so clearly the work of the Holy Spirit! In the last few weeks the group has been joined by two other ‘Newcomers’, a woman and a man, both regular visitors to the Centre.

Here we have an example of why in the missional context ‘Small is Beautiful’! The Newcomer percentage for ‘*Coffee with Spirit*’ is around 50% plus compared to the standard church average of 8% and falling. Note also this is at virtually no cost!

‘Small is missionally beautiful’ because it is a highly effective and cheap way of reaching the unchurched. What is the recipe? Simple. A passion to ‘Go’ and make disciples, Intentionality, Public Visibility, Perseverance and most importantly – Prayer and the Holy Spirit.

‘*Coffee with Spirit*’, just one example of a missional community, is now being cloned at another location, in a pub, and there is currently a search for a third venue. Watch this space!

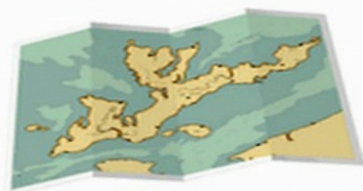
Where is your ‘Coffee with Spirit’ going to be?

*Martin Bragger lives with his wife Sandie in Thirroul, on the south coast of NSW. He is the founder of Unbounded Church. A former atheist, painfully dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom of God, he is working with others in trying to write a map for the missional journey down the road we have not yet travelled.*



# HOW TO START A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY FROM SCRATCH

by Doug Paul



**As someone who helps lead a local church, and as someone who regularly coaches pastors wanting to learn how to lean into this whole 'missional' thing, one of the most frequent questions I hear is, "How do I start a Missional Community?"**

How do I do it if I don't have anyone other than me and a few other people? What if I'm starting from scratch? As such, I thought sharing a story of a Missional Community my wife (Elizabeth) and I planted in Pawleys Island would be helpful. You see, this Missional Community came at a time when, for the first time in about a decade, I wasn't in vocational pastoral ministry – specifically meaning that local ministry wasn't my JOB. Sure, I was training pastors, but that wasn't pastoral, local ministry.

So we were having to answer the all-important question that anyone sitting in the pews do: "How does this work when I have a regular 9-5 job?"

And remember, where we were at? This is in a rural beach town of about 15,000 people, in a place that would be traditionally thought of as "The Bible Belt."

## Here is what we did.

When we landed, we asked God two questions:

1) What people group (network/neighborhood) are you calling us to reach/minister to/disciple in this season?

2) Who are Persons of Peace (POPs), in whom you've already started preparing their heart — who will help us accomplish this work? (a POP is someone God has already prepared to be open to you and the Gospel)

In our case, it was the 2nd question (a POP) that answered the first question.

My wife met Erin, a young mom who lives on our street, the *very first day we arrived*. They started walking our kids together a few times a week. She invited us to her son's first birthday party, where she introduced Elizabeth to a dozen or so other young moms who were networked together informally. She was the gatekeeper to a group where God wanted to move.

Elizabeth specifically started building relationships with the moms in a low key way. Lunches, playdates, dinners, pumpkin patch. Nothing formal. Just building relationships. But all of the people we were meeting in this network who didn't know Jesus were young couples with kids in diapers.

That really gave us a clue as to where our focus should be. That's what these Persons of Peace opened up for us.

Next, we prayed for a group God wanted us to start discipling and he sent us 3 couples who were dedicated Christians, but not actively plugged into a local church. A couple months later we met a 4th couple who wanted to join, so now we're up to 10 of us. We started meeting every Thursday, discipling them to live out the basic principles of Jesus' life, inviting them into a deeper level of accountability and relationship with the Father.

## Entering into a new net

### That started in August.

While doing this, without explaining what a Missional Community was or anything like that, we started forming an extended family by celebrating birthdays and baby showers, doing meals and life together with people we were meeting who seemed open to us, but who may-or-may-not consider themselves Christians.

- Three months into discipling people, we encouraged them to start asking God who the Persons of Peace were in their life and to start engaging with them in a more intentional way.
- About 6 months in, we pushed our time of discipleship to every-other-week and we added a dinner on the alternate Thursday nights. This dinner consisted of the same people in our we were discipling, plus we all invited people we knew who we felt were Persons of Peace.

The only spiritual content at those dinners, at least in the beginning, was going around and saying what we were thankful for, then blessing the food. That was it! Nothing else. Just catching up, hanging out, laughter, kids running around and engaging in conversation. Sometimes those conversations went to deeper places, sometimes not. At the last one in December we read the Christmas story and sang carols, then helped the kids decorate Christmas cookies. At this point, a little more than half of the people in the group we probably wouldn't call "Christians."

### Here's where it gets really interesting.

You see, up to this point, all we've done is create a welcoming family that is functioning like an extended family, make it crystal clear our lives are oriented around Jesus, and do some regular and rhythmic things that point to Jesus.

Shortly before the break, between Christmas and New Years, three of the couples who had been coming asked about plugging into something with more spiritual content, specifically...they were



# work of relationships with the people He's placed out there for you

really interested in doing something they'd heard of called "a Bible study."

While there wasn't a lot of "structured" spiritual time in our first season of family gatherings, obviously they've gotten to know us over the course of these months and we've been open about our relationship with God — so they see things we post on Facebook and Twitter, as we thoughtfully, but actively use language about what God might be saying to me (in contextually appropriate ways). Another woman read a blog my wife wrote about what God was teaching her about marriage and emailed her saying that she was really glad my wife was in her life.

There's obviously something going on there, right?!

**Notice that we didn't have a 27 point plan of exactly how everything we going to go, but we had been taught to see how the Holy Spirit was working, how to engage with Persons of Peace and to intentionally cultivate those relationships within the context of a family.**

So we shifted the focus of those Thursday night dinners:

- 5:30-6:30 was a dinner and anyone could come, even if they don't want more spiritual content.
- 6:30-7:30 was a simple bible study and discussion (where we will always conclude the dinner by having each person answer, 'What is God saying to me and what am I going to do about it in the next 7 days?').
- In between we continued to have broader, family "events" (corn hole tournaments, running a 10K together in town, baby showers, etc.) that's just normal life. They weren't MC events. But in the midst of that normal life, we invited people to be part of it without the pressure of the bible study group.

So what you're seeing is us forming a family on the continuum of the ORGANIZED and the ORGANIC. There are some things with structure, regularity and are scheduled. But there are some things that are organic, unplanned and sporadic. Why? *Because that's how all extended families function.*

As we think about Missional Communities, Elizabeth and I have wanted them to reflect the fullness of the life of Jesus, because we are the Body of Christ. So we want the MC to have an UP dimension (time together spent with the Father), an IN dimension (time together each other as Christians, the members of the family of Jesus) and an OUT dimension (time spent on mission together, stepping into the brokenness of the world).

- So our UP times constitute our bi-weekly discipleship times with those core group of people. In addition, the open family meals have biblical teaching after the dinner group, along with a few worship songs on an iPod so we can sing and the little kids can sing and dance together.
- We have our more 'formal' IN times during the dinners, but also the informal meals and things we do to feel like family, as well as cornhole tournaments, bbq's, play dates, football games, etc. Also, Elizabeth and I had a family tradition when we lived in Pawleys of going to a local diner each Saturday morning with our kids and we're constantly inviting people into that family outing with us.
- Our OUT was a relatively new concept for that core group of people, so we helped them understand why it was important for them to invite friends who didn't know Jesus. Also, picked another OUT of bring in relationship with a group of people who felt really disenfranchised in that community. In the case of this group, we went to a nursing home once a month, with our kids, to visit and spend time with lonely, elderly people. Most of them didn't have family living by them and they've got no one visiting them. Plus,

older people simply LOVE having babies and toddlers around.

We called the group the Pawleys Island Pampers Brigade (because both the babies and the old people might be in diapers).

I think the big thing to notice is that this Missional Community was started amongst a group of people we didn't know. We parachuted in. We just moved here. It has grown because we've attended to the different seasons of development:

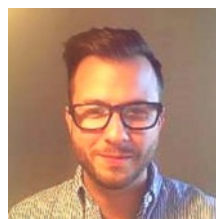
- A season of finding a few key Persons of Peace who opened up a wider network to us. Then, getting to know these networks and building relationships with them, finding out what people were really open.
- A season praying for people who were already Christians and open to investment from Elizabeth and I, who might want to help us lead the burgeoning Missional Community.
- A season developing these people while we started doing more extended family dinners with light spiritual content.
- A season diving deeper into spiritual content and a higher commitment to being family.

**This happened over the course of 15 months.**

These things don't happen overnight, and I think it's important to realize that. It takes time to see where God is working, finding the people he's placed out there for you and then to cultivate those relationships and enter into a new network of relationships because they've been gatekeepers.

There are many ways to start a Missional Community from scratch and allow it to grow. Hopefully this proves to be but one helpful example.

**DOUG PAUL** leads East End Fellowship in Richmond, Virginia. This article was posted on [100movements.com](http://100movements.com)



# GOODBYE PASTOR PHIL...

## ...hello Pastor One-Another

**W**hen I first began as a prison chaplain out at the local Correctional Centre I was issued with a name badge, reading Rev Phil Walters.

Being a bit embarrassed by the 'Rev' tag – I was neither officially nor in character 'Reverend' – I covered up the 'Rev' and eventually ordered a new badge, more appropriately reading 'Pastor' Phil Walters. A few years later I mislaid the badge and needed to order a new one, which brought me to a slight dilemma. Because by then I had come to a stage, with my on-going questionings of modern church practice, where I was no longer comfortable with any titles, be they Pope or Pastor.

And besides, the power of chaplains is the power to come along-side. The guys inside did not need another authority figure in their day.

I must say that I had never really been comfortable being called 'Pastor'.

Perhaps it was because I'd always struggled with the clergy/laity thing, which is an awful division that developed in the church around Constantine, creating a false old-covenant-style division between the professional ordained elite and all the rest. A hierarchical model of leadership which is foreign to the New Testament.

Jesus made it clear that we are not to get hung up on titles. Surely this was his intention when he said, *"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ."* Matthew 23:8–10

I suspect that he knew very well our propensity to exchange the lower-case 'function' for an upper-case 'office' complete with title. So that someone who pastors become Pastor Someone. Then Senior Pastor Someone. Or Associate Pastor or Youth Pastor or Worship Pastor etc etc. The church is full of it. Apostle This, Bishop That, Most Reverend The Other.

Where is such use of titles in the New Testament? Did Apostle Paul write to the Corinthians and tell them he was sending Pastor Timothy and Youth Pastor Titus to catch up with Senior

Pastor Aquilla and Associate Pastor Priscilla? It's a nonsense. And it perpetuates an unhealthy divide. Nowhere in the New Testament are people addressed by their function in that kind of a way.

Of course the excuse we make is that it is a way of 'honouring' our leaders. But if we need a title in order to be honoured surely something is wrong. Should I not be honoured for what I am regardless of title? My son-in-law is a much respected and sort after plumber but we don't call him Plumber Dennis. Why should he not be 'honoured' in similar vein to how we 'honour' pastors? Is his profession less honourable?

On the contrary I can hide behind a title, use it as a smoke screen to hide my insecurities or the flaws in my character, even pull the old "Do not speak against the Man of God" thing.

No, no. The people I serve, in whatever function I have been called, are my friends and my fellow companions in the work of the Kingdom. This was Paul's attitude to those around him and it should be mine. They knew him simply as Paul (or at the most 'brother Paul', a term he uses for Peter as well) and so I should be known simple as Phil.





## NOTHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Besides, considering the prominent place of the Pastor in the makeup of the modern local church scene (though dating back to Constantine), it is surprising how little the New Testament has to say about such an individual. Practically nothing. The word 'pastor' is used once and it is in fact almost impossible to find a clear reference in the New Testament to a local church led by one man.

Mind you, it is also hard to find a local church that looks anything like what we've come to know as a local church today - a distinctively named assembly with its own vision, building and man in charge.

Rather what we find are churches that embrace the whole city, with no separately owned 'church' buildings and a plural eldership belonging to and available to all the believers in the town.

And a style of pastoring that did not seem to centre around any special individual but was spread out between 'one-another'.

Not that the early church lacked leaders but they were there to lift the saints up into workplace ministry and there is very little exhortation in any of the epistles for believers to go seek out a leader for advise, counselling, healing or encouragement. Rather the exhortation is to practise this stuff on 'one-another'. Over 60 times this (or a similar) expression is used in the apostolic letters.

Here is an example of the 'one-anothers'.

- *Teach one another (Col. 3:16)*
- *Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19)*
- *Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8)*
- *Care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)*
- *Serve one another (Gal. 5:13)*
- *Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2)*
- *Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)*
- *Forgive one another (Col. 3:13)*
- *Wash one another's feet. (John 13:14)*
- *Love one another. (John 13:34)*
- *Be devoted to one another ... Honor one another (Romans 12:10)*
- *Stop passing judgment on one another. (Romans 14:13)*
- *Instruct one another (Romans 15:14)*
- *Agree with one another (1 Corinthians 1:10)*
- *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other (Ephesians 4:32)*
- *Teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)*

- *Encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)*
- *Encourage one another daily, (Hebrews 3:13)*
- *Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)*
- *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16)*
- *Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)*
- *Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5)*
- *Have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7)*

Note that the apostles felt that the saints were quite competent to teach and instruct each other, correct each other, hear each other's confessions, pray for their healing, encourage each other, build each other up etc etc. They were well equipped to pastor one another.

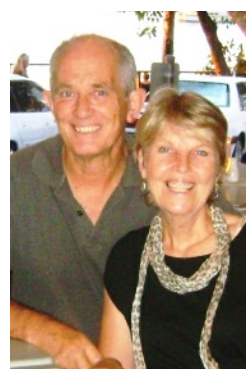
John, in facts, encouraged them to believe that each of them had '*an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.*' (1 John 2:20). If this is so and such a hidden and under-used anointing exists in the body of Christ then the task of the 'fivefold ministries' is surely to encourage its release.

Considering the huge burn-out rate that exists in traditional pastoral ministry perhaps those in ministry would do a great service, both to themselves and to the local body they serve, by

1. encouraging people to believe that they don't need 'the Pastor' as much as they think they do
2. foster the kind of intimate ekklesia where people can actively practise the 'one-anothers'.
3. actively step back from 'doing the stuff' themselves and let the Holy Spirit bring out the aforesaid anointing among the saints.

I suspect that the result of this would be to release leaders to spend more time seeking each other out, seeking the Lord together and exploring ways to advance the Kingdom within the city (Acts 13).

In order for that to happen perhaps the great need of the local church is not another Pastor Some-One but the release of Pastor One-Another.



**PHIL AND ESTHER WALTERS**  
*live in sunny Yeppoon, Central Queensland where, in his retirement, Phil oversees 4NAG, the local community radio station. He also edits the OIKOS Magazine. Check him out at [www.backyardbelievers.com](http://www.backyardbelievers.com)*



# Key factors for multiplying disciples and simple churches

## Keep It Reproducible and Simple!

Simple reproducible practices result in Disciple and Church multiplication. The simple and reproducible practices fly in the face of conventional religious wisdom. People who have (or think they have) strong communication and teaching gifts usually do not like these recommendations, despite the obvious results in lives of disciples and churches worldwide. The reason for this is the leadership models and roles that have been passed on since, primarily, the time of Constantine (combining Empire leadership with Old Testament practices).

This has not been helped either by seemingly successful leaders, preachers and teachers in churches or big campaign evangelists. As one well-known leader in this sphere confessed to others, “We are good at drawing a crowd, but lousy in making disciples.”

***The question to you is, ‘who is the greatest teacher and disciple maker who ever lived’? Your answer will be Jesus, of course. The next questions are, how did Jesus teach? What was most important to Jesus? Preaching or teaching large crowds; or teaching, discussing, talking and training his disciples?***

Look also at the apostle Paul who did not regard himself as an eminent speaker, but was the most influential apostle. How did Paul teach and train and make disciples?

**The answer to these questions will be decisive if you want to make disciples, who make disciples and churches that multiply.**

- Will you choose significance through preaching and teaching crowds of people (which Jesus and the apostles did do, but not as frequently as we think)?
- Or will you choose to teach and train the few (which Jesus and the apostles mostly did) and impact the multitudes through them?

**Here are some fundamental perspectives that are needed if you are going to make disciples:**

- Only share and demonstrate what others can easily do when you are not present (can easily be reproduced).
- Do not restrict church to being a meeting, or to the number of people present. ***Church happens whenever and wherever disciples gather.***
- Cultivate a simple discipleship lifestyle rhythm for people where they live, work and play as well as when they meet. Acts chapter 2 tells us this happened on a daily basis.
- Small clusters of people/families of two's and threes (small numbers) is the most often method demonstrated in the scriptures in relation to making disciples. This is the ekklesia (church) in action.

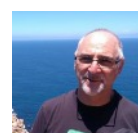
**The following are recommended practices for when disciples (ekklesia) meet:**

- Eat simple meals together and, during the meal, break bread to remember Jesus' death and resurrection (using simple words or reading relevant scripture).
- Ask them what their “ups and downs” were during the last week. Turn their “ups” into simple worship and thanksgiving. Turn their “downs” into short faith-filled simple prayers.
- Help them to discover biblical truths and hear God for themselves through the scriptures – Read the text together, ask the following questions: What does the text say (about God, about human beings)? Is there something you must do (and what will it cost you to do it)? Who can I share this with?
- Every time you meet ask how the previous week's lesson was applied before moving on – healthy accountability is an important aspect of our responsibility to help each other build on a foundation of rock and not sand.

**Jesus said that we are to make disciples, teaching and training them to be obedient to the gospel that Jesus taught us.**

- Train them to pray, hear the voice of God and share what they hear (or see) with others.
- Train them to minister to one another in simple ways with their spiritual gifts, natural abilities and acquired skills.
- Train them in simple giving (amongst themselves and in their community) as well as to the spread of the gospel (through trustworthy apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic and teaching ministry gifts who equip the saints for the works of service, to bring us to maturity in Christ) Ephesians 4
- Train them to share their testimony simply (in a couple of minutes).
- Train them to share the gospel simply (in a couple of minutes).
- Practically demonstrate healing the sick and sharing the gospel (testimony and gospel story) by doing it with them in real life situations.
- Train them in simple “acts of kindness” and practising simple hospitality.
- Train them to be making disciples as they go about their daily lives. Ask for testimonies from those who have shared their testimony or the gospel with in the last week when you gather (as you are eating may be the best time).

Putting simple practices like these into our daily lives will go a long way to making disciples who in turn make disciples (fruit that remains) – disciples who love Jesus, pray, have a Kingdom paradigm, relate to others in healthy accountability, obey the instructions of Jesus, persevere in doing good and pass on simple reproducible practices to others.



**CHARLES KRIDIOTIS** *has been serving the simple church movement in Sweden and Europe for many years in a mentoring and equipping role.*



# ARE YOU AN AMPHIBIOUS CHRISTIAN?

PAUL VIEIRA

**T**he frog is a truly fascinating creature. Adult frogs, as opposed to their water-dwelling young, have body structures that enable them to move about on land as well as in the water. A frog is an amphibian. Similarly, the early disciples lived naturally in two environments.

Very early in His ministry, Jesus picked twelve men to walk with Him on His mission. Mark 3:14 reveals the purpose of Jesus choosing these men: "He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons." Here we have the two environments: community (being with Christ) and mission (being sent out). Jesus designed the church to be able to breathe, live, and thrive in two worlds. One world exists behind closed doors, the private and intimate side of the church, where believers enjoy mutual exhortation and fellowship. The other world is all around us as soon as we walk out the door. It's the world to which we've been sent. We can flourish here too. We are amphibious.

Jesus openly ate with tax collectors and sinners. What was amazing about how Jesus related to people was not only the fact that He was comfortable in that environment, but that prostitutes and drunkards were comfortable around Him. Unlike the Western Church today, Jesus had a good reputation with most of the people. The early church in Acts had the same type of reputation, "having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47).

A healthy and vibrant church is one that can flourish in both habitats, in our own intimate gatherings and in our mission to make disciples of all nations. This is one of the signs that the church in the West may be in trouble. Many believers are not comfortable around (and are even frightened by) unbelieving people. There exists a deception that makes it feel unnatural for Christians to be with unbelievers. Amphibians actually need to live near water for their survival.

There are two reasons for this. The first reason has to do with something called "homeostasis." All living things have this in common. They must maintain stable internal conditions to stay alive. These include heartbeat, water content, and temperature. Most amphibians control their internal temperature through a healthy balance of time in water and time on land.

As a Christian, I cannot spend long periods of time in community and fellowship without going back out into the world to advance the kingdom of God. There is probably nothing more uplifting than having the opportunity to share Jesus with someone who doesn't know Him. However, spending too much time in the water is going to bring my temperature down to dangerous, life-threatening levels. I must get up on land once again and let the sun warm me up.

Finally, there is another reason why amphibians must be near water. Only in water can they reproduce. Staying away from water means we have no babies. Jesus said, "Go out into the entire world." This is the only environment where we can reproduce and have more people added to the kingdom of God.

## CALL ME KERMIT, THE TECHNO-COLORED FROG

A few years back I had some friends over at the house to hear my life story and listen to some of the music I had written. They were all in their early twenties, and I learned quickly what they loved to do. Every Monday night was "Techno Night" at one of the local nightclubs. They insisted that I come with them one night to experience it. I politely replied, "Well, maybe one day." Inwardly, I dismissed the idea. Later, during a personal time in prayer, my mind wandered to thinking about my newfound friends. The Holy Spirit said to me, "I am presenting you to them in techno-color." After a moment of confusion over what the Lord was saying, I realized that God wanted me to

go out with them "clubbing." So, I picked up the phone and called to accept



their gracious offer. They were absolutely thrilled. In no time at all, there I was. The music was loud, the air was thick with smoke, but my companions were really happy to have me with them. I even dared to venture out onto the dance floor to partake in this cultural phenomenon. With those multicolored disco strobe lights shining down on me, I must have looked like Kermit the Frog in a white John Travolta suit. I remember thinking while I was dancing, "I hope this is okay with you, Jesus. I'm doing this for you, and to reach out to these people. You told me to go. So, here I am."

Meeting them on their turf went a long way. I'm sure they knew that it wasn't my regular scene and they never asked me to do it again. However, from that point on everything changed. One time was all it took to win their hearts. They let me into their world. They also let Jesus in. Each one of them, over the next several months, gave me a place to speak to them about my faith and relationship with Christ. They were truly open to hear what I had to say. It's as though I suddenly had a voice.

We need to return to our true nature as followers of Christ. Let's get our feet wet once again and thrive out in the place where people live.



**PAUL VIEIRA** Taken from his book, *Jesus Has Left the Building*.



**I**n spite of man's attempts to organize and institutionalize the church, it has thrived through the centuries because Jesus' eternal life is in its people. I believe the church fulfilled the mission of Jesus better when it was unorganized, decentralized and even persecuted. Back then it depended more upon the foundation of Jesus as the Anointed One than on structure, and it was a supernatural church!

More and more we hear the term "church without walls," but what does this mean? While it can mean sending teams from a local church outside the church's walls to minister in homes and in the marketplace, I believe it is much more than that. If we are going to reach this world for Jesus, we need a completely new model of "doing church." I don't know why we can't have "church" in homes, offices, schools, coffee shops, or even outside for that matter. Why can't we have church meetings that are facilitated by

an army of non-professional yet anointed Christians, and have them meet whenever and wherever it works for them?

Maybe we need to take a hard look at what has happened to the church in the last 2,000 years and see how we can return to Jesus' model of "doing church." Jesus said, "Where two or three meet together, there am I in the midst." The word "church" in Greek is the word *ekklesia* meaning "called out ones."

In Matthew 16:18, Christ said to Peter, "You are Peter (Greek word *petros*, meaning "little rock"), and on this rock (Greek word *petra*, meaning "big rock," which is the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One) I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Jesus is building His Kingdom of "called out ones" based on the solid foundation of His powerful anointing as the Messiah.

This is very reassuring and makes me feel a whole lot more comfortable than supposing that His church is built upon a person or group of people and their organization. It is built upon all that Jesus is: His person, His character, His authority, His values, His power, His ministry and His loving heart.

### When the Church was Supernatural

In spite of man's attempts to organize and institutionalize the church, it has thrived through the centuries because Jesus' eternal life is in its people. I believe the church fulfilled the mission of Jesus better when it was unorganized, decentralized and even persecuted. Back then it depended more upon the foundation of Jesus as the Anointed One than on structure, and it was a supernatural church!

The early church advanced at an unbelievable speed. Within approximately 200 years of Jesus' resurrection, the known world was essentially converted to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The early church was empowered by Jesus, the resurrected Son of God who delegated His love and power to every Christian in the person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:12)

But once Christianity became acceptable and developed political status, a man-made hierarchy developed and religious form began to replace its dynamic, supernatural life.

### The Expanding Worldwide Body of Christ

Around the world today, our evangelical faith is experiencing a massive revival.



Christianity is making amazing gains all over the world.

What is happening? It is His church without walls, without central government, moving in His authority and power to see supernatural miracles and conversions happening at an unprecedented rate. Isn't it interesting that the weaker we are in terms of finances, political power, central government or ability to move forward through self effort, the more we rely on Him, the true source of Kingdom power and advancement?

It is no secret that the church in developing nations is advancing rapidly. The Lord is filling the earth with the knowledge of His glory (Habakkuk 2:14). But in North America and Europe (the historical strongholds of the faith), many people have been inoculated against the church because they have seen the sins and the failures that arise when the church turns into an institutionalized political system, and they have rejected that.

### What About Us?

Here in Toronto, we are a comparatively small movement without denominational organization and backing, yet over four million people have experienced revival here because their hunger for God has superseded the need to feel safe within the parameters of a well-known denomination.

Why is this? Hungry people understand that it is not the structure or the organization that causes the growth and advancement of the Kingdom, but it is in a personal relationship with the living Jesus Christ, the true Rock of Ages.

So what is every Christian's role? To disciple and equip others to be Christians, to be partakers in His anointing. One of my favorite scriptures is John 14:12. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." This is the real church He intended, His church, His body of called out ones, moving in His anointing and power. And indeed, this is the phenomenon that is now sweeping the world.

So how does this work then? Seemingly, the Holy Spirit has no

problem coordinating hundreds and thousands of different individuals and congregations for His eternal purposes. Things really do work much better when Jesus Himself is the head. Once we understand that there is not to be only one or two who represent Christ as His vicars on earth, but in fact, every believer is to be His representative, we will each more clearly demonstrate Jesus to a needy world.

We are a Kingdom of kings and priests. We relate directly to the King of kings and Lord of lords. We pray directly to Him. We hear His voice directly to us and are each His divinely appointed ambassadors. This is not to say that there are not offices in the local churches of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. However, these are not titles, but functions. These are servant leaders who equip others to also become anointed ones. How often we have interpreted these ministries to be hierarchical positions. And notice how the more we grow with political and financial power, the less dependent we become on Him.

While we are becoming more dependent on Him, we must learn to live as peaceably as we can with the diversity of movements and denominations that we now have in the body of Christ. But we must also be free to run with that fresh "new thing" that God is saying to us, without first having to change the traditional paradigms of staid leaders.

In China every day, it is estimated that thirty thousand new believers are added to the church. How is this possible? Because the church is underground and decentralized, the few cannot tell the many what to do. I recently heard a report of a young Chinese girl, seventeen years of age, who pastors a church of 20,000 people. There is no central system to tell her she cannot because she is female or too young, or not trained well enough, so she simply obeys the direction of the Holy Spirit who brings her instructions from Christ the head.



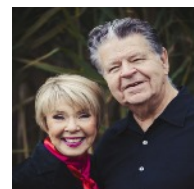
### Time for a Reality Check

It is time for those of us who live in the West to take a reality check. Church as we know it is not really working here. Many of the so-called "success stories" of church growth are merely transfer growth. We need some new models for having church which allow ordinary "lay people" to easily and quickly get involved in ministry.

Somehow the point of entry into ministry has become too difficult throughout the centuries. It is so different from the way Jesus equipped His followers. He first took twelve, and then 70 willing men and women, trained them enough in one year to start sending them out into the surrounding territory to spread the news of the Kingdom of Heaven. They ministered very effectively and came back rejoicing that many healings were taking place, and even demons were subject to them (Luke 10). After one to two years of equipping, those fishermen and tax collectors who were considered uneducated and untrained, began changing their world with the power of God.

This is what is changing Africa, China and Latin America today. In Mozambique, Africa, under Rolland and Heidi Baker's ministry, relatively new converts eagerly receive a minimal amount of training and are then sent out to plant churches. And it is working. They have planted over 6,000 churches in a four year period of time. I suppose someone forgot to tell Heidi that women can't be in the ministry!

The church's finest hour is upon us. Don't disqualify yourself any more. Stop listening to people telling you that you can't. Jesus is saying you can, and I am telling you that you can. Follow your desire as a "little anointed one" who carries Jesus' love and power and just go for it. Just do it!



**JOHN ARNOTT**, with his wife Carol, are the founding pastors of the *Catch the Fire* churches, Toronto.





# COMMUNITY PATTERNS FOR THE CHURCH

Dan White

**W**hen my wife and I got married 16 years ago we'd already been dating for 5 years prior. We had a winding dating relationship that was stretched by time zones, career u-turns and simple immaturity (mostly mine) but we continued to hold onto each other despite these challenges. Naively I thought our sheer romantic-will-power would be enough to cultivate a vibrant marriage. I was an idealist that needed to experience the school of hard knocks. The first year was filled with beautiful memories but the assaulting arrows of: demanding jobs, fluctuating finances, existential crisis (mostly mine), complicated outside friendships, the intensity of school, and learning to grow up, was an onslaught to our bondedness. Our emotional love for each other was still strong but a significant shift needed to take place if we were going to build an abundant life for the future. We needed new patterns.

## Organized-Organic

All of life is built upon patterns. In the natural world bees form their honeycombs methodically, robins put together their nests piece by piece and planets loop around the sun in a strict cycle. All of these are wild expressions in nature, yet none of them is spontaneous and random. They are exuberant but they are organized around a pattern.

These prescribed patterns form the platform for robust displays of brilliant beauty. Patterns on the surface can seem constricting, stiffly organic expression. Funny thing, organic farming is hip but organic farming is anything but haphazard. Ask any organic farmer how intentional, premeditated and rhythmic their toiling is in order to produce a bountiful, colorful, natural crop.

## Shaping Together

Patterning is part of the biblical narrative. The Genesis one account reflects creation patterns, instructions given to Moses for building a tabernacle reflects patterning – “*See that you make this according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain*” (Exodus 25) and the Apostle Paul urged people to model their lives on the pattern of other Jesus-followers – “Take note of others and live according to the pattern we gave you.” (Phil 3). My own marriage lacked healthy patterns that would produce fruitful character in our oneness. We lived by anti-patterns. I love mystery but we both learned our relationship needed to move out of the abstract and into some particular patterns we could commit to and apply together. We fashioned daily, weekly, monthly and yearly patterns.

The goal was not to reach some level of self-congratulation but rather partnership towards growing something beautiful in our midst. Some of those early practices were as simple as a daily cup of coffee to download the happenings of the day, or going over finances weekly so no one bore the stress alone, or having a full date day monthly to indulge in each other. Some of our patterns have changed over the years but we've committed to them, rallied around them and trusted they would shape our life together in the typhoon nature of the world.

## Shared-Patterns

This post is not about my marriage but it is about patterns and the church. I share my waking-up to patterns because what I felt in my early years of marriage, I feel deeply about the church now. The church needs to re-evaluate its patterns of togetherness in the places they dwell. Lesslie Newbigin has said “*We are shaped by what we attend to*”. We must refresh what will conform us into a love-filled, grounded people, for the good of the world and the glory of God. I'm a minimalist, believing that the power is in the essentials not the luxuries. From that perspective I ask “what are those essential patterns we must cultivate that foster a vibrant life together in the world?”. I find the question “how can we



*What is really relevant is when the church is the church, not when it's an impressive production. We need a full recovery of simplified, sacred, shared-patterns that mold a new but old way of being Kingdom-Come in the neighborhoods we inhabit.*

be a relevant church" distracting from what will nourish ecclesia for the future. What is really relevant is when the church is the church, not when it's an impressive production. We need a full recovery of simplified, sacred, shared-patterns that mold a new but old way of being Kingdom-Come in the neighborhoods we inhabit. We are human so our joy, energy and emotional maturity towards living as the church ebbs and flows, which makes it paramount to covenant to foundational patterns. I use 7 C's to explain the patterns I attempt to live into with others.

**1. Commitment (A Pattern of Fidelity)** We need a foundation of mutual commitment to each other. If you're gathering a cluster of people to live as the People of God do not be afraid to ask for a long term commitment to a neighborhood together. We're not in a promise-keeping culture so commitment sounds alien and potentially cultic. Covenanted-community is a core sacrament of the church. This is not an issue of control but of mutual love for one another. Love is not sentimentality; it is fidelity. Love is a rugged commitment to be with and for someone. Many live their lives with a strong dose of individualistic-ADHD, transitioning to the next shiny, exciting opportunity that benefits them. We cannot be fueled by inspiration as inspiration comes and goes; we are fueled by covenant-love, patterned after God's relentless faithfulness to us. Discover rootedness, converse about it, come together, fashion some vows together, don't take them lightly and press into a long faithfulness.

**2. Communion (A Pattern of Remembering)** The Lord's Table (Eucharist) is our banner reminder of who we are to God, who we are to each other and who we are in the world. We rally around this living feast because of how forgetful we are. We need to tell each other with symbol and sacrament that we are loved, we belong to God and we are sent on a cruciform mission. This Table marks us, humbles us and fills our souls back up. This becomes a blazing

signpost for our existence as the People of God submitting to the reign of King Jesus.

**3. Common-Table (A Pattern of Welcoming)** From the Lord's Table flows a secondary table into our lives; a common table. This common table is a coming together to feast, to share our food, linger and laugh, share our high's and low's and make space for strangers in our life. Kids play among us, tears flow when it's been a hard day and warm hugs are offered liberally. This pattern shapes our social muscles together, one that is generous, hospitable and constant. The schedule of our lives will resist this table-pattern but we must practice a counter-resistance.

**4. Confession (A Pattern of Truth-Telling)** Galatians 6:4 says *"Let everyone examine together the work they've accomplished, for then you can delight in the work of your hands without pride. Do not compare yourselves with each other; rather seek God's help in making the inner secrets of your hearts plain."* This verse inspired the Jesuit practice of The Examen of Consciousness founded Five-hundred years ago. It was an Examine practiced in community to explore motivations, hopes, failures and sneaky sins. Examine is essential for maturing together. This pattern of examine is our place to confess who we are. We need safe spaces that encourage discourse and disclosure. What does it mean to be confessional about who we are? We must learn to tell the truth. Truth-telling is first about speaking the truth about ourselves before pointing the speck out in someone else's eye. Yet we must seek understanding when we observe relating that is untruthful, perpetuating the nursing of wounds, angry inner tirades, passive aggressive postures and festering sins. Confessing who we are in safety is a cord that holds us together in a viral culture of dishonest relating

**5. Conflict (A Pattern of Dialoguing)** We will offend one another, we will hurt each other because we are human and flawed. What will we do when we intentionally or unintentionally jab each

other? Will we bail? Will we revert to gossip, detached attitudes, ruminating in paranoid interpretations, hiding behind words in emails and collecting weapons to unleash on each other? When we sense our rights have been stepped on, or voice has gone unheard, or our input has not been valued: we must vow to new patterns of conflict. We must name these new patterns, hold each other to them and invite each other to refresh our application when they are not practiced.

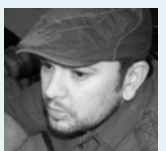
**6. Complexity (A Pattern of Diversity)** Community does not obliterate our individuality. We must make space for our uniqueness, our hobbies, our distinct cultures, our political leanings, our varying education levels. We must not force conformity, graciously learning how to make room for each other beyond affinities. This means listening to each others differences, celebrating each other's milestones, partaking in each other's cultures and genuinely listening and learning from each others opposite experiences.

**7. Crisis (A Pattern of Supporting)** Crisis precipitates a change in our lives and we must be there for each other when this occurs. A loss of job, a significant failure, a death, a marital fight, a loss of faith, are all matters for community to press into urgently and appropriately. We must take crisis seriously and feel the full burden to carry our brothers and sisters when it arises. No superhero person can do this, this is covenant-commitment to each other.

These are the patterns that I've been attempting to live into over the years. They have become my foundation for being the church as the expression of the Kingdom of God. All of these Patterns stirred together create a crock-pot for God's Spirit to brew and create a new Kingdom flavor of body-life.

What patterns would you add to the list?

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# Leaving Church

An Encouragement To Those in the Wilderness ... or looking to be

*Editor: We print this, not to stir up dissatisfaction but to encourage those who are exploring. Sadly, though, many have left traditional church but are going nowhere. This also cannot be the Holy Spirit's intent.*

**I'd like to offer some encouragement to folks who have left church, or who are thinking about leaving church.**

*It goes like this: You are not crazy! And you are not alone!*

*Whether you are in the wilderness, or you are growing more uncomfortable and restless attending church, know that there are tons of other folks out there feeling the same way.*

*I know. I escaped.*

## **10 Things I've Learned About Leaving Church**

**1. What I mean by church is the traditional, institutional form of church in the western world.** Typically, this is a pastor in the front giving teachings, sermons, etc to a passive audience (congregation). This is the most prevalent association our culture has with the word church, because there are church buildings everywhere using this format. There is often a focus on the physical building as being the church (as in, "let's go to church"). The sad fact is that **this is not a representation of a New Testament church.**

**2. There are tons of other people who have left church in search of something that seems closer to what the New Testament envisions.** However, these folks are often driven to re-invent church (myself included at one point in time). In reality, the church does not need to be invented or

re-invented. It needs to be watered because she is a living organism. The true church cannot be manufactured; rather it is something (or more accurately Someone) to be discovered.

**3. Those who try to re-invent church often have not looked very deeply at Christian history** and they often end up reproducing something similar to what they left behind (and they often become the center of it).

**4. There has always been a remnant who seek only to know Jesus Christ deeply.**

Look for those that want to know Christ in a deeper way and hold on to them for dear life. Seriously. When I talk about knowing Christ, I mean wanting to know Him intimately and personally, just as you would know your closest friend or your spouse. The Apostle Paul considered everything garbage compared to knowing Christ intimately (Phil 3:8). You will have found a very special thing if you can come together just to know Him and each other better. Beautiful things typically grow from these relationships. You may come from very different backgrounds, but if you can lay that aside you will find fertile ground.

**5. If you do leave the church, most people will not follow you.** Many of them will think you are crazy and "witness" to you as though you are a pagan. It's part of the path. Don't let it discourage you.

**6. You may experience bitterness and pain and anger.** This is normal. But it's also normal to heal from this over time. Don't get stuck in the bitterness. Take time to grieve, but then move on.

**7. Don't rush to have "meetings".** Don't push to have something formal. **Part of moving into the wildness of freedom in**

**Christ is letting go of religious tradition for tradition's sake.** I believe God is concerned about us knowing Him rather than our church attendance record. So take a break. Enjoy your family. Grow together with friends. Focus on serving others. And in all of this, trust Jesus to fit the puzzle pieces together. I've learned that He is not in a hurry, and we don't need to be either. Let meetings come in the right season after you have grown together in relationship with other believers.

**8. Don't throw out the Baby with the bathwater.** I know it's cliché. But seriously, hang tightly onto Jesus. He is your life preserver. Unfortunately, many people who walk away from church because they haven't found Jesus there end up walking away from Jesus, too. **Don't lose your faith in God because some people are behaving badly.**

**9. Just meeting in a living room instead of a formal church building will not solve your church woes.** There are many dangerous so-called believers inside and outside of the institutionalized church. Look for those that are learning to express the life and nature of Christ. (Hint: These won't be folks that are trying to build a kingdom around themselves. They will always point to Christ.)

**10. Growing deeper in Christ means growing deeper in freedom.** Let the chains of religion fall off. After all, it was for freedom that Christ set us free (Gal 5:1).



**MARK BLAKE** lives with his wife and 3 children in Gainesville, Florida. Catch his writing at **MARKBLAKE.ORG**



# 5 Intriguing Reasons why people are leaving the INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

FRANK VIOLA

**B**ased on my experience and observation over the last 30 years, here are the five top reasons why people leave their local assembly (church).

## 1. It's boring.

This is especially true for those who leave the traditional/institutional church. The service is basically the same show every week. There's no room for spontaneity or creativity from the congregation. In our book, *Pagan Christianity*, George Barna and I demonstrated that the Sunday Morning Protestant Order of Worship (Service) was created 500 years ago and it's changed little since. That's true for virtually all denominations and "nondenominational" assemblies. The changes between them are minimal. I've often said the Body of Christ is dying for a lack of imagination. But very few church leaders would dare change this tradition in any significant way. So those who are bored with it end up leaving. And that's no small number of Christians.

## 2. There's no community.

Many complain that they don't know the other members of the congregation, despite trying to forge relationships. A Christian can spend years in a local church and never develop any deep relationships with the other members. While sometimes this is due to the individual's inability to reach out, oftentimes, the environment of many churches doesn't foster face-to-face community. For them, getting to know others in their congregation is just as difficult as making friends at the local gym. Not easy to do.

## 3. There's no place to function and minister.

Again, this is true in most traditional/institutional churches. The church is divided up into the professionals who function and the nonprofessionals who are spectators. You may reply saying, "But they can volunteer to serve in the church." Yes, but many Christians have no interest in the typical "church" duties like being an usher, a Sunday school teacher, etc. They wish to function and share what God has given them in the corporate gatherings as envisioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26ff. To their minds, if they want to listen to sermons, they just find a good podcast and listen at home. If they want to worship with a worship team, they buy worship music, etc.

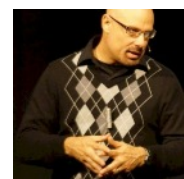
## 4. The institutional form of church is not found in the New Testament.

Over the last seven years, more and more evangelical Christians have come to the conclusion that the typical institutional church and the typical house church do not operate according to the principles of the churches in the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus or the apostles. This is a vast subject and many books have been written on it over the last seven years, but in short, countless Christians have come to believe that the ekklesia in the New Testament is something very different from what they've been involved in. So they leave their church out of a crisis of conscience. (Churches where the leadership abuses its members would also fall into this category because such groups are clearly unbiblical.)

## 5. It didn't meet their expectations.

People leave churches for this reason, whether institutional, missional, liturgical, organic church, house church, etc. People in the West are used to having their expectations met. So they attend a church simply to get their needs met. It's all about them and their needs. And when it doesn't happen, they flee and look for another church to meet their needs. (These folks don't understand that no church can meet a person's needs, no more than a spouse can meet a human's every need.) If a person understands that the church exists for God and for His Eternal Purpose, and that real church (face-to-face community) is profoundly difficult, they would never leave a church that they felt was biblical and had God's life (meaning, Jesus didn't remove its lampstand—see Revelation 2-3).

There are other reasons, of course, but every person I've met who left a local church stated that it was because of one of these five reasons. The only other reason that I've not listed here is that they stopped following Jesus altogether so they didn't care to be around God's people at all.



**FRANK VIOLA** is the bestselling author of *God's Favorite Place on Earth*, *From Eternity to Here*, *Jesus Manifesto*, *Reimagining Church*, *Jesus Now*, and *Jesus: A Theography*. *Rethinking status quo Christianity*, Frank Viola has helped thousands of Christians to deepen their relationship to Jesus and experience a more vibrant, authentic expression of church.



# How God Brings **CHANGE** To His Church

**T**he history and experience of the Church over the past 20 centuries tells us that when God desires to bring about profound change in the life of His Church, He usually does it in one of four ways. I want to explore those four ways God brings about change, and then reflect a bit on those changes He is bringing about in His Church today, particularly as it impacts the organic house church movement.

## **1. Change Through Leaders Whom He Sovereignly Raises Up and Anoints For A Purpose**

In the year 1904 Seth Joshua was an official evangelist of the Welsh Presbyterian Church (then called the Calvinistic Methodist Church) and an official evangelist for the Methodist Forward Movement in Wales. He had become concerned with the over-emphasis of the Presbyterian church upon the academic and educational qualifications of its ministers. So, Seth Joshua had begun to pray that God would raise up a lad from the mines or fields of Wales, even as He had taken Elisha from behind the plough. Not from Cambridge or Oxford to pander to the people's pride, but a lad from the mines or the fields to revive his people and lead them back to God. His prayer was soon answered in the person of a 26-year old former coal miner and first year bible school student named Evan Roberts.

At a gathering for organic house church leaders several years ago, George Barna suggested that a revolution without leaders is like a war without Generals. When it comes to spiritual revolutions, the same principle seems to hold true historically. The story of Seth Joshua and Evan Roberts is only one of many which we could share to illustrate this point. The starfish concept of leaderless movements notwithstanding, every great move of God's Spirit in the past 500 years of western Christianity can be linked to identifiable individuals (people we call "leaders") whom God sovereignly raised up and anointed to carry the torch of His purposes for that move or that generation. And in every situation that I can document, these individuals did not set out with the intent of becoming a leader, or of even leading a movement. Quite the contrary, they were simply people who chose to obey God. And God significantly used them, usually to their own surprise (and I'm not talking about false humility).

Who are the people around you whom God is raising up to lead in this new season? Don't look in the mirror. Look in the harvest.



## 2. Change Through The Collapse of Old Paradigms and The Rise of New Ones

God often changes His Church by challenging its existing values and paradigms. A good Scriptural example of this is found in Acts 15 where the mission work of both Paul and Peter to the Gentiles forced the Church to re-consider its spiritual values to include non-Jewish believers without requiring them to become practicing Jews. This re-evaluation and change of values represented a water-shed moment in the life of the early Church.

An historical example of God challenging old values and changing old paradigms while raising up new ones can be seen in the Protestant Reformation and the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers”. For nearly a thousand years the Church taught, and people believed, that personal access to God could only be gained through the ministry and intercession of recognized and ordained priests of the institutional Church. The teaching of the Reformers challenged and changed this widely held belief through their insistence that every believer is a priest before God with access to Him through Jesus Christ His Son. Once this biblical doctrine was understood, the Medieval Catholic Church lost its institutional grip on the hearts and lives of men and Protestant Christianity was born.

A third example of God changing old values and paradigms can be seen in the missions movement of the 19th Century, including the idea that world missions are the responsibility of all believers. Few Christians today realize that prior to roughly 1795 there were no Evangelical Protestant missions or mission organizations, apart from a handful of isolated missionaries and a small band of Moravians in Germany who were starting to send out missionaries (the Moravians were pioneering missions in the mid-1700s, which brought them in touch with John and Charles Wesley). Beginning in the late 1700s, God began raising up individual missionary leaders who taught that missions to reach the lost in foreign lands was the responsibility of every believer. This was a radical notion that was strongly resisted by Church leaders. But when it caught on it ignited

a missionary movement which resulted in what Church historians describe at the great century of Christian missions throughout the 1800s.

A fourth example of God challenging and changing old paradigms while raising up new ones can be seen in the radical idea of the Church as a change agent in society. This idea that the Church could and should change society for the better took root during the Evangelical Awakening in England. There was a book written in 1938 by a fellow named John Wesley Bready entitled “England Before and after Wesley: the Evangelical Revival and Social Reform”. The author documents the profound changes in British society which came about as a result of the Evangelical Awakening under Wesley, including the abolition of the slave trade in Great Britain and the establishment of such things as child labor laws and the Sunday School movement. The greater impact was the idea, born out of that spiritual awakening and its aftermath, that the Church - working through the lives of redeemed individuals in their particular spheres of influence, could be a powerful agent for profound change in society. This idea found expression through people like William and Catherine Booth, who were chased out of the Methodist Church for their participation in the Awakening of 1857 in England and went on to found The Salvation Army with the vision of bring profound spiritual and practical change to the poorest populations of England. Do you know who the acknowledged father of modern investigative journalism is? If you ask any reputable school of journalism in America today who the father of modern investigative journalism might be, one name comes up. He was a close friend of William and Catherine Booth and an evangelical Christian himself. His name was William Thomas Stead - W.T. Stead. He was a journalist who, by his own testimony, got into journalism in order to give the devil a black eye! He worked with William and Catherine Booth to expose the reality of child prostitution and sex slavery within upper British Society and



to secure legislation to outlaw it. He was nominated 5 times for the Nobel Peace Prize. It was widely believed that he would have received it in 1912 had he not perished aboard the Titanic on his way to a peace conference in New York in April of that year.

I want to close this section on the collapse of old values and paradigms and the rise of new ones by offering one current-day example that is relevant to our situation in the organic house church movement: the rise of the idea and the value of Church as an organism rather than an organization. I believe that the idea of the Church as an organic gathering of believers irrespective of any institutional setting or organizational requirement represents the most significant change of values and paradigm shift since the Protestant Reformation. Its full implications are yet to be fully understood or felt, but it is an earthquake of historic proportions in the life of the Church. Are you part of it?

## 3. Change Through Social Upheaval

In a workshop at a CMA Conference in 2007 Alan Hirsh asked this question: “How did the early church grow from 25,000 in AD100 to between 20 & 25 MILLION in just 200 years (by the time of its legalizing under Constantine)?” Alan went on to muse even further.

How did they do it? What makes it all come together in a movement that can only be described as KABOOM!? These questions are particularly challenging when we consider that these early believers owned no buildings, possessed only fragments of Scripture (if they could read at all, which many of them could not), had no seeker friendly services or any of the things people today associate with “church growth”. Hirsh went on to suggest that one of the reasons can be found in the “viral” nature of Christianity at that time: it was so simple as to be “sneezable”: “Jesus is Lord”. This “sneezable” proclamation of faith stood in sharp and direct contrast to the official proclamation demanded of every Roman: “Caesar is Lord”.

But to say that the faith of the early church was “viral” and “sneezable” begs and leaves unanswered another question that must be confronted, especially since the declaration that “Jesus is Lord” doesn’t seem to be viral today in most of the Western world. What set of circumstances must exist in order for Christianity and its timeless proclamation that “Jesus is Lord” to become viral and to spread uncontrollably? I want to suggest two things.

First, Church history seems to bear clear testimony that Christianity becomes spontaneously viral during times of spiritual awakening and outpouring as God sovereignly moves to renew His church and expand His Kingdom. I’ll spare you another lecture on the history of revival to illustrate my point. If you’re interested, you can read my book on the great Welsh Revival of 1904, posted on our website. That spiritual awakening went viral and circled the globe in three years, brought millions into the Kingdom of God and left a legacy spiritual legacy (including Azusa Street) which still resonates today.

**What set of circumstances must exist in order for Christianity and its timeless proclamation that “Jesus is Lord” to become viral and to spread uncontrollably?**

Second, Church history also clearly testifies to the power of persecution to turn Christianity “viral”. Just look at China. When China expelled all Western Missionaries in 1949 the Chinese church numbered somewhere between 1 million (on the low side) to around 5 million (on the high side, based on 1% of a population of 541,670,000 in 1949). When China re-emerged on the world scene and began to open its doors following the disastrous “Cultural Revolution” of the ‘60 and ‘70s, during which Christians were ferociously persecuted, the Christian world was “stunned” to discover that the Christian community - far from being destroyed - had grown to an estimated 25 million (on the low side) to 50 million (on the high side) by the early 1990s (these numbers are based on publicly available studies. The CIA World Factbook suggests that 3%-4% of all the population in China are Christians as of 2002. Independent estimates of the underground house church movement there have ranged

from 40 million to 100 million). How can we explain such phenomenal growth of the Church in China between 1949 and 2000? I would suggest that persecution, combined with a genuine move of God’s spirit, turned Christianity “viral” in China (which also explains why there is no “China model” that can be reproduced or implemented elsewhere, but why persecuted churches in other hostile countries experience a similar “viral”

phenomenon).

In case you were wondering, my “punch line” here is exactly what you feared it might be; that the prospect of our seeing genuine “viral Christianity” in the West (and, yes, that includes the organic house church movement) depends upon whether or not we experience the two primary catalysts of such viral growth: persecution or genuine spiritual awakening (or both).



#### **4. Change Through Seasons of Divine Visitation and Spiritual Outpouring**

My fear in even broaching this subject is that regular readers of this newsletter will cry out in exasperation and frustration, “Enough already! We get it! We need a spiritual awakening!” My response is twofold.

First, historically speaking, spiritual awakening doesn’t come to the frustrated, but to the desperate. The “bane” of the Church in the west is that we’re frequently frustrated, but seldom desperate. Frustration means our carefully laid programs aren’t working out the way we planned them - huge expenditures of time, effort and money with little to show for it. Desperation means we’ve given up on both programs and on fixing the problem ourselves, and we are willing to humble ourselves and beseech God for His solution on His terms.

Second, I’ll place my bet-for-success on the history of God’s sovereign dealings with His people, rather than on recent (and constantly changing) church growth fads. Scripture teaches and history records identifiable seasons (kairos) of divinely inspired awakening and renewal through which He transforms His Church, empowering and equipping it for the task at hand. That’s where I’m placing my hope, my prayers . . . and my bets.



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Media, a non-profit Christian media and publishing company, which you can access via their website [safehousesofhopeandprayer.org](http://safehousesofhopeandprayer.org)



# Methods and Tools

*versus*

# Prayer and Obedience

*"For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." 1 Corinthians 1:25*

Westerners love methods and tools. I see it in our churches where we plan programs and services that look much the same from one place to the next. I see it in our house churches where we want to know 'how things are done' and then implement accordingly as we seek to follow the methods that others tell us work. I also see it on the mission field where we focus on the currently popular missiological methods.

For example, people love to talk these days about disciple making and disciple making movements. The tools that are taught in this vein are the current 'way to do ministry' that all must follow in order to be 'successful.' In fact, as I travel around the globe, I find that DMM (disciple making movements),

and the corresponding tools that are now taught, is the **ONLY** way that missions is to be done.

Don't get me wrong. I am a proponent of most of these tools and have helped many to implement them. I spend much time training these very methods to others!

**BUT**, we so often miss the real point in our reliance on the right tool, the right method, the right practice, and the right way to do ministry.

Let me share something that an African woman told my wife. She and her husband are currently working with 1,000 disciples in their area who are actively reaching others. They expect to have 2,000 disciples meeting in house churches later this year and 4,000 by next year. My wife asked her some routine questions about her life and also probed about her spiritual life. This very humble woman spoke about her

prayer life without any pride in her voice, "Naturally I am walking close to God and spending much in time in prayer. How else would we be seeing this kind of fruit?"

Oh, right! How else? How else is fruit born? How else is the Spirit released to work? How else is the work of God accomplished? You mean it's not all about methodology and programs?

We love trainings and tools and methods and how-tos. We expect to follow the models of others who are successful in order to be successful. But we can often miss the real point. God is the one who brings the increase and it is not about the wisdom of man! Rather, it is about the power of God manifesting through a praying, love-filled heart from one who longs to obey, and follow, and give all to see His glory and Kingdom come.

ROGER THOMAN [simplechurchjournal.com](http://simplechurchjournal.com)

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS (cont. from page 2)

At present in Oikos I see God raising up people who can serve in various ways - visiting, encouraging, shepherding. We also need to identify and work with those who exercise the gift (or office) of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teachers, whose function is "to prepare Gods people for works of service , so the body of Christ may be built up, and reach unity and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ( Eph 4:11-13).

I have a growing conviction that teams of people with these gifts need to visit

amongst our missional communities and equip them to better serve, be united and to grow in maturity in Christ. These are "anoointed not appointed" functions and giftings, and no one in simple church circles wears a title of an office, or asserts positional power - "I'm apostle or prophet X," - but rather, under the Spirit's guidance, we would see and recognize those who carry that gift with a heart of humility, service and effectiveness. Those who are most effective in bringing new networks and movements into existence through the work of the Spirit are probably gifted in these ways. Those who consistently give

prophetic words that proves accurate and true are gifted as prophets, and those who train believer or shepherd and care for them best are teachers and "pastors." In simple church we find that titles are absent and unnecessary when serving, ministering and equipping others is the priority.

As we serve together under the head of the Church, Christ, and are guided by the Holy Sprit, the spiritual Body is healthy and working! We need to affirm and work effectively with these gifts and people.

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

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## Pearl!

[nobrokenreed.org](#) September 24, 2017 by [Disciple](#) / [3 Comments](#)

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” – Matt 13:45-6*

**Like many others, we have had severe criticism for placing such great emphasis on going out into the marketplace and opening our mouths about the person of Jesus Christ. What a waste of time it is.**

Many who have sought out our small gathering, looking for an alternative to more conventional church, have been sorely disappointed when they hear the great emphasis we put on ‘going out.’ It has cost us many potential friends and adherents who may otherwise have been keen to join us (just think of how big a “church” we could have built, had our focus been on great praise and worship, or lively preaching).

We have at times felt great hurt and despair. Lord, is this really what you want – if so, where are all the others? Just a few of us against a flood of unbelievers. What chance do we have? We know that almost everyone involved in a disciple making process feels the same way, overwhelmed with the task, and the lack of support.

But, for those of you who have persevered with Sally and I over the years – those who endured our scepticism, and doubts, who continued to challenge and cajole and pray, even when we reacted badly this story is just for you. Ian and Joan, Steve, Dave, pa and others, a pearl of great price makes it all so worthwhile.

Lord, send more workers!

Some months ago, Sally and another lady met with Pearl on the streets of our village here in Sydney. Pearl was reading a book on Buddhism and didn’t seem particularly interested in a conversation about Jesus, yet they persevered. One thing led to another, and soon a Bible came out, and Scriptures were read. There was a reaction. Could there be more? Buddha was put to one side, and soon, a discovery Bible study was setup in Pearl’s little flat and she began to ask questions. Who is this Jesus who died for me?

The prompting of the Spirit meant that they were asked back and soon Wednesday’s became a regular event. Pearl, her of such great price in the Kingdom, was being drawn into the great heavenly family of God. More questions, and then the realisation that faith in Christ would mean salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Repentance occurred, even with incomplete understanding. A faith was born.

Soon, a baptism occurred, confirmation of a decision to follow Jesus. There are still questions, lots of them, but she is making steps. As a new believer in Christ, Pearl already recognises, along with so much more, that her faith must be shared. Christ is not to be contained within four walls. We can see a Discovery Group forming, perhaps with Pearl’s own oikos. We shall see what the Lord brings. We pray, we fast, we plead, intercede.

It has been an exciting weekend all round. For those who persevered with us, just think of the fruit. For those who deliberate and wrestle, is this the right way to go – keep wrestling. For those involved in the work, the workers will always be tiny, it’s just the way it is. God is with us all of the way, he wants us all to be involved. For those on the periphery, praying, supporting or just sending us their thanks, be assured, this is what God wants, because it is what Jesus came for.

Meantime, praise God for Pearl. We hope there will be more to uncover as a result.

Filed Under: [Community](#), [General](#), [Making Disciples](#)



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